



The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

道の為、世の為、人の為 合気道

The Aiki Dojo

Direct Affiliation: Aikido World Headquarters, 17-18 Wakamatsu-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, Japan
Los Angeles Sword and Swordsmanship Society Kenshinkai
The Furuya Foundation

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メリクリスマス
Merry Christmas!

Upcoming Events

December 1st:
Dojo Christmas party

December 15th:
Dojo clean up

December 24th-26th:
Dojo Closed: Christmas

December 29th:
Instructor's intensive

December 30th:
Last practice of the year

December 31st - January 1st:
Dojo closed: New Year

January 5th:
Second Doshu memorial

January 19th:
Dojo benefit dance

Letter From the Editor
by Mark Ehrlich
Editor, The Aiki Dojo

We have had quite a year at ACLA. We've accomplished much for the dojo and the Furuya Foundation, and, like so much of what we do here, we have lots more to do (See page 3 for a hint.). When everything becomes an aspect of our training, it seems logical that all avenues will simply keep unfolding, offering us new challenges and opportunities to keep honing our skills and spirits. I invite all of our readers, students, and friends to join us as we recommit for another year to do our best, every day, off the mat as well as on it.

The holiday season always suggest things spiritual, either because of religious traditions we honor or because of the overwhelming attention our economy gives this time of year. In this issue, our contributors examine what it

takes to hone one's spirit through training, share some of their breakthroughs, and ponder where they'll go from here. Ito Sensei offers a candid recipe for success in training that can lead to success but can also not suit the taste of so many who begin training but then leave it. Finally, we share another gem from Sensei's archives, wherein our teacher invokes a sword metaphor to call upon us to polish our spirits continually through our practice. This essay, to my mind, stands as one of his wisest and best. We've tried to make this issue good food for thought over the holidays, and we certainly hope you find it so.

As one year closes and another opens before us, permit me a moment to thank all of you so much for your support. Your efforts have allowed us to continue Sensei's mission to provide a nice place to train, seven days a week. I wish all of you a safe, healthy, and happy holiday. We'll see you next year on the mat!

Anyone Can Learn Aikido, But Most Won't

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

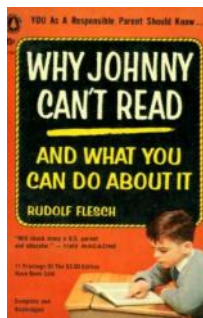
Training in the martial arts can seem like one of the most difficult endeavors that a person can undertake. It feels challenging because, like all traditional arts, it pushes the limits of not only our physical body, but also our mind. Initially, every student pursues the art form from the physical standpoint. However, like spilled water on a hot day, everyone's natural aptitude dries out regardless of how much or how little we have – some run out quickly and some run out slowly, but we all run out sooner or later. At this point our mind comes into play and we begin to struggle because we ran out of physical skill and now try to compensate by using our thinking minds. We become desperate, because our pursuit takes a turn that emphasizes our mental/emotional state rather than what we can do physically. In other words, our true personality or inner state emerges. The way we learn or our attitude merely reflects our mental/emotional state.

Sensei once cleverly quipped that a student's attitude was the most pivotal factor in learning Aikido. The proper attitude for a student to have combines the desire to learn with the desire to be taught. While it is true that students with physical gifts like athleticism, strength, or speed seem to stand out and excel at first, those physical gifts are nothing without the proper attitude to cultivate them, let alone wield them.

The desires to learn and to be taught amount to two sides of the same coin. The desire to learn means that, at our essence, we have the genuine spirit to learn or for the most part develop ourselves in the pursuit of victory over ourselves. The desire to be taught means setting aside our egos in order to let our desire to learn truly manifest itself. Think of it like a car: the desire to learn acts like gas and the desire to be taught acts like the engine – we need both to get anywhere. If we lack the desire to learn then we will always lose steam and run out of passion for our pursuits. Likewise, if we don't

want to be taught, then our ego will always get in the way of our wants, hopes, and dreams.

Attitude, then, becomes the pivotal factor not only in learning Aikido, but ultimately in succeeding in any endeavor. That is why neither age, ethnicity, build, athleticism, nor gender matter when it comes to learning Aikido, because those things pale in comparison to having the proper attitude. That is also the reason why anyone can learn Aikido, but most won't. By this I mean that, although most anyone might have the physical and mental capability to learn Aikido, almost everyone feels a reluctance at some point to exercise the proper attitude needed to learn.



When undertaking any activity, the biggest step we can take involves owning some very powerful knowledge about ourselves: we must realize that we have the capability to be or do anything that we want, based on what we believe or think about ourselves. Having the understanding that we can achieve anything our minds can imagine begs the question, "What would you do if you knew that you *would* succeed?" The way of Aikido is not exclusive – it is open for all to follow. All that we have to do is want to and have the will to follow. Most of us fail to understand that everything lies within our reach; we need only grasp it. An old English proverb put it best, "Where there is a will, there is a way."

As 2012 winds down, it feels only natural to reflect back on the year and take note of its ups and downs. Happily, our dojo was fortunate to have experienced more ups than downs this year. Yet I can't quite help but look back and think about how many of those downs I could have reversed if I only had exercised the proper attitude. They say that the teacher will appear when the student is ready. I guess that means that when I have the proper attitude everything will become my teacher and there won't be anything I can't achieve in 2013. May you all have a wonderful Christmas holiday and a happy New Year. I look forward to seeing all of those students who *can* and *will* learn Aikido next year.

AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES OFFICIALLY AFFILIATED DOJOS

INTERNATIONAL

Spain

Aikido Kodokai
Salamanca, Spain

Chief Instructor: Santiago Garcia Almaraz
www.kodokai.com

UNITED STATES

Arizona

Aikido Renbukai of Arizona
Surprise, Arizona

Chief Instructor: Michael Van Ruth
www.aikidorenbukai.com



Visit us on the Web at www.aikidocenterla.com

合気道

Let's Celebrate the
New Year at the Gardena Elks Club



Dancing for the Dojo



A Benefit for the
Aikido Center of Los Angeles
The Furuya Foundation

www.aikidocenterla.com



Saturday
January 19th, 2013

Doors Opens: 7:30pm

Dance: 8:30pm - 12midnite



Music Performed By

Kokoro

Music with Soul

Featuring

Steven Santiago & Lauren Kinkade



Information: **Dale Okuno** / daleokuno@gmail.com / 626.585.3500 x7220

Carol Tanita / cntanita@mail.com / 626.281.8894

Elks Club: 1735 W, 162nd St., Gardena

*Complimentary Light
Appetizers will be served*

The Furuya Foundation is a 501(c)3, Non-Profit Corp,
Public Benefit EIN# 20-0026129

**Limited Reserved
Table of 10: \$350.00
Individual Tickets: \$30.00**

**After January 1, 2013
Table of 10: \$400.00
Individual Ticket: \$35.00**

**PRE-SALE ONLY
NO TICKETS SOLD
AT THE DOOR**

RSVP FORM/CUT & RETURN BY JANUARY 1, 2013

Make checks payable to: **Furuya Foundation**

PLEASE DO NOT SEND CASH / Table Reservations: ONE CHECK ONLY

Contact Name: _____ Required: Email for Confirmation: _____

By Dec. 31st., 2012: _____ TABLE(s) of Ten @ \$350.00 \$ _____

_____ Individual Ticket @ \$30.00 \$ _____

Total Amount Enclosed \$ _____

**After January 1, 2013
Table of 10: \$400.00
Individual Ticket: \$35.00**

*Table Guests: List Names in Back

The Furuya Foundation is a 501(c)3,
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RETURN ADDRESS:

ACLA / The Furuya Foundation
c/o Carol Tanita
426 Kingford St.
Monterey Park, CA 91754

From Ground Work to Finishing Steps

by Shaun Menashe, Aikido Shodan, Iaido Nidan

Many of us have heard Sensei's adage that it is critical to practice Aikido 100% while in the dojo. When we get caught by surprise, on the street or otherwise, we will not find a friendly environment filled with comfy mats and willing practice partners. Outside of these carefully orchestrated conditions, we can certainly expect our technique to suffer.

Although we live in a developed and wealthy country and it seems unlikely that we will lose our lives to an act of violence, we stay sharp and dare not neglect the martial aspect of our training. This effort, however, leaves many questions for us to answer. Why train so hard to develop something we will never use? Why practice swordsmanship when we will never need to draw our sword? Why train so hard when no competitive fame, no elevated status will come of it? This is especially true of Aikido, where we receive no external validation and have no competitions to demonstrate our prowess over others. Many argue that for these reasons and others, we have no need for formalized, traditional martial arts these days.

Because we, like the *samurai* of a modernizing Japan, have little need to draw our sword on the battlefield, we must search for the hidden meaning in our martial arts pursuits. The gifted warriors of the past saw something special in their respective arts. In the struggle to defeat opponents, they were able to unlock wisdom, restraint, and compassion; even the Japanese sword, the embodiment of Japanese warrior culture, had emerged as one of the most

compassionate means of dispatching an opponent, with the lethal capacity to take life in one cut.

Sensei regarded violence as one of the least reliable human endeavors, writing that "we all like to think we are so 'effective' and so 'strong', but humans are not really strong because they can throw very hard or break your arm or kill you. . . . This is not what humans do best, as history proves over and over again. Man is known for his human spirit, which Aikido polishes and allows to shine."



Shaun Menashe demonstrating
at Zenshuji Obon in 2009

is the basic step of grinding away the flaws, correcting the shape of the blade, giving it an edge. Although this is the first step, this step is the most important and takes the most skill. This is where all of the labor and hard work is. If the shita-ji work is good, then the shi-age ("final polish" or "finishing step") brings out the final beauty of the sword. The final step is much easier. If the ground work is not done competently, however one uses his skill, the final polish will never come out well.

Continued on page 6...



The Aiki Dojo
Official publication of
the Aikido Center of Los Angeles

We are a not-for-profit, traditional Aikido Dojo dedicated to preserving the honored values and traditions of the arts of Aikido and Iaido. With your continued understanding and support, we hope that you also will dedicate yourself to your training and to enjoying all the benefits that Aikido and Iaido can offer.

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Questions/Comments?

We welcome all questions and comments. Please send us a letter or an e-mail and our team will do our best to come up with an answer. We reserve the right to edit questions and letters for clarity and length.

Please e-mail submissions to:
info@aikidocenterla.com

Why I Still Practice Aikido

by Kay Sera, Aikido Shodan

Well, it has been 12 years and one month since I stepped into the jewel that was our dojo in Little Tokyo and have continued to practice Aikido with some consistency ever since. Never having an interest in martial arts and not knowing what I was getting into, one may ask, "Why do you still practice Aikido?" Yes, Aikido serves as a good form of exercise for me; yes, it's fun, challenging and enjoyable; yes, I like the teachers and fellow students; but there is more. I know there is more but I can't seem to verbalize it. There is a reason why I continue to practice.

Often after class when we sit ready to bow out and finish, Ito Sensei gives a short discourse on the scroll hanging in the *tokonoma* regarding some aspect of Aikido practice that we can ponder and apply to our daily lives. These thoughtful comments always touch and inspire me and strengthen my desire to continue practicing. Recently Ito Sensei talked about his trip to Japan and how he did *kokyu dosa* with some older students – some over 60, one more than 80 years old. I forgot what he said exactly, but what I got out of what he expressed that day amounts to this: the practice of Aikido allows us, over time, to strip away the extraneous stuff we carry around, stuff that just covers the truth of who we are. As we practice year after year, decade after decade and lose our youthful, muscular strength, what gets revealed is our inner clarity and true strength. I felt particularly interested in this since as a woman (and a small one at that) who, like all of us, is also aging, I know my

physical strength is limited and waning. It felt heartening to hear about these older students with impeccable technique and to think that as we get older, with the right foundation and consistent practice, the technique remains exquisitely effective and a certain clarity of self begins to shine through. In our practice, we strive to improve ourselves – our inner selves as well as our outer selves. The dojo offers a space where we can practice this self-improvement in a focused, disciplined way.

After not passing my recent *nidan* test, my reasons for practicing Aikido came into high relief for me. Even though I did not pass, I knew I would keep practicing and try to improve myself. I did have to ask myself, however, what am I doing, why am I doing this, how much of this do I really want to do, how far do I want to go? I trained as much as I could considering my work schedule and other involvements and at the time of the test I still did not feel prepared. But since I already postponed my test once, I really didn't feel that I could postpone it again. The good thing, though, was my trying, failing, and discovering my resolve to push myself harder next time. I'm not really interested in my rank and did not really want to take the test, but I now know that it marked an important milestone in my development. It promised to push me, and it certainly has. Not passing the test was a great learning experience. And because I see Aikido as a way to develop myself physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, I continue to want to practice. I am grateful to have our dojo, teachers, and students because we all work together to create an environment for learning and developing ourselves in many ways. Thank you!

Why I Train

by Stan Sung, Aikido Shodan

I have observed that, in the world that surrounds us and especially in our West Coast metropolitan area, we exhibit a cultural desire to get results in the fastest possible way. Or in other words, to get as much done as with as little effort as possible in the name of being efficient. This cultural norm has led to such concepts as the law of diminishing returns. Translated to a martial artist's point of view, we want to 'kick butt' as fast as we can.

This is one of the reasons why I believe that personal combat styles, which aim to get 80% of the results with 20% of the time, enjoy such popularity today. However, just as muscles get their most effective workout during the final 20% of the workout routine, I feel that much of the exponentially compounded effectiveness of martial arts training lies in the final 20% of the learning effort. We can probably apply this to any martial art; in my Aikido training, when striving to attain what is in the final 20%, I am in effect striving to perfect myself.

While I was in college I had researched what martial art I wanted to learn. I had practiced Tae Kwon Do and also admired Bruce Lee when I was a kid, and thought that a striking martial art was what I desired. In practicing Aikido, I realized that striking was only a way to be aggressive and that Aikido had more to offer me than that. Although I don't think there will ever be an end to my Aikido practice, my deep sense of loyalty to what I've started also keeps me training. This sense of loyalty extends beyond the martial art and technique itself; over the years I have grown close to my fellow students and all those currently practicing at the dojo. I enjoy coming to practice because of the people who practice as well as the practice and self-improvement opportunity itself.

Lastly, as I come to practice I am constantly reminded to be humble, which is actually a good thing for me as it has applicability to the rest of my life. Practicing Aikido tempers my expectations and how I see myself and the world around me in life and business. I have gone through many roller coaster cycles: one moment I feel on top of the world just to discover the next moment how much I don't know and become re-grounded. I take these lessons and apply them to other situations that come up in my life and business which helps me not get carried away regardless of how good I feel about the situation. On the reverse side, it also helps provide a good center to remind myself not to feel victimized and become disabled by that mentality. Each fall I take in Aikido to me represents a fall in the real world. Therefore I have learned that the better my *ukemi* becomes, the faster I can get back up after the fall.

From Ground Work to Finishing Steps *continued from page 3...*

In many ways, we train to elicit our inner beauty and find what truly lies within. What motivates our behavior on a moment-to-moment basis is not always what it seems. Through difficulty in training our true character emerges. When we catch this glimpse of ourselves, we see something that is likely subtle and pervasive, perhaps painful, but nevertheless something that has become a part of us. This recognition is where the true value in our training lies: we train so hard every day, both in and out of the dojo, to bring these hidden truths to the surface and understand ourselves better.

Staying in one place long enough for transformation to occur can often feel like the hardest part of the process. When faced with pain, we instinctively want to run back to comfort. In this sense, training seems so much like the modern romantic relationship: oftentimes we stay with our partners only up to a certain point. When it gets difficult or the romance fades, we move on, only to encounter the same problems in the next person and the next, all the while never realizing that each individual was more or less equally worthy of our time and affection. If we are lucky, we surmise that the problem lies not “out there” but somewhere inside – an insight that does not leave us weak and broken, but truly powerful, for by acknowledging that the problem sits with us, it becomes a problem that falls under our control. Sensei admonished us along these lines many times, always emphasizing that *“developing skill in the physical techniques of Aikido is nothing without some kind of progress of an inward nature. Aikido assumes that if we become proficient in its techniques, we become a better person for it. This is not unique to Aikido but with all traditional arts in Japan. Even a skillful flying-kite maker can become a great master.”*

What some may call spiritual training in the end amounts to nothing more than *just* training. To reach mastery, we must devote ourselves to the basics and keep our feet firmly planted on the ground, so to speak. These basics function as both a guide and a safety net. When we go astray, we can follow them back to the

path; when we fall, we can have a softer landing because our foundation enjoyed greater stability from the beginning. We can apply this approach to anything we wish to master: identify the basics and commit ourselves to their study. This recipe for success became Sensei’s true legacy. For example, all language builds on the most basic and perfunctory structure of vowels and consonants;

without them, even the most beautifully composed opera would fall apart. Only once we have mastered basic syntax, can we form sentences, then paragraphs, then essays. In the end, we can throw away this structure to write prose and poetry that breaks the laws of grammar but nonetheless moves us and conveys its meaning deeply; such a progression began with the alphabet and countless hours of practice. In this regard, no matter what we study, when we apply this method, we can achieve our own personal enlightenment and really see how the way is in training, without any magic bullet or any shortcuts to ease the journey.

“Even a skillful flying-kite maker can become a great master.”



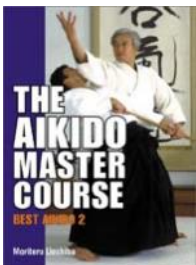
Master Edo kite maker Mikio Toki

Aikido is a human art. It is alive and relies upon an oral tradition, the learning of which we can only accomplish through years of practice under a qualified teacher and through the generosity of our fellow students who yield their bodies for the greater good. Much like the sword depends upon the iron, miners, swordsmith, polisher, and numerous other agents to achieve its beauty and effectiveness, we too rely upon the efforts of others so that we can develop ourselves through Aikido.

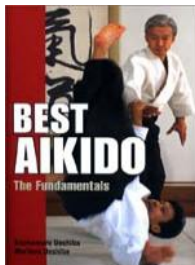
They say that the better the sword, the longer it takes to polish, but the final product exemplifies the polisher’s twofold purpose: to highlight both its sharpness and capability and its actualized and inspiring beauty. It takes 100% effort to achieve this accomplished end state.

Several years ago, Sensei posted a conversation he had one time with a student to his daily message board. The student lamented that Aikido felt like the hardest thing he had ever done in his life; Sensei emphatically agreed. After six years of training, I finally understand their discussion.

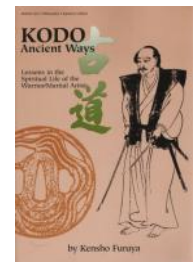
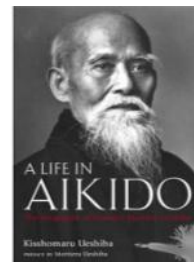
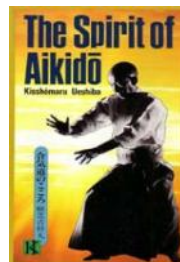
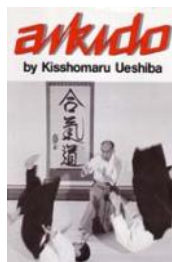
Recommended Readings:



by Ueshiba Moriteru



by Ueshiba Kisshomaru



by Kensho Furuya

An Eye for an Eye

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

In the Fifties and Sixties, I think, there was a big controversy going on framed as, “Why Can’t Johnny Read?” I was quite young at the time and quite oblivious to whatever was going on but I know my mother was very concerned about my reading. The whole country suddenly become obsessed with the fact that there were so many young children with reading challenges.

It just so happened at this time that my teacher stuck me into remedial reading and this, of course, sent my mother into a rage. Private tutors were hired and it seemed I spent the whole day being hauled from one expert to the next. I myself didn’t see anything wrong with my reading at all. Well, it was later discovered that your Sensei is not the dunce that he often appears to be. During a routine eye exam, the wise Dr. George Kambara, now retired, noticed that one eyelash had grown inwards and rested on my eye, causing irritation, which indeed caused me to blink a lot, which in turn slowed down my reading abilities, which caused my teacher alarm – enough to put me into a remedial class which, without fail, caused my mother to go through the ceiling. The problem was easily solved by a pluck of the eyelash and believe it or not, it was discovered that I was the fastest reader, with the highest level of comprehension, in the entire Southern California area. I myself had no doubt in my mind: I was already, at the age of nine, reading books on swords and Buddhism and such odd, unchild-like and un-young-like topics.

Cleaning up my book case the other day, I recently found one of the first books I ever bought and read on Zen. It was dated 1957; I was nine years old at the time, and it cost me 15 cents! Obviously, I mused, I sacrificed one day of milk and cookies at school for the money to buy it!

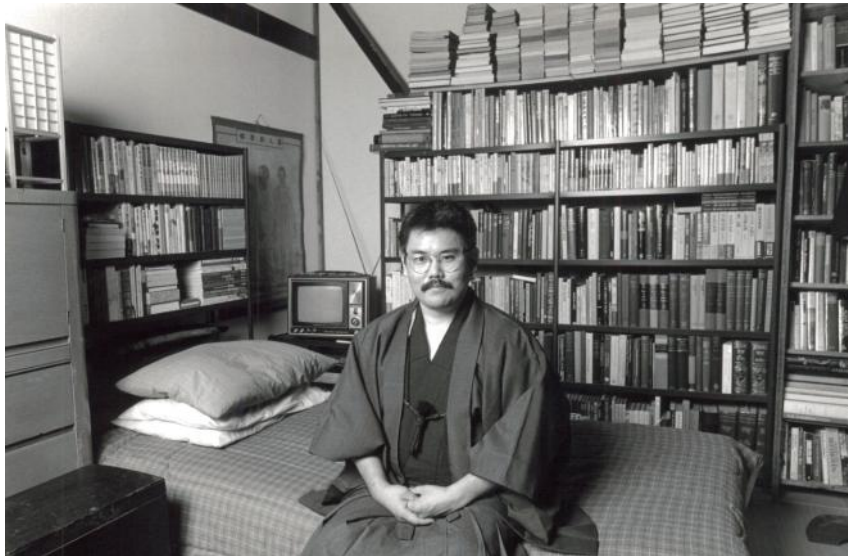
Well, although it hasn’t been proven whether Sensei is a dunce or not, it has been proven without a doubt that we do have a problem which still exists today, more serious than ever before, although we have known about it for the last 40 years at least – poor Johnny still cannot read!

With not many black belts and instructors around, I started teaching Aikido at the age of 14 when I received my first *dan*. Teaching and learning have always held an interest to me and of course,

“Why Johnny Can’t Learn Aikido!” And, much like our country’s efforts to solve why our children still have reading disabilities, I am still thinking, every moment of the day, how to teach Aikido more effectively.

I don’t think I was born with any special abilities – I myself like any other “normal” child longed for super, Batman-like, Spider-man-like, Green Lantern-like abilities as a child. I notice some of you still do today. . . . I attribute my reading abilities to simply reading a lot – a great deal! Aikido practice works much the same way: more than ability or age or talent or youth, we can only develop in Aikido through practice – a lot of practice!

There is one more thing: you actively need to want to develop yourself. I don’t see this anytime today – nowadays, we all start from the point of “original perfection.” In Eastern thought, the sword cannot be appreciated until it undergoes the polishing stone. We in the West do not appreciate the idea of “polish”. Who needs to polish that which is perfect? Our inborn ideas of our perfection really make all sense of learning, or polish, all impossible. Yes, we are perfect – but don’t worry about it now! Even perfection needs polish!



Sensei posing in his bedroom at the old dojo in the mid 1980s. The books lining the walls amount to just a small fraction of his personal library.

Part of the passion to learn and need to polish one’s self entails the need to gobble up everything you learn. Be hungry to learn! Be ravenous to learn! If you focus properly, there will be not one thing you will forget about what you learned. Without this passion, the instruction will only pass through one ear and out the other, as usual.

I don’t know why Johnny can’t read. I feel that, most likely, Johnny doesn’t feel like he needs to read! I don’t know why some people cannot learn Aikido and Iaido easily. Like reading, perhaps we do not see the importance of such things to our lives. In our lives, *everything* is important; to someone who is “perfect”, nothing is important!

Christmas will soon be here. Every year, I feel the Christmas spirit less and less, I don’t know why . . . are we so bored with everything? Merry Christmas!

Editor’s Note: Sensei originally published this article, in slightly different form, to his daily message board on December 13, 2002.

Aikido TRAINING SCHEDULE

Sundays

9:00-10:00 AM Children's Class
10:15-11:15 AM Open

Mondays

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals
6:30-7:30 PM Open

Tuesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Advanced*

Wednesdays

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals
6:30-7:30 PM Intermediate
7:45-8:45 PM Weapons*

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Bokken

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

Saturdays

9:30-10:30 AM Open
10:45-11:45 AM Advanced*

*6:30 AM Instructor's Intensive: last Saturday of the month by invitation only.**

* These classes are not open for visitors to watch.

Iaido TRAINING SCHEDULE

TRADITIONAL JAPANESE IAIDO SWORDSMANSHIP

Saturdays

7:15-8:15 AM Beginning
8:15-9:15 AM Intermediate/Advanced

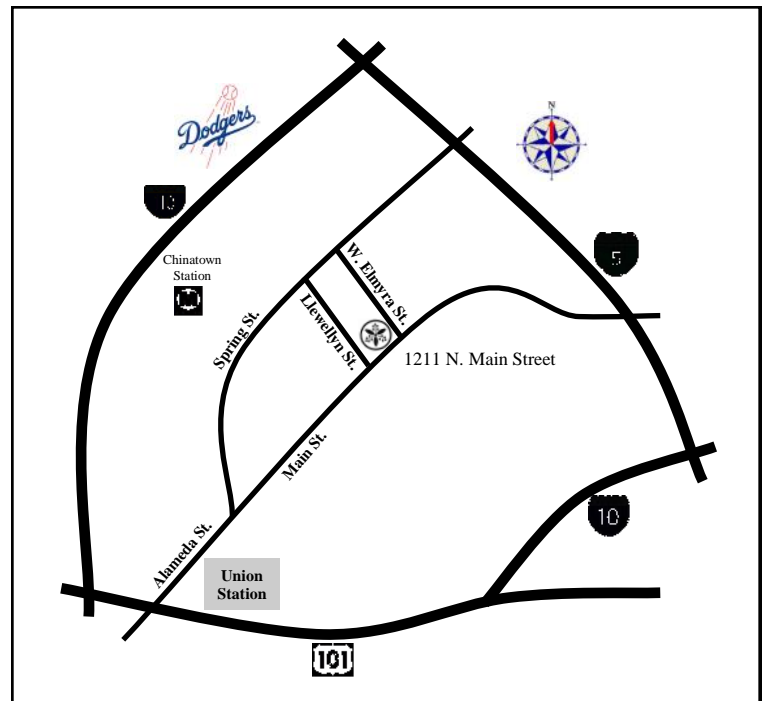
Sundays

7:45-8:45 AM

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM (Bokken Practice)
7:30-8:30 PM

No classes on the last weekend of the month.



Finding Our Dojo

We are located at
1211 N. Main Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Telephone: (323) 225-1424

E-mail: info@aikidocenterla.com

We are across the street and one block northwest from the Chinatown Metro Station.

The entrance is on Elmyra Street.

No appointment necessary to watch classes or join:
You are welcome to visit us any time during any of our Open or Fundamentals classes. Please come early.



We are directly affiliated with:
AIKIDO WORLD HEADQUARTERS

Aikido Hombu Dojo - Aikikai

17-18 Wakamatsu-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, JAPAN

We are committed to the study and practice of the teachings of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba and his legitimate successors, Kisshomaru Ueshiba and the present Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba.

The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles (ACLA) admit students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, and national or ethnic origin in administration of their educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.