



# 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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## Happy Chinese New Year!



## Gong Hey Fat Choy!

## Welcome to 2016 The Year of the Red Fire Monkey!

### Message From the Teacher *by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor*

According to Chinese astrology, 2016 is the Year of the Fire Monkey. The characteristics of the year usually follow the nature of the animal and we can anticipate the monkey's intelligence and hyperactivity to be of influence this year. This hyperactivity is amplified by the fire element, and although we should not try to control it, the additional energy will need direction. While many things may get done at an accelerated rate, they can also get out of hand if we are not diligent or focused in our endeavors.

Last month we published an article by Furuya Sensei in which he discussed the tendency for humans, like monkeys, to become deluded. A monkey's delusion comes from their proclivity to overestimate themselves since they rely so heavily on their intellect. Thinking that they "know," their journey of self-awareness goes no further.

For the Aikidoist, the Year of the Monkey can lead us down one of two paths. The first path has us falling prey to the monkey's delusions and, lacking focus, we become self-absorbed and full of our own egos. When we think we "know," there is no need for improvement. This, coupled with a lack of proper focus and work-ethic, precludes us from learning and ultimately becoming successful.

The second path enables us to use our minds as a tool for success. There is an old saying, "The mind is an excellent servant, but a terrible master." Using our mind as a tool enables us to find our own way to victory.

Martial artists are disciplined, diligent and determined and the characteristics of a Monkey year can promote growth when we put our ego in check and use our minds as an asset without letting it get the better of us.

I wish you all the best health and prosperity in the Year of the Monkey.

## Upcoming Events

**February 27th:**  
Intensive Seminar

**March 5th:**  
Furuya Sensei *Meinichi*  
Memorial Service

**April 15-17th:**  
O Sensei Memorial Seminar

**May 28th:**  
Intensive Seminar

**June 25th:**  
Intensive Seminar

**July 4th:**  
Dojo Closed: 4th of July

**July 30th:**  
Intensive Seminar

## What Good is Rank?

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

Years ago, before I was a black belt, we had a student who had been studying Aikido at another dojo come to our school looking to change over to the Aikikai system. When Furuya Sensei asked him his rank, he replied, "I want to start over and will humbly accept any rank you give me." After a few months, Sensei awarded this student 4<sup>th</sup> *Kyu*. Sensei told his advisors later that he was being generous and that this guy was really more like 5<sup>th</sup> *Kyu*. I was so surprised at how angry this man became upon receiving his rank and even more surprised when he stormed out and quit. Later, his friend who had brought him to our school told Sensei that he was actually 3<sup>rd</sup> *Dan* and a teacher in his home style. Yikes, how embarrassing! Sensei was mad at this person's friend for not telling him and that he had inadvertently embarrassed this student.

In the old days there wasn't a formalization of rank or status. Students studied a system and either left when they thought they were "ready" or were graduated out by the teacher and given a scroll called a *menkyo kaiden* (免許皆伝) or certificate of total transmission in recognition of their achievement. There were no belts or ranking systems and there was little to differentiate a beginner from an expert other than their skill or ability.

Ranking in the martial arts is a phenomena of late 19<sup>th</sup> century and was implemented and popularized by Jigoro Kano, the founder of Judo. His first awarding of rank in Judo was in the 1880s to his four most loyal students known fondly as "The Four Guardians of Kodokan" or *Kodokan Shitenno*. The *Kodokan Shitenno* were: Tsunejiro Tomita, Yamashita Yoshiaki, Yokoyama Sakujiro and Saigo Shiro. Judo was one of the first global martial arts and Kano Sensei had students coming to Japan from all over the world and from every walk of life. Interestingly, Yamashita Yoshiaki would go on to be President Roosevelt's Judo teacher.

The westernization of Judo created a need for a system of advancement and testing as a practice. Kano Sensei followed the Japanese board game *Go*'s system of *Kyu* and *Dan* rankings which had been in place since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Typically, *Kyu* ranks were for students and *Dan* ranks were for masters. Later, at the turn of the century, a need arose to further formalize these levels and Kano Sensei created a standardized curriculum and began testing and awarding colored belts upon completion of each rank.

Before the modern era of martial arts, students lived in-house as *uchi-deshi* or "house students." Most students lived with their teachers for a period of about five or so years with the head student or first born staying longer to eventually inherit the school and the

entire system. Students trained every day for more than eight hours, six to seven days a week. I recall Sensei telling us about his experience as an *uchi-deshi* at Hombu Dojo and how lucky the students felt if 2<sup>nd</sup> *Doshu* gave them a day off. Day in and day out, a student's development was seen firsthand by the teacher and the student could be directly assessed on an ongoing basis. It wasn't unusual for a student to learn the entire system in about two or three years under the watchful eye of a strict teacher and under harsh conditions. From that point, a student would spend the remaining years refining their techniques being carefully scrutinized by the teacher. After this time, a student was given a *menkyo kaiden* and was then licensed to teach this art and some even started their own schools. Regardless of the era, a total transmission was extremely rare and a license to teach was just as uncommon for one to achieve.



O Sensei and Kisshomaru Ueshiba with many of the *uchi-deshi* who went on to become famous Aikido teachers.

With the modern era and the globalization of the martial arts in Japan came a satellite type of student called a *soto-deshi* or "outside student." In this situation, students were usually unable to live with their teachers, but still wanted to study the art. Not being in the company of the teacher day in and day out created a certain type of "distance" and a need arose for a testing and ranking system to assess

student progress and ability. A student from across the world could come once a year to Japan and demonstrate their level for the teacher. This demonstration showed how earnest a student had been in his absence from the teacher. How much they developed in their absence was equal to their sincerity and dedication to the teacher and the art. Weaker students returned with sub-par levels and were often admonished by the teacher and other students. Strict teachers needed to push these satellite students and the training tended to be harsher so that a student would reveal their inner nature to the teacher in what little amount of time they had.

In the old days everyone, regardless of position, learned technique but it was the *uchi-deshi*s that got the real training. The training tended to be very strict and bordering on the harsh where the teacher was more strict than sympathetic. Sensei used to say, "The rings get tighter as they come closer to the center of the tree." It is often said that a good teacher is meticulous and a great teacher is strict. This strictness is something Sensei prided himself upon and it always amazed me when people would come in with this romantic notion about him from his writings and his presence on the internet only to be taken aback by his strictness. Strictness was so common for teachers of old that they sometimes touted strictness or *kibishii* as their only qualification as a teacher.

Continued on page 6...

## Saving Self; Saving Face

by Ken Watanabe, Iaido Chief Instructor

There is a story about Confucius being invited by an official to perform an important ceremony. Before performing the ceremony, Confucius met the organizers and, although he knew how to perform the ceremony, he started asking questions regarding the event, how they would like him to officiate it and so on. Confucius often traveled with many of his students and after Confucius finished meeting with the officials, his students asked, "Why did you ask them how to conduct the ceremony? You know how to perform it better than they do!"

The reason, Confucius told his students that he asked the questions was so the officials could save face. Normally one would expect someone famous like Confucius – an "A-Lister" so to speak – to simply stroll in and take over everything. Confucius, instead of arriving with an all-knowing attitude and taking over, politely deferred to the officials and consulted with them.

Confucius asked the officials for their advice, not because he did not know what he was doing, but so the officials, the people organizing the event, could keep their honor. Of course Confucius knew how to conduct the ceremony better than anyone, but he deferred to the officials so there wouldn't be any inadvertent bad feelings.

Lesser students, as strong and talented as they are, would not consider helping another student save face. A lesser student would only know how to think about themselves and make themselves look good regardless of how their actions affected anyone else.

Confucius' students did not consider helping the other party save face. They only thought about their own group and their own ability. Likewise, when training in the dojo, it's only natural to think about oneself. When students start gaining experience and ability, it's easy for them to think of themselves as beyond reproach but without the proper mindset, confidence and pride can easily turn into arrogance.

In the West individualism and the freedom to do whatever you want is emphasized. Nowadays, the idea is, "I know what's best for me" is popular. In a way this idea is true, but without experience and training, it's easy to become self-centered about one's own practice, picking and choosing in a selfish way thinking, "I like this, I don't like that."

With this kind of entitled mindset, it's very easy to become unteachable – unable to take instruction, criticism, or constructively deal with setbacks in training.



*Statue of Confucius at Yushima Seido temple in Japan*

In the Eastern tradition of training it is equally, if not more, important to focus on others as well as one's self. In the context of traditional training, being considerate to one's training partners, teacher, and dojo, and understanding how one's actions can affect another person's well-being and honor is sometimes more important than training in the technique. Traditional martial arts training is more than just throwing one's opponent down powerfully or hurting them.

In training we talk about improving the self, but at the same time, the training also goes beyond the self and takes those around you into consideration. It's good to demonstrate skill, but to do it in such a way while boasting about their own abilities is no good. It's okay to be strong, but to show your strength by beating up your training partners is no good. It is one thing to be a model student, strong, skillful, and modest, but another to behave in a boorish manner that brings shame to your dojo, your fellow students, and to your teacher.

The traditional training goal is to prevent students from getting a self-entitled "me-me-me" attitude. It's important for the student's progress to prevent the rise of the their ego and not to let one's self-reflection turn into self-satisfaction.

There is a large mirror in our dojo that students can use to check their form. However, the danger with using the mirror is that it's very easy to get caught up in one's own image and become mesmerized with it, like someone at the gym flexing in front of their own reflection and, in this state of delusion, taking in the awesomeness that is themselves.

Instead of using the mirror as a tool to help check one's form, it becomes a means to stoke the student's ego. It's easy to get caught up in one's own image and think, "I look good!" instead of using the mirror as a tool to help us perfect our technique.

Traditional martial arts training goes against this kind of self-centered mindset; this idea that I am great or that I am awesome. A student believing that they've arrived at their so-called level of mastery solely under their own efforts is actually farther away from mastery than they were on their first day of training.

Even in everyday Japanese etiquette the tendency is to favor the other person over one's self. This form of etiquette is directly related to Japan's warrior tradition and this idea of etiquette, behaving in such a way as to not create any misunderstandings, allows the other party to keep their honor and save face. After all, practice begins and ends with etiquette and without this sense of etiquette, martial arts loses its humanity and devolves into simply a form of "fighting".

*Continued on page 4...*



## O Sensei Memorial Weapons Seminar

April 15-17, 2016

### Seminar Schedule

#### Friday, April 15th:

6:30-7:30 PM: Tanto-tori  
8:00 PM: No host dinner

#### Saturday, April 16th:

6:30-8:00 AM: Bokken basics  
8:15-9:15 AM: Bokken-tori  
9:30-10:30 AM: Aiki-ken  
10:45-11:45 AM: Memorial service  
6:30 PM: Seminar social

#### Sunday, April 17th:

7:30-8:45 AM: Jo basics  
9:00-10:00 AM: Breakfast  
10:15-11:00 AM: Kumi-jo  
11:15 AM-12:15 PM: Jo-tori  
12:30-1:15 PM: Jo-nage

*Schedule subject to change without notice.*

\$100.00 for entire seminar  
\$45.00 for a single day

## Setsubun Service at Zenshuji February 7th at 1:30 pm.



This service is to celebrate the changing of the Winter Season to the Spring Season. In the homes, a 'mame-maki' or bean throwing ceremony is held to drive out the evil spirits. The beans are thrown and meant to pierce the devil's eyes.

At Zenshuji those born the year of the Chinese Zodiac Animal, which this year is the Monkey, will throw the beans while yelling: "Fuku wa uchi; oni was soto" or "Good Luck enter; devil depart". If one eats these roasted beans equal in number to one's own age, good luck will follow.

Darumas are sold at the Setsubun Service as a symbol of Good Luck. On the back side a message is written such as Good Family Health, Successful Business, etc. and the Darumas are blessed and taken home. Come early to purchase and have your Daruma message blessed.

You are cordially invited to attend the Setsubun Service at Zenshuji on Sunday, February 7th at 1:30pm. We look forward to your attendance and taking home some of the bags with mame (beans) that will be thrown at the service.

For more information visit [Zenshuji.com](http://Zenshuji.com)

### Saving Self; Saving Face *continued from page 3...*

Confucius did not come in full of selfish attitude ready to show the ceremony organizer how much he knew while throwing his weight around, but instead allowed the other party to save face and have a say in the ceremony without feeling they were being steamrolled by their guest.

In training, it's important not to let one's ego take over. Students may have techniques that they favor, techniques that they find easier to learn or ones that might be their strongest technique but these are only a facet of a deeper more profound art. Using the technique as a façade to show off one's skill is not mastery, but a delusion. Traditional training, with all its seemingly contradictory rules is designed to nip this type of selfish thinking in the bud.

Likewise with the dojo, one's training partners, and the teachers, it's important in our training to help them save face as well as demonstrate one's own skill. This idea of putting others above one's self is the foundation from which true mastery begins. A lesser student puts others down to make themselves look good, but a good student who follows the correct path can bring themselves

up not to the detriment of others. It's important to be mindful of one's own progress but also to take care and not to fixate on one's own self over others.



Being considerate of one's opponent, and even caring for their opponent is an idea expressed by Morihei Ueshiba, the founder of Aikido. It's only from this "caring" attitude that the student can eventually begin reading their opponents and furthermore their intentions.

Morihei Ueshiba, or O Sensei, was aware of this when he created Aikido. Aikido training was designed to be done in cooperation with a partner, not in isolation. As an Aikido student, we depend on the well-being of our *uke*, or practice partner, in order to have a good practice and they, in turn, depend on us. Without our partners to help us, our progress would be almost impossible.

No one can be like Confucius but as students of the Way, we can emulate his spirit and like O Sensei's Aikido seeks to do and create harmony both on and off the mat and at the same time bring us closer to mastery.



On January 16th, Reverends Shumyo Kojima and Daiki Toho from Zenshuji conducted a memorial service to commemorate the 17th year of the passing of Nidai Doshu, Kisshomaru Ueshiba. Kojima Sensei presented the dojo with a *shikishi* of his calligraphy that reads, "Nichi nichi ko nichi," which is a Buddhist phrase that means *everyday is a good day*.

## Nidai Doshu's 17th Meinichi Practice and Memorial Service January 16, 2016



### The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles



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.



## 2016 Kagami Biraki Dojo Opening Celebration



### What Good is Rank? *continued from page 2...*

Teachers understood that with the acquisition of skill and ability came a certain amount of ego. It was the strict teacher's role to quell that ego for as long as possible if not entirely. Sensei used to say, "A good teacher only answers 'no' to questions from the student and serves 'wrong' as his only complement." Although the teacher knows that no matter what they do, the student will still have an ego, this "no" type mentality is meant to keep their ego in check so that they can reach their true potential.

Testing, promotions and rank are a slippery slope for teachers because with accomplishment comes hubris. Without discipline this sense of self runs rampant and can get the better of the student. The inflated sense of self that tends to come with accolades disables the student from delving deeper into their art and often precludes them from an inner journey. As the visitor in the opening anecdote illustrates, we can fake our humility for only so long. When he realized that he wasn't getting the rank he deserved, he quit. How could he expect to not only change styles but improve himself?

There is a saying, "Poor students benefit from their teacher's reputation, average students benefit from the teacher's kindness but good students benefit from their teacher's discipline." This need for discipline is not meant to oppress the student. It is there to protect the student from their greatest enemy – the self. Sensei said, "The most dangerous time is when a student thinks that they have arrived."

There is a saying in Buddhism, "If one really wants to learn, abandon any hope of fruition." The simplest transaction between a teacher and student is that the teacher teaches and the student learns – nothing more. If a student wants to get good in Aikido, all they have to do is forget about rank, position and advancement and just keep training.

## The Meaning of Teaching

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

We are changing the emphasis of our early morning Intensive Class each month to an Instructor's Class for the assistant instructors in the dojo and I hope that all of my black belts and senior students will attend this class regularly and faithfully.

Today, it is a custom in Aikido and also a popular trend to teach "whatever" we feel like teaching at that moment. Teaching is seen as a "creative" process where one needs to be "spontaneous" and, of course, by teaching unusual techniques, we are popular with the students who are always attracted to something new and different.

Some of my assistants like to go off on their own and expound on their own ideas of what Aikido is. In some respects, this is good and helps to develop the independence and individual thinking of the student. Each instructor needs to think out the techniques for themselves and think about what might be the best way to teach the students.

However, more often than not, this spontaneous type of teaching only results in showmanship and individual promotion and more than thinking of and taking into consideration the education and welfare of the student, it is more an exercise in self-expression and self-absorption.

In my own dojo, I hope that my assistants do not lose track that in teaching, the student's welfare and education must come first. We must also consider the "purity" of the art. Self-expression comes much later.

We are, and I include myself, only "beginning" instructors who, are representatives of O Sensei and we are trying to teach and pass down his Aikido. In my own mind, there is only one teacher, O Sensei, and we are only helping him to pass on his Aikido in his absence. We must be faithful and committed to his Aikido.

Picasso can be spontaneous and creative and create something new and different and it is truly a work of art. But that spontaneity comes from many years of experience and the cultivation of his genius. O Sensei can be spontaneous and create new techniques at the moment but this also comes from many, many years of hard training and refinement. We can be spontaneous too – but where does it come from? Usually, our egos – or 5-10 years of occasional, off and on practice? – this is the worst way to teach.

Of course, many teachers believe that it is only to do "their thing" and the students follow or not – it is up to them. This is a great way to teach, I like this method myself! But, in this day and age, when students can devote so little time to their practice, we need to think of more practical and efficient ways to instruct them. It is not like many years ago when the student stayed with the teacher everyday all day long and followed him everywhere.

Instructors must think hard for themselves. What is the purpose of teaching Aikido? To pass on the art of Aikido? To express one's self as a teacher? To make money? To be popular with others? To be the Big Boss? Teaching is not necessarily a matter of power and profit. It is sad when teaching becomes purely a business venture – as it is happening right now.



If we go back to the old days, teachers were poor and destitute and many were tough and unpopular – yet they were geniuses in their art and students followed them in order to receive instruction.

Instructors cannot enjoy such loyal and devoted students these days, so they focus on personal profit, fame or power. Students these days, think that they know everything, and pick and choose what they want to learn. How can true learning and teaching take place in this type of

me first environment?

It is ironic that in order to learn, we must first go back to the first step of learning how to learn.

Finally, I must insist to my assistants that students are not laboratory rats and monkeys to test your theories on! They are here to learn Aikido and this is what is the first and only duty of the teacher. It is our responsibility to teach solid, time tested Aikido which is a result of our training. Of course, teaching Aikido is the long, arduous, boring job, of teaching the same things over and over until the student can master it. This is drudgery at its worst – but also a test of faith – to look at the glass as half full. I have seen many wonderful results over the years based on this method but it takes many years. If you want to teach your most devoted "student" right now at this moment, stand in front of a large mirror (Ha, just kidding).

Please think about what it means to be a teacher of Aikido. I am only saying this to my students and assistants and not insisting that this is how others may teach in other dojos.

At the same time, senior students and black belts must also think well about what it means to have responsibility in the dojo.

I personally believe a true teacher should not use teaching as a tool for self-promotion, or use seniority as a power tool to lord over others, or make the dojo your stage to express your own theories.

Perhaps, this is a hard and narrow-minded way to think about teaching and training. Please try to imagine what O Sensei went through to develop Aikido – our path is quite easy and luxurious!

See you all each month in our Instructor's Class, please!

**Editor's Note:** Sensei originally published this article, in slightly different form, to his daily message board on August 31, 2004.

# Aikido TRAINING SCHEDULE

**Sundays**

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

**Mondays**

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

**Tuesdays**

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

**Wednesdays**

6:30-7:30 AM Open  
 5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals  
 6:30-7:30 PM Open  
 7:45-8:45 PM Weapons\*

**Thursdays**

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals

**Fridays**

6:30-7:30 PM Open

**Saturdays**

6:30-8:00 AM Intensive Seminar\* †  
 9:30-10:30 AM Open  
 10:45-11:45 AM Open

\* These classes are not open for visitors to watch.

† Intensive seminar is offered the last Saturday of every month and is open to any Aikidoist regardless of school or style who is at least proficient in forward and backward ukemi.

# Iaido TRAINING SCHEDULE

## TRADITIONAL JAPANESE IAIDO SWORDSMANSHIP

**Saturdays**

8:00-9:00 AM

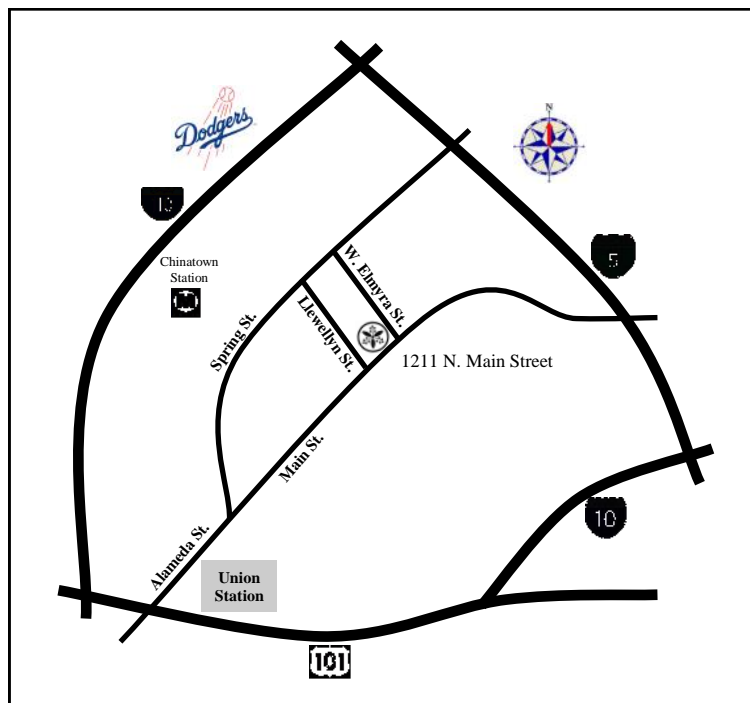
**Sundays**

7:45-8:45 AM

**Thursdays**

6:30-7:30 PM

*No weekend classes on the last weekend of the month.*



The Aikido Center of Los Angeles has been awarded  
**Hombu Official Recognition by the  
 AIKIDO WORLD HEADQUARTERS**

公益財団法人 合気会

**Aikido Hombu Dojo - Aikikai Foundation  
 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.*



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**The Aiki Dojo**  
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 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 will also dedicate yourself to your training and enjoy all the benefits that Aikido and Iaido have to offer.*

Editor-in-Chief and Publisher: David Ito

**Finding Our Dojo**

We are located at  
 1211 N. Main Street  
 Los Angeles, CA 90012  
 Telephone: (323) 225-1424

E-mail: [info@Aikidocenterla.com](mailto: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.*