

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

January 2015

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Upcoming Events

January 3rd:

Hatsu keiko

First practice of the year

January 10th:

2nd Doshu memorial service

January 11th:

Kagami Biraki – Dojo opening

February 28th:

Dojo benefit dance

February 28th:

Instructor's intensive

March 7th:

Sensei memorial service

March 28th:

Instructor's intensive

Letter From the Editor

by Mark Ehrlich

Editor, The Aiki Dojo

Another year has begun, and here at ACLA, it has begun rather auspiciously. Three of our teaching staff have appeared in Hombu Dojo's *Kagami Biraki* promotions list: **James Doi** and **Ken Watanabe** at 6th Dan, and **David Ito** at 5th Dan. For those of you who don't know, in Aikido we only test up through 4th Dan, at which point (if I have it right) they consider a person to have reached teacher status.

Promotions beyond 4th Dan, therefore, stand as an acknowledgment of one's commitment and service to the art in the years after 4th Dan. Thus these ranks stand as a testament to all of the hard work and effort that our teachers

(and Sensei's most senior students) have put in over the years, and I hope you will join me in offering them hearty congratulations.

Let's all renew our commitment to our practice this year to support their growth as teachers as well as our own development, and to make the dojo stronger.

In a similar vein, in this month's edition of *The Aiki Dojo* we examine practice and its importance from several perspectives. David Ito considers the choices we make about how

to view our training, and announces a key area of focus for the dojo curriculum in 2015. Ken Watanabe reminds us of the importance and cumulative impact regular training has on our development. James Doi offers an interesting study in the layers of reality that inform how we might, one day, develop our technique such that our opponents have no idea what we did to neutralize them. Santiago Garcia Almaraz shares some thoughts from the other side of the world on what makes for a good practice, as well as what

gets in the way our practice. And as he does, Sensei pays us a visit from the archives to examine the challenges of teaching traditional martial arts. I found these pieces thought-provoking, and I hope you will as well.



The plum symbolizes the new beginning after a harsh winter. This woodblock print is Plum Branch Before the Rising Sun by Yoshimura.

Milestones such as a new year stimulate us to look back and review

as we look forward and plan. For my part, while I feel I made some modest gains in my personal growth, I know I have so very, very far to go. This year will find me working to improve my consistency as a student, a senior, and as a person. I welcome any feedback you have to help me achieve this.

On behalf of all of us at ACLA, I wish you and yours a happy, healthy, and prosperous 2015. Let's make it a year to remember. I'll see you on the mat!

The Path of Self-Perfection

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

“To advance in Aikido beyond the basics, does not simply mean to be stronger in technique or develop one’s authority, prestige or popularity but to find one’s own self which will lead us and all others around us, at the same time, towards a fulfilling life.”

– Reverend Kensho Furuya

2014, the Year of the Horse, was wildly prosperous as predicted and 2015 is also set to be a prosperous year as well since it is the eighth year of the Chinese zodiac cycle, and the number eight is supposed to be auspicious. 2015, the Year of the Sheep, is generally supposed to bring a gentler, more harmonious, and more peaceful year than the Year of the Horse; but to reap prosperity, the horse required more control, while the sheep year requires more preparation. Furthermore, the Year of the Sheep is also Earth and predicted to be a big year in terms of turning points because it is the year set between

Fire and Metal and should yield more changes but requires more grounding. I believe that change can either be positive or negative but like all change it follows the course we’ve plotted based on the choices we’ve made.

Training in Aikido is also based on choice. The choices are mainly about our perspective and we have generally two perspectives from which to choose. We can either choose to have the outlook to train in Aikido as a *jutsu* (術) or as a *do* (道). *Jutsu* literally translates as “technique”, but in a martial arts sense we think of *jutsu* in terms of “self-protection”. The word *do* translates as “way” or “path”, and from this definition or standpoint the mindset is to train with the goal of self-perfection.

When we train for self-protection, we generally train from a physical place where our growth is generally external and based generally on what we can do to others. This level is where all students begin and at this place we focus on how strongly we can do the techniques and concern ourselves with how much strength and power we can generate. Some like to think of this place in terms of how we control ourselves to control others. This also, on a certain level, is *nage* based thinking, where we as the *nage* try to perfect our ability to triumph over the *uke*.

When we train for self-perfection, we strive toward a higher consciousness. Our goal is no longer to be the victor over the *uke* but to be the victor over ourselves. Hopefully at this point in our train-

ing, the goal of winning or throwing the person down has at least begun to diminish. Here, we learn to let go of control and give ourselves selflessly to others. At this place, we come to understand that the only true opponent is ourselves and I believe that this level is where we begin to recognize that being the *uke* is more important than being the *nage*.

In Aikido, we do not separate self-protection and self-perfection – they are two sides of the same coin. In the beginning of training, Aikido is always a martial art first. After we have perfected the physical outward techniques, we begin to journey inward and perfect the self. Self-

perfection begins with the noble act of selflessness. Every great religion, teacher, or teaching encourages us to become selfless or think beyond “I” and focus more on “We”. Selflessness is something that lives innately within all of us – even if it is buried deep down inside. In Aikido, the act of taking *ukemi* brings that selflessness out and teaches us how to express it. If we can act selflessly in the dojo then it isn’t much of a stretch to act selflessly in



our daily lives. Therefore in the dojo as we practice Aikido and volunteer ourselves as *uke* for others, we teach ourselves how to live our lives at a higher level of consciousness.

Within Aikido, the victory over ourselves begins with *ukemi*. Harmony is the highest teaching in Aikido and in order to create harmony two things must come together. The *kanji* in the word *Aikido* lead us to the secret of obtaining victory over ourselves: the word *ai* (合) means “to join” or “come together”, and *ki* (気) means “spirit” or “energy” for lack of a better English translation. From these *kanji* it appears obvious that in order to create harmony, one thing, person, spirit, or energy must join together with another. To take *ukemi* means sacrificing ourselves for others. To throw people down in victory is one thing, but to allow others to perfect themselves with our sacrifice is quite another. The selfless act of taking *ukemi* serves as the vehicle of true selflessness and thus the real path of self-perfection.

Over the years as I traveled and taught Aikido, I noticed that regardless of how complicated the technique or level of the practitioners, the movement greatly improved when I taught the students the *ukemi*. Therefore this year I would like to re-focus the lens of training in our dojo on the specifics of taking *ukemi*. By focusing on *ukemi* I hope the students and the dojo can reap the prosperity of the sheep’s harmonious and gentle nature.

Have a wonderful and prosperous 2015!

Practice, Practice, Practice

by Santiago Garcia Almaraz, Chief Instructor
Aikido Kodokai, Salamanca, Spain

Whenever students in their first years of practice ask me if I can recommend any book or video that will help them in their practice of Aikido, either to enhance their rolling or certain techniques, my answer is always the same: the best book is *practice*.

I think practice is the secret to anything in this life and especially for something like Aikido, where practice is the only way to get the techniques into our bodies by repeating them over and over, as many times as it takes. Most of our frustrations in class or about our progress in Aikido comes down to a lack of hours of practice. I think today there is too much information and many times we spend more time watching videos or reading about Aikido than actually practicing. Don't get me wrong: I'm not saying it's bad to watch videos or read about Aikido per se, but Aikido practice provides the action, movement, interaction with a partner, sweat, and feeling that all help us develop.

At this point I'd like to discuss two kinds of concepts relating to practice: the first concept would be the number of hours of actual practice or the actual time devoted to practice, and the second concept concerns the quality of the practice (that is, *Am I doing it right* and *Is it what I need*).

Let's look at the first part, the number of hours of practice: We all want to do well. I do not know anyone who likes doing things wrong, but I know people who consciously or unconsciously are lazy. That can pose a problem in Aikido when people look for excuses (albeit unwittingly) to avoid practice. Here are some of the most common cases:

Sometimes during training students start to chat with their partner about the technique, or something completely alien to the class, which leads to a mini conversation that just distracts everyone and takes time away from practice. Which brings us to the beginning – just *practice*.

Sometimes, when we enter the dojo early and get on the mat, during the 10-15 minutes before class we collect in small groups to talk or stand around, just wasting time until class begins. Whenever that happens we do not meet the golden rule in Aikido – *practice*.

When we finish the class and have time to refine certain techniques or address concerns with a partner before changing out, we should *practice*. The days that we feel lazy and have no desire to go to the dojo, so that in our head it starts to rain all kinds of excuses for not getting up from the couch, we just need to grab our bag and, yes, *practice*.



So if we look objectively at our “practice” we realize that the real time we spend actually practicing Aikido in the end seems ridiculous, yet over time all those small periods of practice can add up if we go regularly, work hard, and focus on practicing rather than not practicing, or practicing with bad or lazy habits.

On the other hand, as regards the second concept, the quality of our practice: During a daily class techniques and contents get presented to everyone but, because classes are composed of different levels of practitioners, eventually students have specific needs to grow in their Aikido, that will get corrected only by practicing. For example, there are times when the teacher may teach an attack or technique not practiced regularly as a part of the usual program and, while we want to do our best during that class, it does not mean we have to emphasize or remember these techniques in the same way as we do our *ukemi* if it is mediocre or if our *ikkyo*, *kote gaeshi*, or *suwari waza* have problems. For these fundamental, essential things, if we need improvement we should devote some time to practice the basics rather than the more advanced techniques and thereby we will slowly get better.

In the words of Sensei, make your worst technique your best technique. *Practice!*

Best wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from everyone at Aikido Kodokai!



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.





Resolutions or Resolute?

by Ken Watanabe, Iaido Chief Instructor

First of all, I would like to wish everyone a very Happy New Year. Another year has come and gone, so here we are again – a fresh start. The spirit of the New Year is to put the old year behind us and start the new one with a rejuvenated spirit. Whether it's renewed motivation to eat better, quit smoking, or come to practice more, resolving to improve ourselves seems a nice sentiment. However, we shouldn't feel satisfied with making a promise to "do better" just once a year. Like our practice, the thought of doing better should not be reserved for special occasions, but a sentiment to keep alive all year 'round.

Ito Sensei mentioned something interesting to me about New Year's resolutions: according to researchers, a person makes the same resolution an average of six and a half times before acting upon it. This means that if we only strive for improvement once a year, an average of six years will pass before we actually do anything to improve.

Training is not an annual promise to practice hard only once a year, but constantly reminding ourselves to keep up our regular training. Training in martial arts is not measured with yearly quick shots to the arm, but instead, progress in training gets measured in weeks, months, years, and decades; that is, we must be ready to be consistent and have the discipline and desire to maintain regular practice in order to see progress in the art.

Japanese martial arts like Aikido and Iaido are not designed to submit to the students' requirements but on the contrary, in Japan, the practitioners adjust to the art, thereby becoming the art. To reach this level, an annual promise to practice more will not do. Only with regular practice can we hope to refine ourselves and eventually become the art. Please remember that the founder, Ueshiba Morihei, designed Aikido training so it is impossible to practice the art, or to develop skill, by practicing alone. Aikido requires that two people must work together, selflessly, to create a good practice. This means that each one of us, as well as our fellow Aikido practitioners, must possess the proper attitude towards practice.

It's said that there may be someone who comes along whose genius may surpass O Sensei's, but there will be nobody who practiced more. If the masters that came before us only resolved to practice once a year, where would we be now? Without O Sensei's dedication to practice, where would Aikido be today? Please remember to work together and practice regularly, not only to raise our own level, but to raise the level of the dojo and our fellow students – not just once a year, but throughout it, as well.

Samurai Armor on Display at the Resnick Pavilion at LACMA

October 19, 2014 – February 1, 2015



Travel back in time and discover remarkable objects that illuminate the life, culture, and pageantry of the *samurai*, the revered and feared warriors of Japan. The Samurai Collection of Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Mueller, one of the finest and most comprehensive collections in the world, presents a treasure trove of battle gear made for high-ranking warriors and *daimyo* (provincial governors) of the 14th through 19th centuries. The exhibition illustrates the evolution

of samurai equipment through the centuries, featuring more than 140 objects of warrior regalia, with full suits of armor, helmets and face guards, weapons, horse trappings, and other battle gear.

During the centuries covered by the exhibition, warfare evolved from combat between small bands of equestrian archers to the clash of vast armies of infantry and cavalry equipped with swords, spears, and even matchlock guns. Arms and armor were needed in unprecedented quantities, and craftsmen responded with an astonishingly varied array of armor that was both functional and visually spectacular, a celebration of the warrior's prowess. Even after 1615, when the Tokugawa military dictatorship brought an end to battle, samurai families continued to commission splendid arms and armor for ceremonial purposes. Because the social rank, income, and prestige of a samurai family were strictly determined by the battlefield valor of their ancestors, armor became ever more sumptuous as the embodiment of an elite warrior family's heritage.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue with essays by some of the leading Japanese samurai armor experts.

General admission tickets go on sale now!

<http://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/samurai-japanese-armor-ann-and-gabriel-barbier-mueller-collection>



Join Us In Celebrating the Dojo



**A Dance Benefit for
The Furuya Foundation & the
40th Anniversary of the
Aikido Center of Los Angeles**



www.aikidocenterla.com

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28th, 2015

Nishi Hongwanji Kaikan

815 East First Street, Little Tokyo, Los Angeles

Doors Open: 7:00pm

Dance: 8:00pm - 11:30pm

*Opportunity
Drawings*

*Door
Prizes*

Music Performed By

Kokoro
Music with Soul

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

Carol Tanita / cmtanita@mail.com / 626.281.8894

Reserved Table of 10: \$400

Individual Tickets: \$35.00/person

**After Feb. 20: \$50 / Person & at the Door*

Cash Bar

Complimentary Light

Appetizers

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EIN# 20-0026129

RSVP FORM/CUT & RETURN BY FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2015

Make checks payable to: Furuya Foundation

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

Contact Name: _____ **Required: Email for Confirmation:** _____

By Feb. 20, 2015: _____ TABLE(s) of Ten @ \$400.00 \$ _____

_____ Individual Ticket @ \$35.00/person \$ _____

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ACLA / The Furuya Foundation

c/o Carol Tanita

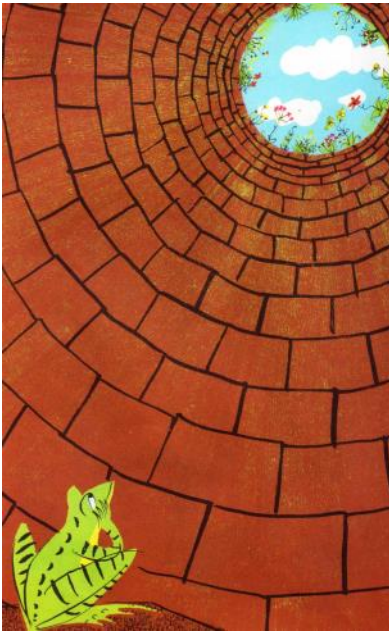
426 Kingsford St.

Monterey Park, CA 91754

**After February 21, 2015
Individual Tickets At
The Door: \$50 /Person*

**Table Guests: List Names in Back*

Unable to attend but would like to donate: \$ _____



The Frog in the Well

by James Doi, Aikido 6th Dan, Iaido 4th Dan

Sensei got mad at us one day and told the parable of the frog in the well. A frog in a well looks up and sees the well mouth opening and thinks that the small section of sky is all there is to it. More on this later, but for now, consider the proposition that reality amounts to a series of boxes within boxes, like Russian *matryoshka* dolls.

We live life with rules within a particular system that is a subset of another system with its own set of rules. As individuals we need to eat, sleep, find shelter, etc. – all things to survive physically. As members of a family, we all have, in addition to our survival needs as individuals, responsibilities and benefits of family. As citizens of a community, we function within the laws and economy of a country. If things end up going well, we can function in each layer of reality and there is minimal conflict between each stratum.

In my job, I investigate mechanical and structural failures of machines and their parts. This is called failure analysis, a sort of industrial CSI. In this plan of investigation, first a failure gets examined and analyzed at the materials level. At this level, materials (such as plastics or metals) get identified and compared to “good” parts in order to determine a cause of failure. If no materials related cause can be determined, the “next” level of a part’s function and process gets investigated. If no answers come from this level of investigation, possible design flaws are sought. The

“root” cause of a failure can be at any layer of “reality” in which the part exists.

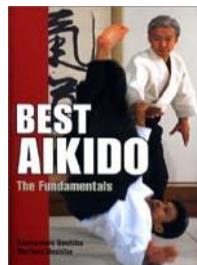
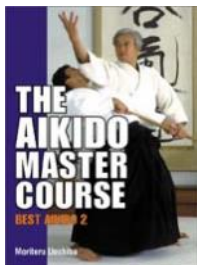
Actions at a higher level are projected to the lower levels. While actions at a high level may make sense, the projected higher-level actions as viewed at lower levels seem random with no reason. This type of investigation process can be described as “thinking outside of the box”. This is also called “looking at the big picture” in order to determine the root cause of a failure. Martial arts techniques can be analyzed using this multilayer reality model.

Physical activities all have at least two levels of operation. The most basic level relies on strength, speed, and simple coordination. The next, more sophisticated, level uses these things, but also uses timing, spacing, and intuition. An even higher level determines the purpose of the technique: art, martial art, or sports. If this higher level is sports, then all the physical activities become athletic and the purpose becomes to win games. If the higher level is art, the physical activities are called dance. If the higher purpose is to defeat an enemy the activity becomes martial arts.

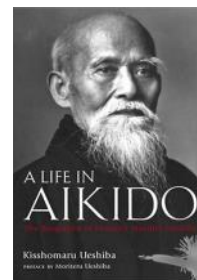
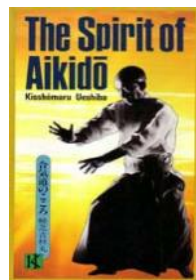
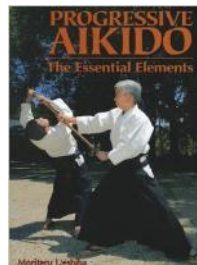
An example of this is the relationship of tactics and strategy. Strategy is composed of the plans and actions for winning a war. Tactics are the specific actions and procedures to implement an overall strategy. Wars are won with good strategies and well-executed tactics. The “higher level” system – strategy – is more important than tactics, since it is possible to win battles (tactics) and still lose the war.

Because of the primal nature of martial arts, martial techniques tend to be as simple as possible (strength and speed count the most). However, martial techniques that utilize elements at a more complex level (such as Aikido) are more difficult to perform, but are more difficult to neutralize or counter. The criterion for good Aikido isn’t when opponents feel that they were overpowered or outmaneuvered, it is when they have no idea how they were pinned or thrown. In other words, the small section of sky that the frog sees is the small box within the larger box of the entire sky that is visible from the top of the well.

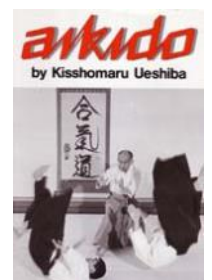
Recommended Readings:



by Ueshiba Moriteru



by Ueshiba Kisshomaru



A Study in Black and White

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

Wishing you all a very Happy New Year and the very best of good health and happiness.

If you want to learn, the teachings are always there: I always feel down in the dumps during the holidays mostly because I miss my dear late parents, I suppose. I am not a good priest who can completely detach himself from worldly affairs, I guess. This is also the time I analyze my teaching methods, count all my mistakes and failings of the past year, desperately search for any meager successes, and create a hopefully “better” program for the coming new year, so I always ask very tough and hard questions of myself.

Aikido, as well as martial arts in general, is changing so much.

For me, the future looks bleak, only because I think my age and methods have begun dying away as a new brand of Aikido comes to the fore. Thankfully, I feel glad I won't be here when it becomes fully accepted! My only comment is the trend has led to less virtue and depth in the art for more sociability, superficiality, and user friendliness. Of course, today, we all worship the “god of fast and easy” and his mistress, “instant gratification”.

I determined this year to re-institute sword training. But, of course, it always seems too difficult. The class peters out in a month or two and we cancel it. I have done this for a number of years now. This year I felt more determined and, with the help of my well-trained assistants, we have made some progress with a few students who have managed to stick it out. But still, *bokken* and *jo* are very difficult to master because they require commitment and perseverance. Senior students make so many excuses why they can't practice it while they are telling me they desperately want to practice it. All meaningless gibberish to me from the standpoint of training itself: If you really want to do it, you will make time to do it. Crying about having your cake and eating it too does no one any good. Simply, people today do not have the inner drive and energy and self-esteem to pursue an art like Aikido in today's busy, overly cluttered, overly chaotic, frenetic world.

Shall I conform and make the instruction more easy? Let up on the pace? Teach a more superficial style of Aikido? Make it more user friendly? Give it more schmooze? Make it feel more huggy and kissy? What to do?

Bokken as well, I wonder how to make it more accessible to you, my students. But its teachings are very black and white and there is really no room to fudge or cheat in the techniques; it is just a matter of buckling down and learning it. This really discourages me because students today seem more impatient than ever before and really do not have the time to learn it properly as much as they

desire *bokken* training. . . .

Yesterday, the day before New Year's, I went with my student to have a new *saya* made for his sword. I was sitting there talking with my friend who has been making *saya* for the last 30 years now. He was looking at my student's sword and recognized his work, both the old *saya* and the *tsuka*, or handle.

Looking at the handle, he said, “I don't do this kind of work anymore.” Surprised, I said, “What do you mean?” I remember how long it took for him to catch the gentle center taper of the handle.

He replied, “Nowadays, all the Iaido guys who do *tameshigiri* complain that the handle breaks too easily, so I make it thicker and straighter now.”



Nakamura Taizaburo performs tameshigiri

I had to laugh to myself and suddenly realized that there is NO compromise in the way sword must be taught. As I teach my students over and over and over again, most people put too much power in the arms and hands and the power is never projected to the *monouchi* (or the upper, cutting portion of the blade). My students always feel frustrated to catch this point. When I heard my friend's comment, I realized that these people he mentioned are not cutting properly so of course all of the impact of the blade gets focused in the hands, not the blade itself. This is what causes the handle to crack and break so easily. If you cut properly, the handle will never break. In addition,

this tapered style of handle became popular in the late 16th Century at a time of fierce battles and proved itself over and over again as the superior grip.

There is no way to compromise sword training. It is either right or wrong. It is black and white. I think this was a sign from my long-gone teachers and it came right at the last day of the year at a time when I felt most discouraged! It must be a sign I think! I will continue as I have before in my teaching, whether it is outdated or not, in or out, popular or hated, accepted or not accepted. It was good enough for my teachers, and still good enough for me; I don't know why it is not good enough for people today. I teach to pass on the teachings of my teachers and hopefully preserve this art for your generation. I do not teach to gather numbers of students, be popular, personally profit from it, or enhance my personal image. Whether students want to learn for me or not, is purely their choice, not mine, and I should not be so crass or greedy enough to try to sway or attract them to me or my way of thinking. As long I can focus on this, I will be fine. . . .

This will be a great and Happy New Year!

Editor's Note: Sensei originally published this article, in slightly different form, to his daily message board on January 1, 2003.

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

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*

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

Saturdays

9:30-10:30 AM Open

10:45-11:45 AM Open

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

8:00-9:00 AM

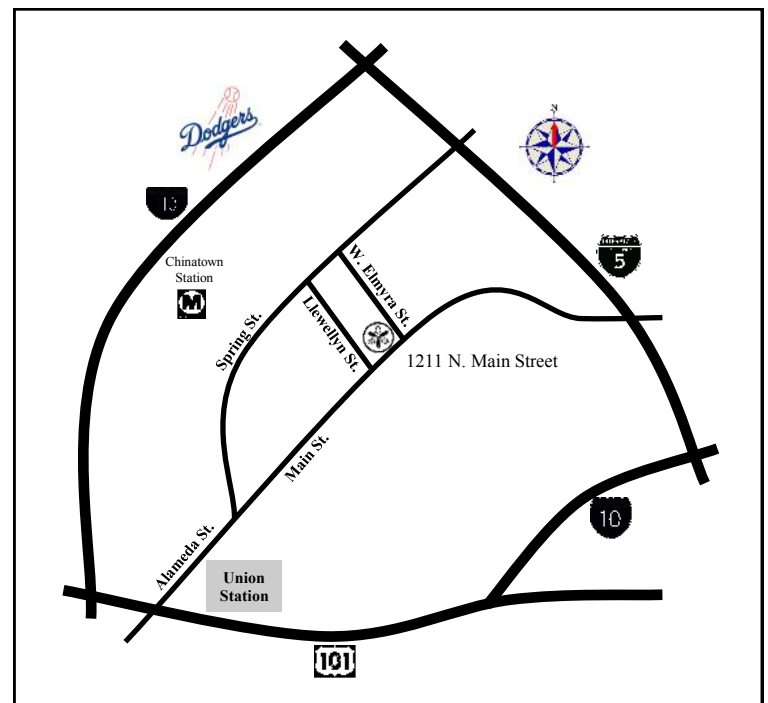
Sundays

7:45-8:45 AM

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM

No weekend classes on the last weekend of the month.



We are directly affiliated with:

AIKIDO WORLD HEADQUARTERS

公益財団法人 合気会

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.



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The Aiki Dojo
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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.

Publisher: David Ito
Editor-in-Chief: Mark Ehrlich



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.