



# 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

June 2012

Volume XXXI Number 6

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#### Letter From the Editor

by Mark Ehrlich  
Editor, The Aiki Dojo

One of the things I enjoy about our community here at ACLA is catching our members as they make transitions. Maybe they suddenly have a breakthrough in their technique, or maybe they achieve a significant moment in their lives which we in the dojo get to share in some way. Two of our students, for example, have just graduated from high school and will head off to college in the Fall, and I know we share their families' pride and best wishes for success on such an auspicious occasion. We have several students preparing to test for their next rank as well; the dojo fairly hums with intensity as they squeeze in extra practice between classes. Of course, we also have people taking time off to relax and enjoy a summer vacation. June does mark the beginning of the season of transitions in the world, and thus for the dojo as well.

One transition we want to avoid, however, would be the one wherein we let preoccupations get in the way of our precepts in the dojo. We all have lots going on in life, and while it can become very easy to get caught up in an egotistical perspective ("It's all about me."), our training by nature encourages us to put down that old saw to try new tools and stretch ourselves into new, more fruitful ways of being. And while it pleases me to say that for much of the year our students apply them-

selves rigorously to this practice, I know that for all us – I include myself here – can get a little lazy when the lazy days of summer come. That's the trap, I think: the time when we feel most inclined to relax our vigilance actually marks the crucial moment to apply the lessons we've learned and thus grow the most.

Consider this issue, then, a clarion call to keep focused on what really matters in your training so as to benefit from what really matters in your life. What does it mean to grow as a student – do you focus on rank or on responsibility? What does it mean to practice mindfully – do you constantly work to stretch beyond your comfort zone, or do you approach each technique the way you want? Have you begun to take



Mt. Fuji in the summertime

things at face value, or do you strive to understand their significance? Our contributors this month pose many questions like these, and I urge you to read carefully and think deeply on what they have to say. Your practice, and your personal development, will benefit.

Best wishes to all our test candidates, our graduates, and everyone else whose life has achieved a milestone recently. If you plan to go on holiday, please drop us a note with your travel dates so we don't worry about not seeing you, and thank you for keeping your dues current. Your continuous support helps us keep Sensei's dream alive to have a clean, comfortable place where students can train, seven days a week. Thanks for all you do. Until next time, I hope to see you on the mat!

### Upcoming Events

**June 30th:**  
Instructor's intensive

**July 4th:**  
Dojo closed  
Independence Day

**July 28th:**  
Instructor's intensive

**August 25th:**  
Instructor's intensive

**September 3rd:**  
Dojo Closed  
Labor Day

**September 29th:**  
Instructor's intensive



### Seeing and Training

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

The other day I heard that two senior students were discussing who was more senior and who should go first during class and it made me think of this haiku by Matsuo Basho.

*Yoku mireba  
nazuna hana saku  
kakine kana*

When I look carefully –  
*nazuna* flower is blooming  
beneath the hedge!

This poem is about being able to see the quality of things as they are in their natural state without judgment or pretense. According to Buddhist scholar Robert Aitken, “The *nazuna*, a small plant called shepherd’s purse in English, bears tiny white flowers with four petals that even Basho might be tempted to pass by but does not. Seeing the *nazuna* flowers evokes an ‘Ah!’ of appreciation for the living things in themselves. I think it is possible to show how Basho is teaching us how the denial of the *nazuna* is ‘self conceit, self delusion, and unshamed arrogance.’” D. T. Suzuki also commented about this haiku by stating that, “Once off human standards which are valid only on the plane of relativity, the *nazuna* weeds match

well with the peonies, roses, dahlias and chrysanthemums.” Aitken summed it up by saying, “Projecting relative standards upon the *nazuna* is projecting conceit and arrogance.”

The two students I mentioned earlier really don’t understand the meaning of training and thus the true meaning of what it means to be senior students. The two of them were more concerned with their egos and who is superior rather than setting good examples for their juniors. As black belts and seniors their job is not to bully all the other students because they outrank them. Rather, their job is to illuminate the way and teach their juniors how to be better students. Tea ceremony master Sen Soshitsu XV said, “The Way is never exclusive. It is open to all to follow, but those who set out upon the path perforce need the help of those who have passed that way before.”

The notion of “being” higher or lower is purely a westernized concept. In Japan, it is understood that no two people are ever of the same position in life and therefore they go almost overboard showing the other person respect. What these two students don’t understand is that we are not given a rank or a title in order to define our status but to define the level of our decorum and responsibility. Higher rank or status in life brings more responsibility and thus the realization that the higher we go, the lower we must bow our head.

The Japanese admire the virtues of modesty and restraint above all others. Most of us think we are judged by how strong our technique is on the mat or how hard we throw someone down, but that is a skill that anyone can acquire. What is of greater importance is our inner spirit. Exceptional teachers look at how we conduct ourselves not only on the mat but off the mat as well. Our conduct speaks volumes about our TRUE level.

Don’t worry about who is senior or who is junior because it is an illusion and one that only leads us astray. When we make relative comparisons, we run the risk of missing the *nazuna* flower hidden in the bush and miss the opportunity to help someone change their life. Don’t make it about you – see the *nazuna* and make it about other people! Focus more on helping other people to figure out what they need to get to their next level – this is Aikido. If you do this, I guarantee that you will earn their respect.

Respect is never given and can never be taken; it must be earned. People who try to take respect are easily seen through, and likewise people who work hard for the benefit of others will easily earn respect. Being a good senior means setting the example for everyone around us, juniors and seniors alike. Aikido training is akin to polishing a mirror to our inner self where the more we train the more clarity we observe. Therefore as a senior, our only job is to reflect back on others a better version of themselves, otherwise known as leading by example. Remember the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. If we show others respect, we will garner respect. To this end, bowing our head and showing respect for others is the only way to look up and truly see ourselves. When we can truly bow our head, a weed will no longer be a weed but a breathtaking flower and such will be our life. It is said that training begins and ends with respect; therefore, shifting our perspective like this will change our life forever and this is the true meaning of training.



## Exploring the Discomfort Zone

by Gary Myers, Iaido Chief Instructor

I am amazed at our capacity to adapt to change when it is a matter of survival, but surprised at our resistance to change when we get too comfortable. It is natural to want to maintain the status quo when things seem to be going well, but status quo is an illusion that we construct for ourselves. Over time little remains static, because the laws of nature dictate that things are either in a state of growth or entropy. Remaining in our comfort zones by being either unaware of or resistant to changes keeps us from developing ourselves more fully.

Recently I had the opportunity to speak before the Pacific Asia Museum docents on the evolution of Japanese swords and armor. It was a challenging speech to do for several reasons. First, a vast amount of information had to be condensed into an hour's presentation. Second, my audience, the docents, had only a passing interest in the weapons of warfare. Third, the subject matter's terminology and nomenclature can get a bit dry and tedious for the uninitiated. The challenge was to create a presentation that provided meaningful information to the docents and also entertain them to hold their interest. Based on the number of astute questions, the minimum of closed eyelids, and the feedback, it appeared that the lecture was a success.

Over the years, I have given my share of speeches: financial product introductions, wedding toasts, art & antiques lectures, and, unfortunately, eulogies; perhaps that's why I feel at ease in front of an audience. Of course there is always the adrenaline rush and the feeling of butterflies in the stomach that accompanies speeches or any performance, but these feelings can be channeled to make the presenter's enthusiasm for the subject contagious to the audience. Sensei always seemed very relaxed in front of a crowd; he could charm them with funny anecdotes while educating them at the same time. I often think of Sensei before giving a speech.

While I feel very at ease speaking in front of a crowd, I feel uncomfortable within crowds, which is why I sometimes feel uneasy at large parties and social gatherings. For some reason, when the numbers grow to double digits, I am not in my comfort zone. I know people that are the exact opposite: they are the life of the party, socially adept in the art of conversation, but find public speaking terrifying. I had a boss at the bank that was a prime example. At social and business gatherings he could change the course of conversation or business decision to his position by the force of his personality. Yet when he got in front of an audience he would literally freeze up in fear, and was unable even to introduce himself. For a while he just avoided making speeches, and delegated them to others. But he recognized that this was a prob-

lem he had to fix, so he enrolled in a public speaking class and eventually learned to overcome his fear. He put himself in his discomfort zone to learn to be a better speaker. He faced this fear and conquered it.

We are all a bit guilty of wanting to stay in our comfort zones, but yielding to that impulse often leads to complacency. While I would not say that some Iaido students have reached the complacency stage, I would say that some are far too comfortable. There



*Sensei explaining Aikido at Higashi Hongwangji temple's Children's Day*

are certain telltale signs in the techniques that let us know if we have become too comfortable. The first sign is at *reito*; bowing to the sword, if your head dips below the level of your back, you have become too comfortable and unaware. If at the beginning, middle, and end of the technique your focus is not on your opponent, you are too comfortable. If your mind is more concerned about what your body is doing, as opposed to what the sword's *monouchi* is doing, too comfortable. These are just a few of the signs that reveal the state of our mind's focus and awareness. Our focus must change as we progress: it goes from focusing on

the basic body movement, then out to the sword, then to our opponent, then even beyond. The more we extend our focus, the more focused we have to be and the more we remove ourselves from our comfort zone.

In the animal kingdom, there are the hunters and the hunted; sometimes they are one and the same. The hunted, at least those who survive, always appear wary and not quite comfortable. As they are out foraging for food, they have to place themselves in uncomfortable situations in order to survive. We notice a wariness and cautiousness in their movement. They are very vigilant; some animals will even post lookouts to warn the others of impending danger. This caution puts all their senses on alert and makes them very aware of what is happening about them.

There is a hawk that likes to take a bath in a water feature in our backyard. This bird, obviously classified as a hunter, is one of the most cautious creatures I have ever seen. It will take up to 30 minutes for the hawk to feel comfortable enough to take its bath: first it perches on the roof of the house, then it flies to a nearby tree, from the tree to a rock, then the rock to the water, and then eventually it takes its bath. At each stage it assesses the situation, evaluates the danger, then moves closer if it feels safe to do so. If during that time it senses something is wrong, either an unfamiliar sound or movement, it flies away. Mind you this is one of the hunters being this cautious and to see the hawk's awareness is something to behold.

*Continued on page 6...*





Examples of budo ni risu or squirrels and grapes motif tsubas



A scroll with the same budo ni risu motif

### The Color of No Color

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

The other day a very nice sword guard fell into my hands. One reason is that no one really wanted it because the design was described as “rats crawling over vines”. Indeed, it did in a way look like funny-looking rats, so from this perspective I can see why no one wanted it. From my American mind, it does look like ugly “rats.” But from my Japanese mind, I thought it was so very nice and lucky to have! The design is, in reality, not of “rats” but of Japanese squirrels, which are playing on grape vines. This is a particularly rare and auspicious design because in Japanese this design is read as “squirrels and grape vines” or *budo ni risu*. This image, and the literal description, employs wordplay; it also can mean *budo ni ri-su* or, “Rely on your martial arts [skills].” How lucky for me! This design was especially favored by the old *samurai* for its good karma!

**Editor’s Note:** Sensei originally published this article, in slightly different form, to his daily message board on May 4, 2002.

## AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES OFFICIALLY AFFILIATED DOJOS

### INTERNATIONAL

#### Spain

**Aikido Kodokai**  
Salamanca, Spain

Chief Instructor: Santiago Garcia Almaraz  
www.kodokai.com

#### Mexico

**Veracruz Aikikai**

Veracruz, Mexico  
Chief Instructors:

Dr. Jose Roberto Magallanes Molina  
Dr. Alvaro Rodolfo Hernandez Meza  
www.veracruz-aikikai.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](http://www.aikidocenterla.com)

## The Secret *Atemi*: Hygiene

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

An *atemi* is a strike delivered to some part of the body, usually to a vital point, but in this case it is aimed directly to the opponent's nose. An *atemi* can be very effective in felling your opponent but in this case it is done in a very impolite way. Nobody wants or needs the secret *atemi*. Here are some guidelines to keep in mind as you prepare for training.

**Keep your uniform clean.** Wash your uniform after every use if you can. If you are not going to wash it immediately, spray it down with odor neutralizer and hang your uniform and/or hakama up to air dry. To kill some of the bacteria and odors that build up over time, add white vinegar to the detergent when you wash, dry in the dryer for a short while, and then hang dry outside to finish. I use one cup of vinegar per wash.

**Keep your mouth clean.** This is probably one of the biggest culprits in the dojo because it is so easy to become accustomed to our own breath. We do not hold our breath while doing Aikido so then naturally we are breathing out, and breathing out means that people will smell our breath. Be kind to your classmates and pop a breath mint, chew some gum, or brush your teeth before class.

**Keep your hands clean.** If you haven't washed your hands, or washed them incorrectly, then everything you have recently come into contact with remains on them. Bacteria feed on dead skin cells and sweat, breeding more bacteria. The contaminants on your hands can cause pneumonia, staph, UTI, and numerous other infections. Washing hands with soap and hot water for at least 10 seconds can greatly reduce the amount of bacteria on your hands. It's a good idea to wash your hands or use a hand sanitizer before you leave for home.

**Keep your fingernails and toenails trimmed.** Millions of fungus, yeast, and bacteria live under your nails and are a virtual diary of the things you have touched or come into contact with in

the past. There is a lot of grabbing and movement in Aikido that makes us susceptible to scratches that can break the skin and put our training partners at risk for diseases (see above). Regularly trimming your nails will allow you to cut off the area of the nail that might be harboring these germs and keep them from breaking off upon contact. If you really want to be nice, run an emery board across your nails after trimming them to make sure they are dull.



**Keep your body clean.** As a general rule of common courtesy, students should take a shower every day, and especially after practice. This hopefully does not come as a shock. For all practical purposes, please maintain the highest personal grooming habits. This is not my rule: I am sure you've heard it from family and teachers thousands of times.

**Keep your feet clean.** Aikido is done with bare feet so it comes as no surprise that everyone must practice good foot hygiene. Your feet come into contact with all the nastiest germs and places you can think of and it is no wonder that they are a breeding ground for bacteria. Restrooms, foot fungus, and a myriad of other hazards await your feet at every turn. Therefore you must make sure to keep your feet as clean as possible before stepping on the mat for practice. The bacteria from your feet get rubbed off on the mats and end up on some unfortunate person's hands, feet, or face. The first thing I do when I get home from practice is wash my feet. If you wanted to be safe, I recommend that you wipe your feet down with an antibacterial wipe as soon as possible after training.

**Keep your sweat to yourself.** It is bad manners to wipe the sweat off your face with your sleeve, especially since your sleeve is the place where people will grab you. The polite thing to do is to use a hand towel, called a *tenugui* or *hachimaki* in Japanese, to wipe the sweat off your face. In Japan it can be very humid and Japanese people are very accustomed to carrying a *tenugui* with them to use in this way.



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

**Exploring the Discomfort Zone** *continued from page 3...*

Samurai were typically very cautious individuals. There is an old saying that a samurai should eat fast and go to the bathroom fast, because those acts were considered periods of vulnerability. It is obvious that these feelings carried over from the animal kingdom. Miyamoto Musashi was often described as being unkempt looking, due to his hair being always disheveled and his propensity not to take a bath. (He was even more cautious than the hawk.) He felt that bathing was also a period of vulnerability in which he could easily be attacked.

The period of time in which Musashi lived was a time of great unrest. The unification of Japan eliminated large-scale battles, but dangers were still very prevalent. There was a large population of *ronin*, masterless samurai, due to the elimination of large-scale wars and the mandated limitations on each *daimyo*'s garrison. These masterless samurai created problems for the Tokugawa regime. *Ronin* would often band together, forming groups that were called *kabukimono*, literally "things that swagger". They would wear extremely long swords, have fancy hairdos and wear extravagant clothing of the Momoyama period. One of the ways they would test their swordsmanship would be to lie in wait at crossroads and cut down the first unsuspecting person to approach. These were called *tsuji giri*, or "crossing kills". The *kabukimono* situation got so bad that in 1645, the same year Mushashi died, the shogunate mandated that swords be shortened to a standard length, instituted as a hair style the shaving of the pate and the topknot for samurai, and outlawed large square *tsuba* for swords. The reason for outlawing the square *tsuba* was that the *kabukimono* used them as a step to go over walls to rob residences. Therefore, it is safe to say that back then all had to be on their guard when traveling out in public. Maintaining one's skill with a sword was important not only for physical survival but also economic survival, because that skill might provide future employment. This is why so many dojos



*Miyamoto Musashi was even more cautious than a hawk.*

were established and why *musha-shugyo* sword pilgrimages increased. Of course we don't have to worry about *tsuji giri* in this day and age. However, there are plenty of other things that require our diligence and vigilance.

In Iaido, we must project *zanshin* in all our actions. Although *zanshin* has been mentioned in other articles, it bears repeating because it is such an important concept in Japanese martial arts. It literally means "remaining mind". This is a difficult concept to convey through words, but it essentially is a state of sustained mental awareness. We often emphasize *zanshin* after the final cut in Iaido or after a throw in Aikido, but this is to remind us that we must maintain our awareness even after the main action. We must be prepared for what may come next. However, *zanshin* is projected before, during, and after the technique. It is the awareness of our surroundings, our situation, and our relationship with our opponent; this awareness is projected from our true spirit, feeling, and attitude to initiate the action through to its conclusion. It is not posturing or glaring or some affectation, but generated from our true spirit and demonstrated in our actions. *Zanshin* helps us cut through the "I" in our techniques.

When we become too comfortable we lose the ability to project *zanshin*, and we begin to lose focus. Concentrated focus is hard to sustain over a long period of time and can feel very mentally exhausting. Therefore practice should not only test our physical ability it also requires our mental acuity. It requires practice to maintain and hone our focus to an even greater degree. Being too comfortable allows the conscious mind to pull us away from our focus. Through practice we develop the power of *zanshin*. Sensei would often say that we do not perfectly understand the technique until we have perfectly executed it, and we cannot do the techniques perfectly without doing *zanshin*.

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Published by Aikido Center of Los Angeles  
1211 N. Main Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012  
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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



## Acquiring Wisdom

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

Despite the great advancements we have made today, it seems we are still not at ease about our lives, we have not achieved peace of mind, and we never know what tomorrow holds for us. In martial arts and in the popular culture of movies and mass media, we have become so obsessed with physical power and prowess. What we enjoy today is not much different than what the later Romans enjoyed in the bloody gladiatorial fights centuries ago. Can we not control our inherent blood-thirstiness? We idolize physical power and no-holds barred fighting and as long as it gets the job done, who cares about anything else? As much as we seek out more realism in martial arts, we are so much less discerning when it comes to special effects, virtually “real” fighting and actual fighting techniques. The more violent it appears and the more destructive it seems, the more we like it.

Perhaps it is our obsession with fantasy, or perhaps we love too much the appearance of violent destruction of “anything that gets in our way”. Either way it indicates to me some kind of imbalance – either, I suppose, in our perceptions, or values, or understanding of the world at large. . . .

We know, more than ever before, the real experience of violence and the dear consequences of violence, and yet we seek out more violence.

What does this mean?

Is this a failure of wisdom on our part?

Does this suggest our lack of or need for spiritual depth in our lives?

Or does this result from the general drive towards greater materialism so apparent in our modern world today?

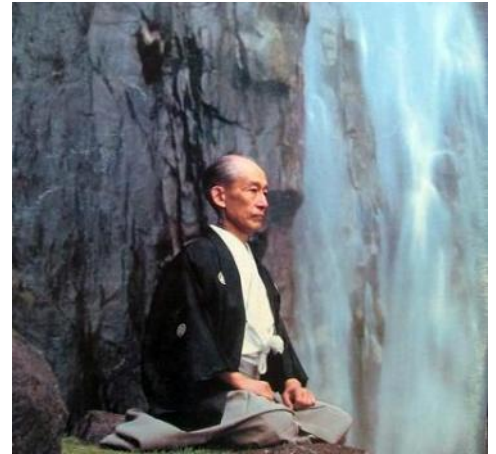
So many people come to me for spiritual guidance, but there are equal numbers who want to fight and kill. . . . I am sorry I don’t have the answers, I pose these questions as they are constantly in my own mind. . . . Ultimately, a teacher must guide his students towards greater fulfillment in life. Is it really simply a matter of strength or skill? Is that all it takes, you think, to fulfill yourself through Aikido? Do you think this is the goal of Aikido? A fulfilled life can only be achieved through wisdom – not a word I hear very often nowadays. Maybe this lack of awareness and appreciation of wisdom bothers me the most.

Teaching students over many decades, I have come to believe that “acquiring wisdom” (to borrow an ancient Chinese term) must be the path and direction of our practice and our lives. I see that each person is not physically equal, and I see that each person is not materially equal. Despite inequalities or differences in social position, education, destiny, and plain good luck, each individual to me has an equal opportunity to gain the wisdom to bring her own individual life and being to great fulfillment through Aikido practice. I believe this; at least, it is my goal and what I hope to provide my students.

For some, it is simply, “I take the money and run,” and for others, it is, “As long as they are happy what does it matter?” I am not a merchant who will smile at you just because you are buying something in my store, and I am not a muse on a lonely island who amuses you for the moment and turns into a horrible monster later to kill you as taught in old Greek mythology; at least this is what always comes to my mind. Teachers must seriously think about their duties and responsibilities as teachers of Aikido. Students too, even more, must think about what makes a good student. But being a good teacher and a good student is not all it takes. Without the sincere spiritual connection, without the heart-to-heart communication, without the same aspiration towards understanding what Aikido is all about, nothing will be gained at all.

Violence is a myth, not a reality, because violence is born out of ignorance. Hopefully, ignorance is not man’s destiny on this earth. . . .

**Editor’s Note:** Sensei originally posted this article, in slightly different form, to his daily message board on May 7, 2002.



*Nidai Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba*

# 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

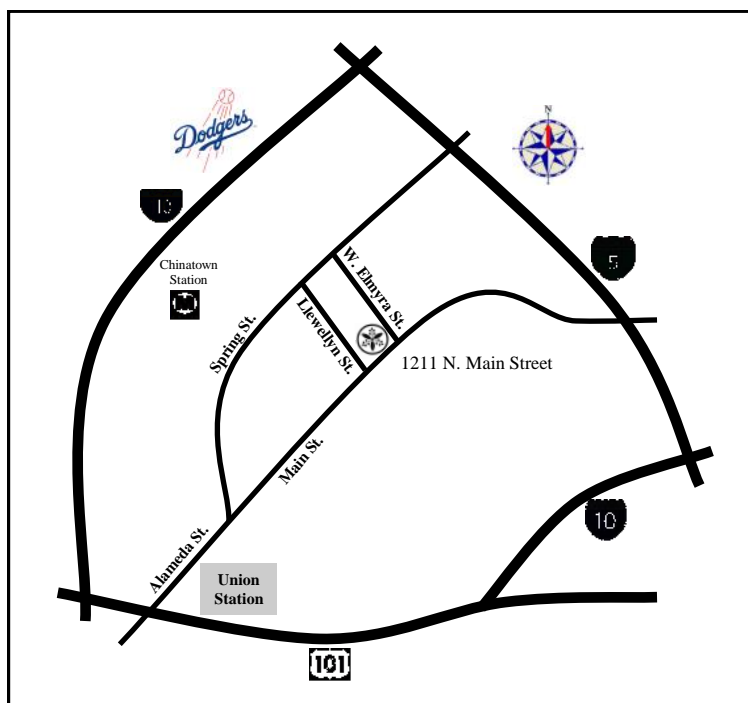
## Sundays

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.



### 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.



### Finding Our Dojo

We are located at

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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.