

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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Reverend Kensho Furuya
1948-2007

Letter From the Editor

by Mark Ehrlich
Editor, The Aiki Dojo

This month marks the eighth anniversary of the passing of the founder of ACLA and The Furuya Foundation, Reverend Kensho Furuya, so most of this issue of *The Aiki Dojo* contains the memories of some of his students, as well as some of his words beyond the customary article we unearth from our dojo archives.

For those of us lucky enough to have trained under him, Sensei looms large in our memories even all these years later. As happens often when the teacher dies, many have fallen away by choice or circumstance. Some have decided to try and seek their fortune as teachers elsewhere, whether on their own or under a new teacher. While I have to say that I think such an undertaking can bear some worthwhile fruit, I've yet to see it do so, at least in our case. Nonetheless, such transi-

tions and risk taking seems inherent to the process of personal growth.

My own memories of Sensei have become muddled with the collective sense of him we who remain at ACLA all have: stories of him as father figure, relentless disciplinarian, consummate impresario and cultural ambassador, and martial artist *par excellence* fill these pages and our recollections. For me, I will simply say that Sensei's life and work gave me a glimpse at mastery, at what it meant to pursue an art whole-heartedly, and at the lonely sacrifice such mastery entailed. I found him kind and uncompromising, and that spirit informs everything we do in the dojo and at the foundation, as best we can.

Please think of Sensei a little this month, and send some thanks his way for making our school possible. For those who never met him, learn from this issue; for those who knew him, recall the gift he gave you, its gentle strength, its humble brilliance.

Upcoming Events

March 7th:

Sensei memorial service

March 28th:

Instructor's intensive

April 24-26th:

O Sensei Memorial Seminar

April 26th:

O Sensei memorial service

May 25th:

Memorial Day: Closed

May 30th:

Instructor's intensive

“Master yourself, not the technique – ‘self’ is the source of all error. With self-mastery comes mastery of the technique.” – Reverend Kensho Furuya

Hidden Learning

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

In olden times, the students of the martial arts were educated in a very different way than they are today. Historically, warriors were expected to become well-rounded people, and their martial training amounted to but one aspect of their total education. In addition to the military arts, they learned about art, spirituality, and other worldly aspects of life – ideally to make them better equipped to command as well as to fight. Sensei often talked about this balance as the “secret” teaching because the student came in for one thing and ended up getting quite another education in the process. He wrote about this balance as a “hidden” teaching in his Daily Message on September 26, 2003:



If we study the Yagyū sword guards deeply, we understand that the war baton (signifying battle or warfare) always got paired with the hora or conch shell (large conch shells were made into horns used by mountain priests and those who practiced ascetics). Paired together, the design refers to the deep connection of military arts and spiritual discipline. In this piece

the conch shell is missing, but those initiated into the Yagyū teachings understand that the shell is supposed to be there – thus only “hidden” or implied. An uninitiated person would only see the design alluding to warfare; the Yagyū student would understand that this design also has deep connections to spiritual training, represented by the conch shell horn which inevitably belongs with the baton.

We find expressions of this idea of a balanced warrior outside of Japanese culture as well, such as in Greek mythology. Ancient Greece expected its warriors to become great people as well as fierce fighters. Their training balanced what Greeks called their bestial side and their intellectual side; we see an excellent instance of this expectation in the archetype of the famous teacher Chiron the centaur, half beast and half man, who taught many of the Greek heroes including Jason, Hercules, Aeneas, and Ajax. One of the most famous accounts of this type of warrior’s education tells of Achilles’ journey as a young child to Mount Pelion to learn from Chiron: his education tempered the values of warfare (like wrestling, sword fighting, and archery) with the softer pursuits of the humanities (like poetry, art, music, medicine, and philosophy).



Baron Jean-Baptiste Regnault’s The Education of Achilles by the Centaur Chiron, currently part of the collection at the Louvre

O Sensei referred to this balance between warfare and the arts as *satsujinken katsujinken*; today this saying often gets translated lit-

erally as “the sword that takes life and the sword that preserves life”. However, this concept, like most Japanese concepts used for training, is not meant for us to take literally. In order to understand it, one must put in the time contemplating it through training. The swords O Sensei invokes amounts to nothing more nor less than our own selves; thus, we can choose to destroy humanity or uplift it. We alone have this power and therefore each of us must choose how we wish to use it. However, in order to have this awakening, we need to understand something more than harming others. Our education must therefore strike some balance between the martial and the creative arts. Only then can we understand through our training what Voltaire meant when he wrote, “With great power comes great responsibility.”

Today, as I look back on my training under Sensei I can distinctly see that I got a warrior’s education. When I started training under Sensei as a teenager, I only came in wanting to learn how to fight. My delusions to the contrary, I knew absolutely nothing about life or the world. At the time, I also lacked any knowledge about Japanese culture to the point that I didn’t even know how to use chopsticks. The 17 years I studied with Sensei at the time felt like a harsh prison sentence; but looking back I now see that time with much different eyes. I understand why Sensei dealt with me so strictly and perhaps why he treated me the way he did. He understood that to change the tide of my life I needed structure, discipline, and hard training. This type of cultivation proved necessary for my growth and helped to awaken the real me.

During my time at the dojo, in addition to Aikido, I had exposure to different aspects of Japanese culture like art, music, poetry, and medicine. Sensei became like a “tough love” foster parent to many of us. He saw his job as not to be our friend but our teacher. Although I understand today how it pained him to scold us, he did so time and again for our own good. His approach helped develop us into adults and prepared us to grow the next generation of Aikido.

Sensei stands as the single most influential person in my life to date. So much of what I do and how I act today I can directly trace back to his instruction. Even when I undertook to take up the study of acupuncture, I learned soon after starting that Sensei studied it as well with Trogawa Rinpoche.

A truism in teaching holds that students can’t be taught, but they can learn. To grow, however, they need the right environment coupled with the right motivation. Sensei pushed me to become the best me that I can and I realize that the training he gave me was a true warrior’s

education. I would not be the person that I am today without the training I received from him.



Moment of Peace

by Maria Murakawa, Aikido 3rd Dan

Like all of us, Sensei had his faults as a human being. But once he got on the mat and taught, his Aikido was, in a word, pure. His single-minded devotion to the art became apparent in every movement he made to show the technique. It amazed us to see Sensei throw with such ease, speed, and economy of movement, despite his size. Just by watching him throw, I could believe that Aikido had become a part of him, and an inherent extension of his body.

I remember being in class while he demonstrated and the room seemed so quiet as everyone watched him execute a technique; or perhaps he would, in one of his talkative moments, describe some anecdote from Japanese *samurai* history to in-

spire us to go further in our training. In those times I remember, that no matter how busy my day had been, whatever anxieties I had before stepping on the mat would dissipate, and I would feel a sense of peace.

I don't think in those days a lot of us students would describe our interactions with Sensei as peaceful: he was incredibly strict, demanded a lot from his students, and definitely permeated the dojo and the Little Tokyo community as an authoritarian presence. But in those moments of teaching I believe Sensei was truly in his element. It seemed to me as if everything he had lived and struggled for was put into building this dojo, and we had the good luck to witness, during each class he taught, the fruit of his labors. Every time he threw it looked as natural as simply lifting a glass to drink, and we all watched in amazement as his *uke* went sailing across the room.

Sitting *seiza* with my fellow students, as we watched Sensei demonstrate, I think we all took it for granted that he would always be there, and we would always be witness to such purity in Aikido. Now I look back with gratitude that I had those moments of study with Sensei. I think of how lucky I was to have seen him teach Aikido, and wish I would have had more time with him as his student.



“To do martial arts does not mean you become invulnerable, immortal, or acquire super powers. It means you live correctly and justly according to your beliefs and ideals.” – Reverend Kensho Furuya



What You Need In Life:

To prove yourself to others, you may need a nice car, fancy clothes, rank, power, prestige, and money to flash around.

To prove yourself to yourself, to family, and those who love you, you only need an open heart and a little bit of sincerity.

To prove yourself to God, you need nothing at all.

Editor's note: Sensei originally published this article, in slightly different form, to his daily message board on July 9, 2005.



A Tradition of Progress

by Ken Watanabe, Iaido Chief Instructor

To call my teacher, Kensho Furuya Sensei, a traditionalist would be an understatement. Everything from his method of teaching martial arts, to his design of the dojo, was traditional. The way he interacted with students and the way he required his students to conduct themselves was traditionally Japanese. He passed the art from his teachers to us in pure and unadulterated way, devoid of personal touches or idiosyncrasies. Yet as traditional as my teacher was, he always kept abreast of the latest developments in the martial arts world and adapted our training accordingly. In a way, Sensei's legacy embodies both traditional and progressive approaches.

For Sensei, tradition meant emphasizing the basics. The same boring, basic techniques he practiced every single class when he was training in both Aikido and sword were the very same techniques we practiced. Yet, at the same time, Sensei made sure that our training wasn't rote or mindless, but tried to instill into us this attitude that to practice and master the basics in an alert and thoughtful manner is the way to transcend them. To my teacher, martial arts tradition meant more than just adhering to the past fanatically; it meant keeping its wisdom and allowing the art to personalize itself to us naturally, while at the same time retaining what makes Aikido recognizable as . . . well, Aikido.

In fact, the traditional martial art we practice, Aikido, works much the same way: while a relatively new and modern martial art with roots in very old philosophies, Aikido nonetheless doesn't directly copy these old techniques and philosophies. O Sensei, after mastering several systems of traditional sword, spear, and *jujutsu* schools created, out of his genius along with superhuman amounts of training, what we now practice as Aikido. O Sensei kept these very old traditions and ways of thinking about martial arts and adapted them to the modern world.

Recently I saw a cooking documentary featuring a progressive-minded chef who equated tradition with stagnation. In a way, at its lowest level, it's true. To follow a method mindlessly and thoughtlessly execute it by rote, can lead to lifelessness if we don't take care – in effect, much like comparing a seventh generation photocopy with its original, the copy cannot compare with the vibrancy and clarity of the original. For this reason, my teacher tried teaching the art as close to the source as possible, never claiming to

teach us "Furuya style" Aikido but, instead, the Aikido that his teachers had passed down to him.



In martial arts today, tradition seems like a dirty word, with connotations of being staid, stagnant, and stiff. Tradition in its most base form can seem like this; lifeless and destined to disappear, or devolving into meaningless formality. Especially in this age when we have access to so much information and have so many options from which to choose, this catch-phrase of tradition often gets misunderstood and misaligned, yet think about it: without tradition, each generation would have to start all over from the beginning. Each generation would have no choice but to reinvent the wheel. Because of tradition, we can rely on the wisdom of those who came before us and not only master, but refine, and perhaps reinvent tradition – not in a convoluted, contrived way just to change for change's sake, but naturally.

Without this so-called "tradition" there would be no Aikido. Without this idea of tradition, where would we be in our Aikido training? Without Sensei's teacher, second Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba, where would Aikido be today? Without his son, third Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba, where would Aikido be today? Without tradition, the generations that trained after O Sensei would have to start from scratch. It's said that there may be people who possess the same genius as O Sensei, but no one can practice as much as O Sensei practiced. I don't know about you, but I don't have even a fraction of O Sensei's genius and I really doubt I have enough bandwidth to juggle a superhuman practice regimen along with earning money and spending quality time with my family.

Tradition allows us to have someone to follow; it offers a stepping stone from which to continue and elevate our training. Without tradition, we would have no sword, no French cooking, and no advancement in the arts, technology, sciences, or culture.

Some of us do many things in our training, and we have no idea why we do them. Seemingly meaningless, the benefits of these "traditions" feel so far away, so unlikely, like a long road on which we've traveled mile after mile without any understanding of why. Yet upon reaching our destination, we understand. Tradition was our teacher showing us the road and showing us which direction, and even showing us how to go about travelling on this road. Sensei tried his best to train us in spite of ourselves.

Continued on page 6...

*An old saying of Samurai warriors:
To part from the Way is only the width of a single hair.
To return to the Way is a journey of ten-thousand miles.*

A Sense of Humor

by James Takata, Aikido 2nd Dan

A senior student recently made a comment to a white belt about the importance of having a sense of humor in Aikido practice. I agreed and, noting that two of the students in the room had never met Sensei, I added that he had a great sense of humor.

Zen priests are famous pranksters, which explains why Sensei often seemed keen to tell a joke – sometimes at our expense. (“James, why don’t you tell your West Hollywood barber to give you a real haircut?” “Well, if you weren’t staying up all night at rave parties then maybe you would make it to practice more often.”) My favorites were the mom jokes: “Tell your mommy this,” or “Didn’t your mommy teach you that?” (My mom trained at the dojo back then, which provided Sensei with a rich source of material.) I can still hear Sensei laughing out loud or quietly chuckling to himself.

I never felt that his jokes were mean spirited, but if he sensed that maybe someone was taking it the wrong way he would add: “Just kidding . . . (sigh).” Then, in that delicate moment of apology, Sensei often couldn’t resist the comic timing of making one last joke – sending him (and us) into more fits of laughter! It would’ve been like leaving a technique unfinished to leave the joke untold (and we all know how unacceptable that is). I often found myself restraining a laugh in class when Sensei made a particularly colorful and on-target observation about one of us, or when he threw his *uke* with a little extra emphasis to prove a point.

Some of you may not know that Sensei actually died laughing. As I reflect on that I’m astounded at the achievement. If I remember the story correctly David Ito, James Doi, and Jacob Sisk were talking to Sensei after class. Jacob told a joke about earning his *shodan* by using a *bokken* to exterminate some bees which had swarmed Sensei’s house, and Sensei collapsed while laughing out loud! Eight years later it makes sense to appreciate the beauty and art of Sensei’s life by the way that he died: in the dojo that he built, with a few loved and trusted students, laughing out loud. We should all be so lucky.

“No one can defeat you in your training, you only defeat yourself.” – Reverend Kensho Furuya



Thoughts of Sensei

by Mohammed Anwar, Aikido Ikkyu

Most of what I knew about Sensei I gleaned through his old “Words From Sensei” online journal. Although Sensei often seemed somewhat withdrawn he would update his journal nearly every day with insights into the topics on his mind, occasionally telling old stories or describing the origins and etymology of martial arts etiquette.

He was a stickler for historical accuracy, even in fiction, and had great enthusiasm for antique swords. He had a lot to say about the old masters of Asian traditions, and took a meticulous examination of the customs and traditions that fleshed out the world of his predecessors in their prime. Being an older man from a different time, he seemed rather sensitive to rudeness on the Internet, either unfamiliar with or perhaps simply unable to get accustomed to courage that long distance and anonymity brings some individuals.

Sensei’s thoughts often wandered towards the somber and melancholy. Despite the fact that on most days he would only come out of his room to teach and there was almost no talking during class, he would often proceed to write an entry about how lonely the empty dojo felt after hours. In spite of the high expectations he had of the senior students and the levels they’d reached, he worried a lot about the future of martial arts and lamented every compromise he saw others make.

During class the students who seemed like immovable mountains to many of us looked like complete rag dolls when Sensei demonstrated a throw, and his journal painted the picture of someone who couldn’t find other enthusiasts whose devotion to Aikido and the sword matched his own. Reflecting on Sensei like this has given me much food for thought on my own practice and my own attitudes in the coming year.

A Tradition of Progress *continued from page 4...*

Ultimately, whether or not we get to where the road leads is up to us, whether we stay on the road is up to us, whether we even start on this road is up to us. Sensei was not an easy person to be with – no teacher is, but even my own teacher told me that great teachers are not famous for their pleasant personalities. A teacher doesn't need fans, but soldiers. Teachers such as Aikido's Morihei Ueshiba and Muso Shinden Ryu Iaido's founder, Nakayama Hakudo, were regarded as great not because of their skill but because of the number of masters they produced. Anyone can be selfish and grow stronger and more skillful in a self-centered, self-serving manner, but how many can perform, as well as teach, so effectively? While most teachers put their faith in one or two students to carry on their teachings, both O Sensei and Nakayama Hakudo produced many skillful exponents of their respective arts.

If Sensei taught us anything, if we learned *anything*, it was how to create the best conditions from which we can benefit in order to travel this road, this "way". Some skill in Aikido or sword was not the best gift we received from Sensei, but the skill to be able to learn anything and recognize the value of tradition. This tradition is what keeps us connected to the past, not in a backwards, regressing way, but in manner paying respect to the masters who trained and taught before us. My teacher taught us to value this – these lessons that tradition enables us to learn – but he also taught us to take these lessons from the past and carry this treasure with us, towards the future.

Respect

by *Santiago Garcia Almaraz*
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai (Salamanca, Spain)

My mother's cooking is the best. But the funny thing is that when you talk to other people, they all say the same thing: they claim that their mother's cooking is the best! And they may very well be right. Something like that happens in every aspect of our lives, work, sports, politics, religion, etc.

I consider myself an open-minded person (or at least do my best to keep an open mind). Within the world of martial arts especially, I try to respect other arts and their teachers and make an effort to see their involvement, work, and respect behind every workout regardless of the art they practice.

Sensei had his library filled with hundreds of books on art, Eastern philosophy, many styles of martial arts, and arts of hundreds of teachers. He agreed with some of them, and disagreed with others, but he made time to understand as they shared their techniques and gave much thought about what they wrote. One of his best friends for years is a master of Kung Fu, Adam Hsu.

All the time I knew him, I never heard Sensei speak ill of any martial art. He had very good friends from different schools and styles; some we might like more or less, but Sensei never disregarded them or gave them anything other than the utmost respect.

I think Sensei served as a role model for many things, but I think he did so especially well when it came to showing respect. Many people think that a teacher seems too hard or demanding; when teachers drive their students to the fullest, some believe that the teachers fail to respect the students. We should not confuse these concepts, however: if a teacher does not respect herself and fails to hold true to her values and thus does not give the best for the student to improve, that's when actually respect for the student has gone missing.

Today we consider ourselves to be at the center of the world, and we believe that ours is always better either food from my mother or the martial art I practice, and worst of all, we judge others over things about which we know nothing. We would do well to take a page out of Sensei's book and heed one of the pillars of our training, and respect others, no matter who they are or what they do. That is the Way as Sensei taught me.

**Untitled**

The dark moon does not light my path,
The bright sun only blinds my eyes,
People's words stray me from the Path,
False doubts only weigh my feet,
The world flows against me,
Still one step, one step at a time.

Editor's note: Sensei posted this poem on Aikiweb's Aikido Haiku forum on October 13, 2003.





Sensei had to cut short his training at Hombu Dojo short due to his grandfather's illness. Upon hearing that Sensei would leave Japan early, one of his mentors, Kisaburo Osawa Sensei, composed a poem and lamented, "A sudden rain, he returns home too quickly. . . ."



Cleanliness

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

[S]lovenliness is no part of religion. . . . 'Cleanliness is, indeed, next to godliness.'— John Wesley, "On Dress"

"Cleanliness is next to godliness" is not, as many people imagine, a biblical verse. Just as the saying often gets misunderstood, concepts of cleanliness and cleaning are far more complex and useful than people think.

Anyone who has had any military basic training will always comment on the stupidity of marching and the constant cleaning. However, virtually every organized military force, probably since the Roman legions, has trained this way and will continue to do so into the future. People assume that these exercises focus on group discipline. This is true, but there is more to it than just that.



Obviously, individuals in marching formation will learn very quickly that they must follow commands at the right time or else the whole formation falls apart. In a similar vein, individual musicians in symphony orchestras draw on the same skills that allow soldiers to march in formation. These interactive skills used in organized groups have must eventually work at the unconscious level and therefore become deeply ingrained.

ACLA students realize that cleaning and the cleanliness of the dojo make up an important part of their training. Both of our chief instructors have talked extensively about the importance of cleaning and how to clean. The students clean the dojo mats every day and Iaido students clean the outside of the dojo every week. However, I think that many of us fail to grasp the depth of the crucial role this kind of cleaning plays in our development.

Beyond saving on janitorial expenses, to most people the deeper instructive values of cleaning seem unclear. Actually, the technical complexity inherent to our process of cleaning requires a great deal of decision making, which we must execute within a very tight time frame.

We can break down the process of cleaning (anything) into three phases: 1) inspection or monitoring; 2) contamination control; and 3) organization or resource management.

In the first phase, we must carefully examine something to determine if it needs cleaning and how to clean it. During the cleaning process, constant inspection is needed to determine if, in fact, the cleaning process is working.

The contamination control phase requires defining and identifying of a "contaminant", choosing how to remove it, and cleaning it. "Contamination Control" is a high-tech industry that enables many other high-tech industries such as microelectronics, biotech, and aerospace to exist in the first place.

When we "clean" our desks, we are actually organizing the contents for the most efficient task management.

The most obvious martial use of cleaning involves weapon maintenance. Dirty weapons are less reliable; dirty equipment is less reliable. A clean weapon, however, is ready for use. Cleaning a weapon involves inspecting and preparing it for reliable use at any time. The process of cleaning also prepares the cleaner for conflict at any time.

Most societies consider cleaning menial and low class. A martial artist must overcome this natural bias because it will inhibit action and obscure valuable observational information. An opponent's appearance of cleanliness and order (or lack thereof) serve as clues to his preparedness, thinking, and strategies. Cleanliness thus becomes a method to control our image and read our opponents.

Just as the act of cleaning is more technically complex than most people realize, cleanliness is an important psychological and philosophical concept. Looking at cleaning as truly important leads to many other ideas. Cleaning is a never-ending process. How clean is clean? Cleaning is a balance between "clean enough" and OCD behavior. Zen monks spend a great deal of time cleaning. Cleaning is, in the end, a moral exercise.

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

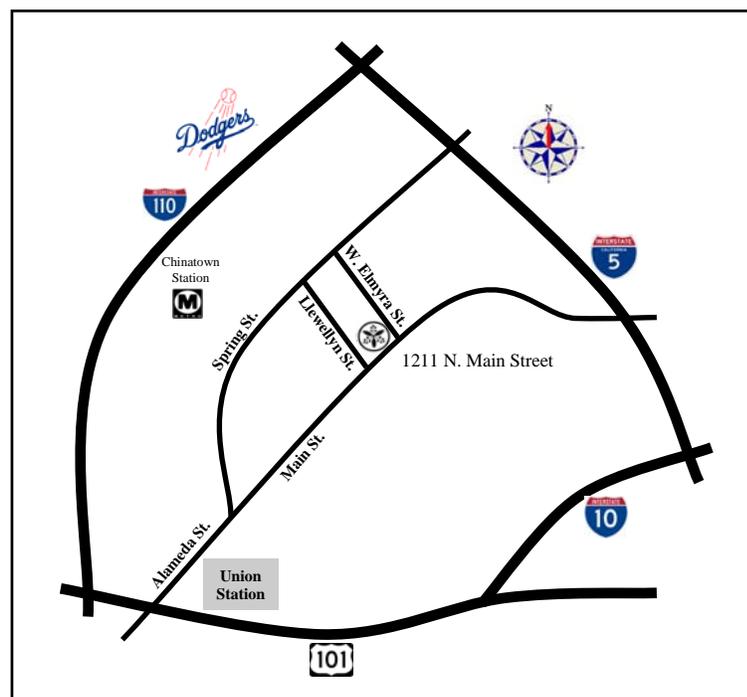
Sundays

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.

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Editor-in-Chief: Mark Ehrlich

Finding Our Dojo

We are located at

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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.