



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

A few months ago, Doshu wrote his annual New Year Statement in the January edition of the *Aikido Shinbun*, entitled "Basics First, Basics Second". In that article, Doshu expressed, among other things, his determination "to comply with the Aikido created by the Founder and spread Aikido properly to society", and offered what I think amounts to a mission statement for his focus in the future:

I have always talked about the importance of basic movements of Aikido in my seminars. . . . This year, once again, I want to return to the starting line and practice with the spirit of "Basics First, Basics Second". Because in order to continue the history, I think that it is very important to move forward steadily valuing the basics.

When I read these words, I felt very grateful that in Doshu we have a leader who has the wherewithal to set the course while at the same time honoring the principles which allowed the voyage to happen in the first place. ACLA wish him and everyone in Aikikai greatest success in this endeavor, and, while we only amount to one small, humble school, we pledge our full support of Doshu's mission.

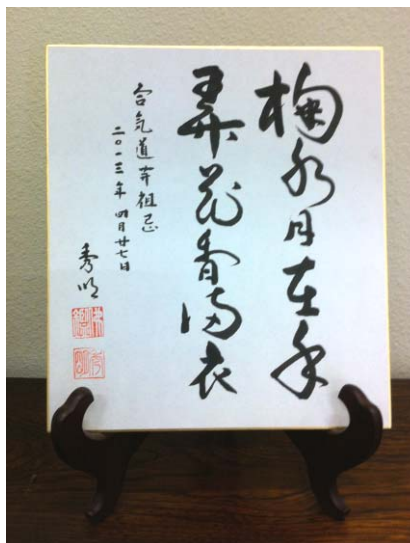
Readers who have trained with us know that ACLA has always focused on the *kihon waza*, the basic techniques that serve as the backbone for the art of Aikido. Sensei demanded this approach, day in and day out, year after year. And while the grueling hours of continuously refining a technique sometimes left us feeling

discouraged, I always found that this approach allowed us to evolve organically as we learned to relax our minds and bodies and thus enable them to work together in what still seems to me remarkable ways. Also, it seems that the more we improve our basics, the easier we can learn other techniques, since they all find their roots in one or a combination of the basic techniques anyway.

I would urge our readers not to confuse *basic* with *easy*; something can serve as the necessary foundation for a larger entity yet entail enormous complexity. Gravity seems basic to our universe: do you find it easy to understand? And the Founder considered love the basis for all Aikido, which to my mind remains the most basic yet

most profound and elusive aspect of human existence we can grasp.

This issue's theme keeps to the basics: our annual seminar, a gift of calligraphy, words from our chief instructors, and Sensei's voice once again brought back from our archives all intertwine to make this a very special issue. I hope you enjoy it. I'll see you on the mat!



**Calligraphy (After Hoen)**  
by Shumyo Kojima Sensei  
Zenshuji Soto Mission

Mizu wo kiku sureba tsuki teni ari  
Hana wo ro sureba ka koromoni mitsu

*When one scoops up water, the moon is reflected in the hands.*

*When one handles flowers, the scent soaks into the robe.*

### Upcoming Events

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

**May 27th:**  
Dojo Closed  
Memorial Day

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

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

**August 31st**  
Instructor's intensive

**September 28th**  
Instructor's intensive

## The Way Things Are

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

I'd like to begin with a parable:

Long ago there lived a man who felt dissatisfied with his position in life despite being gifted with great skill and precision as a stonecutter. The stonecutter wasn't a wealthy man, but his hands were hard and strong and his talent with a hammer and chisel was unrivaled.

One day while carving a highway stone under the hot sun a procession of people passed by carrying a wealthy merchant who was clad in the finest clothes adorned with many expensive jewels. This man was surrounded by people who conceded to his every wish and he looked as if he didn't have a care in the world. The discontented stonecutter was in awe of this person's station in life.

He thought to himself, "This merchant has true power." He then said, "I wish I could be this merchant."

As the words were barely off his lips, the stonecutter was miraculously transformed into the merchant. He ate and drank the finest foods and enjoyed life's finest pleasures. Every person he interacted with showed him the utmost respect. Time passed by and the stonecutter grew to like his new position in life. He smiled to himself with a smugness that implied that no man could resist him. Then one day while travelling about on a hot day, the stonecutter realized that he was sweating profusely despite being shaded by a large canopy and being fanned by his servants. The stonecutter pondered the extent of the sun's power to which even a wealthy and powerful man could not resist.

He then said, "I wish I could be the sun."

With a flash of light, the stonecutter became the sun and shined as far as the eye could see. The stonecutter loved his newfound power and enjoyed his ability to shine or not as he wished. People prayed to him and feared his intensity. He felt very content with his new omnipotence and felt that he was without rival.

Then the *tsuyu* or rainy season began and the rain clouds rolled in and blocked the mighty sun. The stonecutter was in utter disbelief that these rain clouds could nullify his unassailable powers.

He once again thought, "This is true power," and said, "I wish I were the powerful rain clouds."

With a crack of thunder he was at once transformed into the mighty clouds whose rain and wind wreaked havoc over the hills

and valleys. People again feared his wrath and prayed for his mercy. The *tsuyu* was his season and the stonecutter again felt powerful as his fury flooded fields and blew down houses. Then he noticed a large boulder at the entrance to a small village, which was unfazed by his power and wrath. With all his might and power, he could not move this rock.

He then thought, "Ah, this is true strength," and wished out loud, "I wish I were this rock."

He then became this massive unmovable structure that was more powerful than all others. He laughed at men's effort to move him and was unfazed by the power of the weather. He thought to himself, "What could be stronger than this rock?" Then, he heard a familiar tapping sound. "What was that?" he

thought. "Is that the sound of the chisel?" He felt strong and hard hands not unlike his own, then he looked down to see a stonecutter chiseling away at him one piece at a time with a chisel.

Many students approach their Aikido training in the same manner as the stonecutter. They feel so worried about who they want to become and what they don't have that they forget about who they are and what they already possess. I am not saying that people should not try to improve themselves. What I am saying is that the basis of improving ourselves is seeing ourselves for who we already are and what we already have.

A common approach to self-development urges us to make our weaknesses into strengths. However, this approach seems too simplistic and apt to lead people in the wrong direction with the wrong attitude. I posit that the key to self-development requires us first to know what our strengths and weakness are and then make use of our strengths to overcome our weaknesses. This approach is not unlike making our weaknesses into strengths, but the one key difference is the attitude. Sometimes when we focus too much on our weaknesses we reinforce our already negative self-image. When we focus on using our strengths to combat our weaknesses, however, we keep a more positive frame of mind about ourselves. How we see and value ourselves serve as the essential components to success in any endeavor.

The parable of the stonecutter considers contentment. We might not usually associate the martial arts with the concept of contentment, but we will find contentment at the core of every martial art at its highest echelons. Every person or every body comes with a set of strengths and weaknesses and the key to getting good at Aikido involves using our strengths to overcome our weakness. The philosopher Lao Tzu said it best, "Be content with what you have; rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you."



## Eggs and Bacon

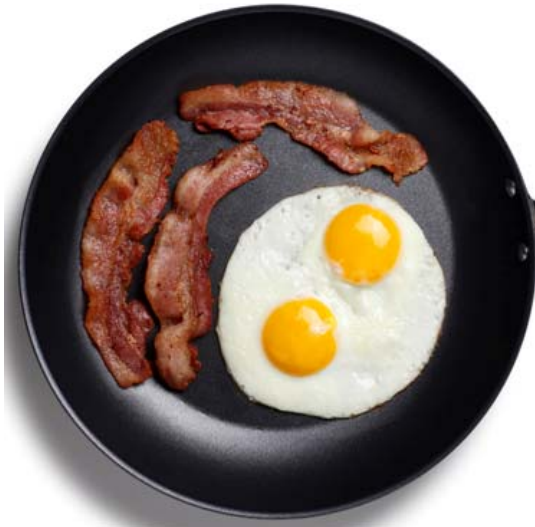
by Gary Myers, Iaido Chief Instructor

There is an old joke about a chicken and a pig debating on which of the two contributes more to the classic breakfast of eggs and bacon. The chicken, of course, asserted that the main dish is the eggs and that the bacon is just an accompaniment. The pig however, pointed out to the chicken that it was only peripherally involved with the breakfast, whereas the pig's contribution was a true commitment. This joke is often used as an analogy when people talk about a consultant's recommendations to a business, as opposed to the employees who have to live with those recommendations. While we can debate whether the joke feels funny, there seems little doubt of the universal truth in the deeper meaning of the joke. Does involvement feel like a commitment to the participant, as opposed to another's true commitment? Involvement conveys that a person is participating in an action or pursuit but their participation is not an obligation on their part. Commitment includes participation but it also implies an obligation to something or someone else. Involvement can be done just for the self without consequence; commitment implies an obligation to someone or a goal or cause in which the participant gives or sacrifices something.

Our society tends to want to limit our commitments or obligations. We usually hear that "we don't want to over-commit", or "he's afraid of commitment", or "we just don't want to be obligated." This attitude can make some sense in a society where we consider individuality the highest form of freedom. Individuals choose their level of involvement or commitment. In other societies where a group mentality has become the norm, the obligation factor increases arithmetically. Typically in those cultures, we can find obligation and duty in many forms and in many layers. Because of such nuances, entering into a relationship, be it personal or business, is not taken lightly, because that relationship has a certain duty, obligation or commitment, if you will, associated with it.

The best and closest example of involvement versus commitment, I think, we find looking at what happened after Sensei's death. At that time, several students left the dojo because Sensei has gone. I am not trying to be critical of them, because I'm sure most were very devoted to Sensei and his teachings, and they were involved because Sensei provided them with something that they wanted or needed. Sensei never asked people to commit specifically to him or worship him; rather, he asked his students to commit to their practice and support the dojo. When he died, they may have felt they had nothing more to gain from their involvement with the dojo, but they totally missed the deeper meaning of Sensei's teachings and what he truly wanted. Those who stayed and those who returned to the dojo truly understood what Sensei wanted from us:

a commitment to keep the dojo alive and maintain our practice as if he were still here.



Several months ago we had a visitor who expressed an interest in studying Iaido. He monitored a Thursday night class and after class I asked him if he had any questions. He asked some of the usual questions one would ask. After answering them, I asked my usual set of questions: How did you learn of the dojo; have you studied another martial art; why are you interested in studying Iaido, etc. One response we frequently get is that the person wants something that has some discipline and structure to it. To them, it appears, there seems so much freedom of choice that they long for a little structure in their lives, something to which they can commit themselves. My usual response is "That's what they all say . . . in the beginning." Many of these folks don't really seek a disciplined structure in the way the dojo requires; they want what fits their idea of the concept. They seek involvement without obligation.

The person in this instance returned the next week to join. When pulling his hair back, which was fairly long and covered his ears, we saw that he wore six earrings, three on each ear – not studs, actual rings. When we informed him that our rules prohibited wearing this type of jewelry during practice, he stated that wearing this jewelry was a statement of his identity and that he felt reluctant to remove them. Even after explaining that the policy existed for everyone's safety, he still seemed unsure. He then asked if he could try it out to see whether Iaido was worth him removing his jewelry. After telling him that's not the way it worked, I suggested that perhaps he was not yet ready to commit to Iaido. In truth, even if he had his "try out", he would see or feel nothing that would outweigh the self-image that he thought his jewelry provided. He seemed eager to get involved but not eager to commit. Perhaps he felt that his willingness to sign up entailed a commitment on his part. However, Iaido and the dojo in general required more from him than just a willingness to participate.

In the past when asked, "What do I need to start practicing Iaido?" I would say they needed an approved practice sword or a *bokken* and a uniform. Now, when asked that question, I first say, "Commitment." Iaido is a martial art that requires more from us than equipment. It requires us to give up something, besides our time, that our egos sometimes feel unwilling or unable to do. It requires us to change in some way. Iaido requires us to use both sides of our bodies; it requires a certain degree of ambidexterity; it requires us to engage our minds and our imaginations. It requires us to put down our egos, face our frustrations, and overcome those physical and mental obstacles that prevent our advancement.

*Continued on page 4 ...*

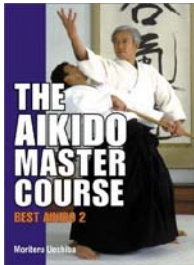
Eggs and Bacon *continued from page 3...*



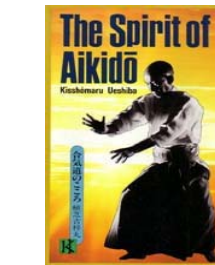
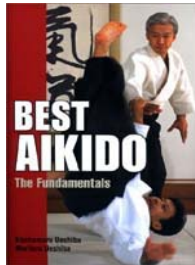
*Muso Shinden-ryu Iaido teacher  
Mitsuzuka Takeshi*

Unfortunately, we cannot change with just an hour's worth of practice each week. There is nobody sufficiently talented to maintain a level of Iaido, let alone advance, with just three hours of practice each month. The numbers simply stack against their ability to effect change and improve. Time is undoubtedly a precious commodity, and Iaido requires that we devote more time than we have classes. In order to become proficient, we must eventually practice more outside of class, once we have grasped the fundamentals. But we can easily lose these fundamentals with just one class per week and without a teacher's guidance. Iaido requires not only commitment of time; it requires us to remain open to criticism, to change, and (here's the part I like) to please the teacher. Some people have a difficult time doing all of that because of the commitment/obligation attached to it. They don't want to forfeit the "jewelry" of their egos even though by doing so, they will enjoy greater benefits. Ultimately, the benefits outstrip the sacrifices. But it is difficult to tell people that Iaido will eventually change them in a positive way, because each of us perceives different benefits from it. Simply saying that it will make them better people may seem like over-promising, but as Sensei used to say, "The more you put into it, the more you will get back."

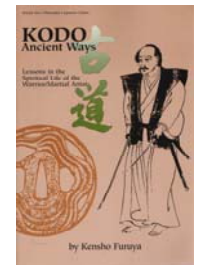
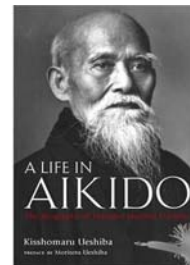
### Recommended Readings:



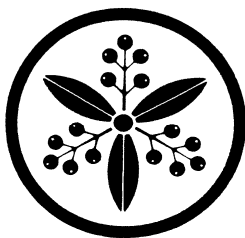
*by Ueshiba Moriteru*



*by Ueshiba Kisshomaru*



*by Kensho Furuya*



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

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

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### Questions/Comments?

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

Please e-mail submissions to:  
[info@aikidocenterla.com](mailto:info@aikidocenterla.com)

## 2013 O Sensei Memorial Seminar



I want to thank everyone who attended and supported our annual O Sensei memorial seminar. It came off a huge success, with more than 20 people attending every class! The theme for the seminar was a return back to basics and I felt glad to see all the students working hard to improve their basic skills regardless of their rank. It pleased me to see that the mat space was crowded for all the weapons classes and I want to thank Myers Sensei and Ken Watanabe for sharing their knowledge. A heartfelt thanks also goes out to Frances Yokota for catering our seminar party with such delicious food and desserts. I also wanted to thank Kojima Sensei for officiating our memorial service and for presenting us with a handwritten calligraphy message commemorating this year's seminar (see above). Three days of training can feel quite grueling but I think everyone had a good time and learned a lot – I know I did. The thing that impressed me the most was the spirit of camaraderie that everyone brought to each and every class and the seminar party. A dojo is a community made up of students and the people who support their efforts and I want to say “Thank you” to everyone for building and supporting this community.

– David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

## 2013 Sensei *Meinichi* Service

On March 9, 2013, ACLA students gathered to observe Sensei's *meinichi* or day of passing. Reverend Kojima and Reverend Toho from Zenshuji temple officiated the ceremony. After the service, many of the students visited Sensei's gravesite to pay their respects by cleaning his final resting place and offering incense in his memory.



## Style Versus Substance

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

Just as a student may search for a good teacher, so does the teacher search for the good student. It is very important that the teacher and student get along well together and try to understand each other. In modern times, we always fight for the higher position (in everything). In spiritual practice, however, we always fight for the lower position to materialize modesty and humility.

I was talking today about *tsuba*, or Japanese sword guards, with my student at lunch. In earlier times, there was a type of *tsuba* referred to as Mogarashi *tsuba* made by Mogarashi Soten in Hikone, much of which was considered “export” merchandise made for tourists. This type of *tsuba* was much too gaudy and flashy for the proper *samurai*. On the other hand, Yagyū *tsuba* were highly prized, although they appear very simple and also crude to the untrained eye. Yagyū were hand forged of the finest iron and constructed almost like a sword, while Mogarashi *tsuba* were made on the waterfronts in Hikone to catch the eye of the tourists. Today, however, it is very different. We don't study *tsuba* nowadays so to the untrained eye, the flashy Mogarashi *tsuba* command more dollars, not the simple, plain Yagyū. It is to this degree our thinking has changed in everything.

There are many characteristics of Yagyū which subtly exhibit the fine qualities of the iron, but they are only noticeable to the trained eye. I think, like today, most people cannot see or recognize them. In martial arts as well, there many subtle characteristics which the trained eye can understand. This explains why constant study and practice become so important. Mogarashi are intricately carved and they use a great deal of gold and silver and very intricate designs. They are made to catch the eye, so they are flashy and gaudy – but they have no depth of character or inner quality. Martial arts has become the same way today as well. Nowadays, I see a lot of flash and showing off but not much else.

We talk almost as much as O Sensei about Aikido principles but the point is, no one



*One example of a Mogarashi tsuba with an intricate design of fighting warriors with lots of gold and silver.*



*Another example of a Mogarashi tsuba with a different warrior theme.*



*Yagyū Ki Igeta - Yagyū Tsuba - Wood Well Design. Mid-Edo Period.*

understands these principles like O Sensei. I often think that it seems better just to follow his teachings simply and quietly, and eventually the understanding will come.

I heard that in the early days, even though they were very poor, O Sensei (like *samurai* of olden days) had no concept of money. Although he didn't have much, he still gave away 10,000 yen bills to young children as presents or dropped them into the collection boxes at temples. His wife, Hatsu, like an old *samurai's* wife, was so faithful and loyal. Whenever O Sensei went out, she always had money for him, so that he would not be embarrassed or shamed. Many old *uchideshi* told me that they were surprised that she had it and didn't know how she could save so much when everything was so tight. Although life seemed so hard in those days, we have so many great stories of loyalty, faith and sacrifice.

Today, we are so smart, we count every single penny in our pockets and track it on fancy, new computers. Nothing can escape us! Not even a nickel! This is not like when O Sensei was alive. Of course, we cannot live like him. *Samurai* always “waste” money because they don't know what it means. This attitude towards money marks a key difference between the *samurai* warriors of old, and us businessmen today. Haha!

Today, no one likes Yagyū *tsuba*, too hard to understand! We like everything fast and simple and easy to get. People like O Sensei struggled hard for everything; we get it handed to us on silver trays and still do not understand or appreciate it . . . another big difference from days of old and today.

I would like to say that O Sensei is like a fine Yagyū *tsuba*: so wonderful but not easy to understand. We are like Mogarashi *tsuba* – we are easy to understand and very flashy, but not much else. Study the old ways!

**Editor's Note:** *Sensei originally published this article, in slightly different form, to his daily message board on October 17, 2002.*

# Aikido TRAINING SCHEDULE

## Sundays

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

## Mondays

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

## Tuesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Advanced\*

## Wednesdays

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

## Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Bokken

## Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

## Saturdays

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

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

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

*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.



Find us on  
**Facebook**

# Iaido TRAINING SCHEDULE

## TRADITIONAL JAPANESE IAIDO SWORDSMANSHIP

## Saturdays

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

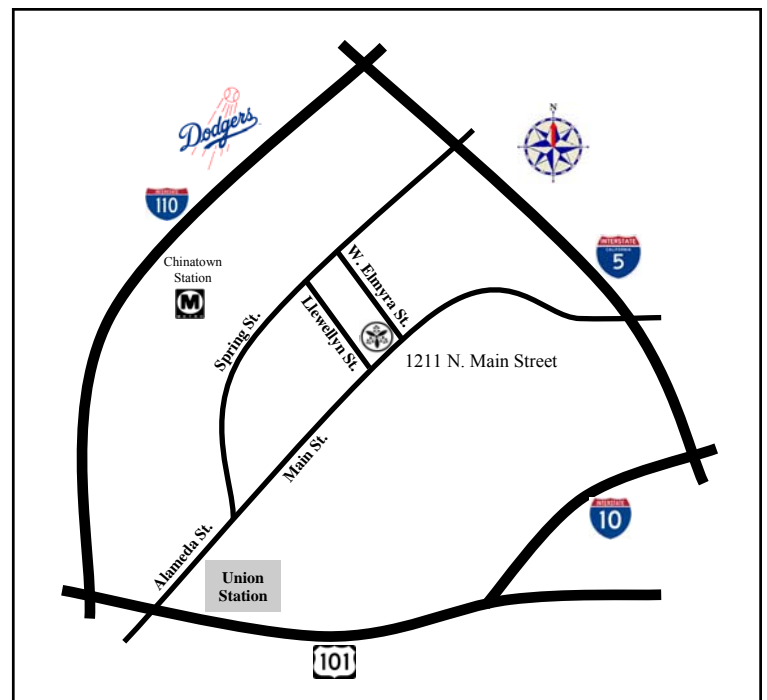
## Sundays

7:45-8:45 AM

## Thursdays

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

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



## **Finding Our Dojo**



We are located at

1211 N. Main Street

Los Angeles, CA 90012

**Telephone: (323) 225-1424**

**E-mail: info@aikidocenterla.com**

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

**The entrance is on Elmyra Street.**

**No appointment necessary to watch classes or join:**

*You are welcome to visit us any time during any of our  
Open or Fundamentals classes. Please come early.*