



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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Test Day at the dojo: 3rd Dan candidates bow in to begin their test before the judging panel and their fellow students. The judging panel, from right to left: Aikido Chief Instructor and ACLA Dojo Cho David Ito, Mark Ehrlich, Ken Watanabe, James Doi, Dale Okuno, Paul Major, Kevin Hoffer, and Jason Markowski. The candidates, from right to left: Bill D'Angelo and Maria Murakawa.

Upcoming Events

November 22nd-23rd:
Dojo Closed: Thanksgiving

November 24th:
Instructor's intensive

December 1st:
Dojo Christmas Party

December 15th:
Dojo clean up

December 24th-26th:
Dojo Closed: Christmas

December 29th:
Instructor's intensive

December 30th:
Last practice of the year

December 31st - January 1st:
Dojo closed: New Year

Letter From the Editor

by Mark Ehrlich
Editor, The Aiki Dojo

On behalf of the ACLA community, I would like to extend our best wishes to all of our readers, their students and teachers, and their friends and families for a happy, healthy, and peaceful Thanksgiving. I have always enjoyed Thanksgiving the most out of all the holidays, and whether it's your favorite or not, I imagine that we all glean at least some satisfaction by marking the day with those traditions which have grown along with us.

This issue, we consider tradition in our training, in various senses of the term. Ito Sensei begins by explaining our dojo's newest tradition surrounding its *shodan*-elect to help them bridge the gap between their white belt past and their black belt present. Two of our newly

minted *shodan* share their unique perspectives on the traditional significance this milestone rank holds, while one of our new *sandan* students describes how she has, after almost 20 years of training, figured out a correction Sensei gave her more than a decade ago, and reflects on the tradition of learning in the martial arts. We get to glimpse the tradition of anniversaries through the eyes of one of our branch instructors as he relates some of the experiences he had while in Japan to help celebrate the 70th anniversary of Aikikai and the 80th anniversary of the founding of Hombu Dojo. And, as has become tradition here, we end with words from Sensei, who this time explains how the different traditions of sword and Aikido intertwine. It's a great issue to read and study, and revisit. Please do so.

Until next time, take care, and I hope to see you on the mat!

New Traditions

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

A few years ago I instituted a policy that, after taking the *shodan* exam, the candidates would line up and receive criticisms about their technique and test from each examiner. The examiners were asked to be brutally honest but constructive. I am sure this feedback came as a blow to the candidates' egos and hard for many of them to hear. Directly after the critique, I would announce which of the candidates passed the test. After bowing out, the current black belts, as a gesture of goodwill and acceptance, would loan the successful candidates their black belts and *hakama* to wear until the ceremony, a month or so later, when they received their own belts, *hakama*, and *dan* certificates.

The other day I noticed that one of the new *shodan* wasn't wearing the black belt someone loaned him so I asked him why. He explained that he "didn't feel like a *shodan* yet and was kind of embarrassed to wear it." Wearing the black belt, like wearing the *hakama*, definitely signifies rank but it is really more symbolic. The *hakama*, for instance, has a stiff *koshita*, which immediately improves our posture and makes us stand a little taller, which in turn improves our awareness of our actions. The *hakama* itself conveys its symbolism through its five pleats in the front, which traditionally represent the five Confucian values of *jin* (benevolence), *gi* (righteousness), *rei* (etiquette), *chi* (wisdom), and *shin* (faith). The single pleat at the rear represents the oneness that results when *makoto* (sincerity) comes together with duty. Therefore, putting on the *hakama* should remind us not only to stand a little taller but to act according to these values as well. The borrowed *hakama* immediately reminds us that as new *shodan* we represent ourselves, our peers, and our dojo community.



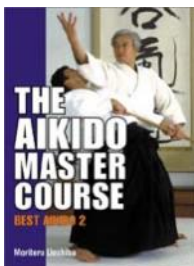
Wearing someone else's *hakama* in the interim before getting our own also helps us bridge the gap between white belt and *shodan*. When a fellow black belt gives you her own *obi* and *hakama* to wear, she has in a sense vouched for you and basically says, "I trust you and you are under my protection." This exchange helps new *shodan* to build confidence and have someone in their corner to go to when they encounter trouble. The other reason why our *shodan* wear someone else's uniform comes from something I read in *Zen and the Art of Archery*. In that book, the author described how,

when a student had trouble with the seemingly easy task of notching and releasing the arrow, the master would come over, take a few shots with the student's bow, and then return it. When the student received the bow back, however, it seemed somehow to have a different energy. It is the same

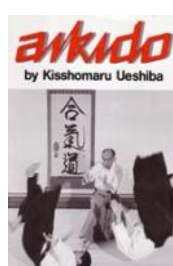
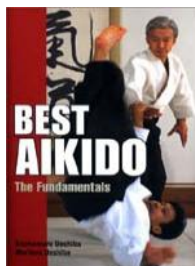
with someone else's *hakama* and *obi*: these items have the energy or essence of a black belt more experienced than us, and that energy can help to keep our spirits up until we receive our very own and, eventually, gain more confidence.

Students promoted to *shodan* join the dojo's *yudansha-kai*. It means "an association of black belts", but it amounts to more than that. It is a family or a group of people who support one another in their endeavor to better themselves. All of our training up to this point aimed to prepare us for the test, but *shodan* only marks the beginning of our training. Taking and passing the test represents as the right of passage; being loaned someone's *hakama* and *obi* represents acceptance. Having explained all this, I hope this little gesture we have extended to our new *shodan* helps them to start acting like a black belt, as well as believing that each of them, in fact, is one.

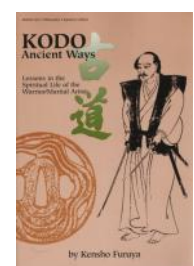
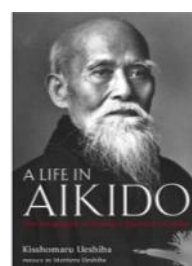
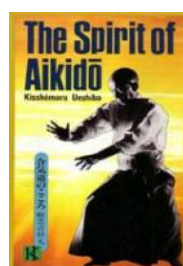
Recommended Readings:



by Ueshiba Morihiro



by Ueshiba Kisshomaru



by Kensho Furuya

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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

White Belt

by Jason Markowski, Aikido Shodan

I have just recently been promoted to the rank of *shodan*, and with this promotion, I find that I have more questions now than I ever did as a white belt. What does *shodan* mean to me? I know that being given the rank of *shodan* is nothing more than a passing acknowledgement by my *sensei*, that I have the basest understanding of the fundamentals of technique. That I have acquired the rudimentary tools to begin to build a foundation for a lifetime of training in Aikido. To me, *shodan* means a first step.

I know that every step I take on the mat, every seemingly feeble attempt at a technique is a reflection of who I am as a person, and this always leads to questions, both on the mat and off. I look back at my training and see someone who took, and still takes, a thug-gish approach to his training. I have perfected the art of rigidly muscling through techniques, the nuances of which I can see but not quite grasp. This has been my approach to both my working and personal life, as well. Retrospectively, I can only wonder at how much more beneficial those moments on the mat, and in life, could have been, had I not been so rigid in my ways. The irony being that even children know they have to unclench their fist in order to take something into their hand.

Connecting and Correcting

by Maria Murakawa, Aikido 3rd Dan

“Make a good finish,” Sensei said to me as he sat at the edge of the mat. There were only a few times I remember Sensei correcting me, but this was said to me on more than one occasion, to the point that I became frustrated with myself. I thought I did as I was told, but Sensei saw my body betray my mind, as my body wobbled slightly after each throw. I was thinking of a good finish but my mind and body were not connected in order to do so: it’s the mind knowing what is correct but not being able to embody it physically. I’ve come to realize that, as with everything, *zanshin* comes with practice.

I didn’t feel confident about my Aikido ever since they announced my test. I compensated by keeping up my practice as much as possible, just trying to do everything correctly. Every time I thought about the test, I felt a knot in my stomach. Then, for some reason, in the last days before the test, my anxiety remained but the knot had gone. It was if I had resigned myself to the fact that I was who I was at this moment and, good or bad, my training will show who I’ve become. On a certain level I just let everything go. During the Friday class leading up to my test, I felt stronger than I had in the past, and I realized that the correction Sensei had made years ago came naturally after every technique. For the first time, I felt rooted, strong, and centered.

I think I became fully aware of what *zanshin* was and the importance of it, and the reason why Sensei would make his correction to me over and over, during the test. I wasn’t fully aware of which techniques I would do next, or how many I did, but I had a *feeling* of knowing which techniques would come, and a *feeling* that I had

Satsujin no ken – katsujin no ken, “The sword which preserves life and the sword which destroys”: I have struggled with this concept from day one. I have struggled with this before I had even heard of Aikido. I joined the Marine Corps because of an inexpressible idea of how and why one should grow. I became a mason following a similar train of thought and I eventually walked into our dojo in search of an answer to a question I could not pose. From the day I began training to the present moment, I have continued to question, and the only answer I know for certain is that I have more questions.

Every path I have taken in life has been physical and it will be no surprise to anyone that I have taken the path of “the sword which destroys” in my Aikido training. I have never trained with the intent to injure anyone but I felt that it was important to fully understand the martial aspect of Aikido before I could aspire to any deeper understanding of the art. As my questions begin to become more tangible, I am starting to rethink my path. To succeed in any endeavor, I think it makes sense to try and envision the outcome, then strive through the seemingly endless perplexities until one day we find ourselves at our goals’ end. At which point, I assume, we will have more questions.

To me, *shodan* means beginning.

done whatever I needed to do. All of the little things I would stress over while practicing for the test had disappeared; so, feeling free from counting, or thinking about which technique to do, I just concentrated on each move on its own, and, having achieved a kind of awareness in the moment, of where my body stood in relation to *uke*. Then, knowing that I would come out okay in the end, finishing with a strong *zanshin* gave me the confidence to move on to the next move, and then the next. I realized that in Aikido, as in life, the key to strong *zanshin*, lies in knowing where we are every step of the way, and trusting that the place where we stand exactly matches where we need to be to move on to the next step. Having this faith saturating our body and mind, we will end up in a good place, as in *zanshin*, ready to move forward freely.

Training for my test has made me realize this, and made clear the importance of *zanshin*. For many years I knew it as being a form which expresses mental awareness and readiness, but I never really knew deep inside what it felt like, until I actually put myself to the test. What I have learned from this test and the training which led up to it will inspire and reassure me that each step I take, if taken with purpose and clarity, will lead me to my own *zanshin* in life beyond the mat – that of success and readiness to take on whatever this life may bring.



Japan Scrapbook

by Mike Van Ruth, Chief Instructor, Aikido Renbukai of Arizona

In September of this year, I travelled to Japan with Ito Sensei and Mark Ehrlich to attend the party celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Aikikai Foundation and the 80th anniversary of Hombu Dojo. During that time we travelled to and around Tokyo and spent one day in Kyoto. Here is a pictorial account of my trip, which many kind people made possible. Enjoy!



Training at Jowa Juku Dojo with Kudo Sensei (front row, second from left) and Hayashi Sensei (front row, center). Ito Sensei and Mark sit on either side of Hayashi Sensei, and I'm standing behind him, third from right.



Left: Hayashi Sensei and Sogi Sensei share a moment with us during the delightful anniversary celebration party at Tokyo's Keio Plaza Hotel. Below: Sogi Sensei and Ito Sensei (left); Ichizuka Sensei, his wife, Ito Sensei, and Omiya students (right).



Attending the IAF seminar, we had the chance to train with old friends and new ones. From left: Mark, Ichizuka Sensei, Ito Sensei, IAF's John Rogers, and Fujita Sensei.



With our friends at Nosyudo, where we spent a wonderful day. (Next time, we'll buy dinner!)

Hombu Dojo's Tani Sensei and Ito Sensei joke together after training at the IAF seminar.



Bottom row, from left: Kyoto has many temples, but none amazed us so much as Komyo In. Its tranquility and beauty left us refreshed.



Top row, from left to right: Scenes from the amazing September Grand Sumo Tournament at the Kokugikan in Tokyo on the second to last day. Our box seats gave us a great view of the contests.



Scenes from Todaiji temple in Nara. Above, the view of the main temple from the entrance gate. Above at left, crawling through "Buddha's nose hole" for luck. At right, posing with Nara's ubiquitous deer.



Scenes from the Fushimi Inari shrine in Kyoto. Left, top: Standing in front of the main shrine's entrance gate. Left, bottom: Mark and I pose among the torii gates which line the trail up Mount Inari. Top: the entrance to the Senbonotorii looms large but makes for a great hiking experience.



Ginkakuji, or the "Silver Pavilion", is a beautiful Zen temple which also goes by the name Jishoji, or "The Temple of Shining Mercy".



Becoming a Shodan

by Mike Hatfield, Aikido Shodan

[Editor's Note: *The author wrote the following with an aim not only to share in this newsletter, but also to reference daily; he intends as of this writing to print it out and tape it to his bathroom mirror and use it as a daily reminder.*]

- It's my responsibility to show up to class. The instructor has made the choice to be there for me, and I have made the choice to be there for all.
- Understand that every moment your teacher is with you. In all interactions, endeavor to lead with action, not words.
- Set your goal of awareness so high that you'll never quite be able to achieve it. Cultivate the practice of oneness not only on the mat, but at all times.
- Listen carefully to what gets said and done. Pay special attention to what goes unsaid and undone.
- Work diligently to recognize the timing present in all interactions, and continually seek to improve your awareness when it comes to the needs of others.
- Respect the teachings of not only the senior students, but of all the students. Just as in life, we are all together, and each person we meet has something valuable to share.
- Recognize personal judgments of like and dislike, and work to release your mind from such superficial thoughts. Celebrate the unique qualities of your training partners.
- Eliminate expectations for reward in training. Likewise, eliminate conflict and force; approach practice with only love in your heart.
- Always keep in mind that a black belt represents your beginning. Honor the past by fully committing to the present, and look to the future only as necessary.
- Understand that warm-up before class is necessary but meaningless unless you prepare your mind and spirit alongside your body.
- Trust that what you experience while training is a glimpse into your real life. Don't compare yourself with others; recognize that each individual has a unique gift.
- Look beyond ideas of right and wrong, to a place where there is only action, and through action seek to embody the forces of nature.
- Recognize and accept that all forms of limitation – physical, mental, and emotional – are an illusion.
- Seek first to understand, and then only if necessary, seek to be understood.
- Take refuge in the fact that pain is inevitable but suffering is optional. Just keep going. Don't give up. Approach each practice as if it's your last.
- Honor those who have come before and those who will come after you. Never seek to impress. Express gratitude and appreciation.
- Understand that we are not physical beings and that in the dojo there exists a group dynamic. Seek to deepen your understanding and acceptance of the collective intelligence and to interact with others on a spiritual level.
- Build your future solidly on a foundation of humility. Try to recognize the good and understand the rest. Always seek to act rather than react.
- Relax and enjoy each moment: true practice means just being there. Diligently try to catch the details and timing on and off the mat.
- A black belt is a guiding principle that resides within your heart and represents your higher self, not a physical attachment to be removed after practice.
- To borrow from, and in loving memory of, Sensei: Make your mistakes correctly, and have faith that things will always turn out as they should.

Sword, Mind, and Technique

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

The psychology of Japanese sword technique exerts a great influence on the nature of Aikido techniques.

Although the goal of sword is identical to Aikido, its methods and mental attitude are very much different. The mental attitude we should take in sword feels quite different from Aikido – although at its highest level, I imagine, it all becomes the same. In sword, the attitude appears slightly “darker,” I should say, to those not familiar with traditional swordsmanship; however, you will find as you begin to understand this a little more, that it is not “dark” at all.

When we hold the sword against our opponent or partner, we must give up all thought of surviving, winning, and even living. We give up everything in our mind and become like a empty tea cup: any attachment to any thought or notion will only hold us back, make us hesitate, stop the flow of our power, and break our timing. We must attempt to become the sword itself and express its spirit.

If we think to win over our opponent or even try to save our own life, we will be defeated from the very beginning. In sword, we can let nothing stop or hinder us. Ultimately, this means that our *ki* must flow freely and strongly. This is the most difficult idea to understand in sword. Once we understand this idea of becoming empty, we must then “stick” to our opponent. We do this by drawing a strong connection as if we both are joined – not two entities opposing each other, but one entity moving as one. We cannot react against our opponent; we must move together as if we are the same person. Not even like a mirror image – we must become our opponent himself. . . .

Once we understand this, we can begin to see where “technique” is born. A technique is NOT a counter measure or means to win, nor is it a clever trick or ruse – this is hard to understand I know. A technique is an expression of our connection with our opponent. If

we are not connected, it is not true sword technique, it is only chaos, confusion, and violence. Just as we train our body to master the *bokken* or sword, we must train our mind to master the sword’s own master – the mind itself.

From ancient times, Japanese culture has always treasured the sword as the ultimate weapon of the *samurai*, not because of its beauty or value, but because it reflects one’s mind so clearly. If you feel hesitant and vague, the sword will become hesitant and vague. If you feel clear and free, the sword will become clear and free. If you feel defeated spiritually, the sword will also be defeated. If we have even a split second lapse in our focus, the sword will die for that one split second. Because the sword will reflect our mind so clearly, it has also been said that “The sword is merciless.” Please try to understand this spirit.



If you can grasp these ideas or at least keep them firmly in your mind, we can continue our sword study. I recommend to my sword students to take down notes of all our sword classes and keep copies of these Daily Messages for your own future study. It will be a long time before we go over this same material again.

Editor’s Note: Sensei originally published this article, in slightly different form, to his daily message board on July 28, 2002.

AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES OFFICIALLY AFFILIATED DOJOS

INTERNATIONAL

Spain

Aikido Kodokai
Salamanca, Spain

Chief Instructor: Santiago Garcia Almaraz
www.kodokai.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

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.



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Iaido TRAINING SCHEDULE

TRADITIONAL JAPANESE IAIDO SWORDSMANSHIP

Saturdays

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

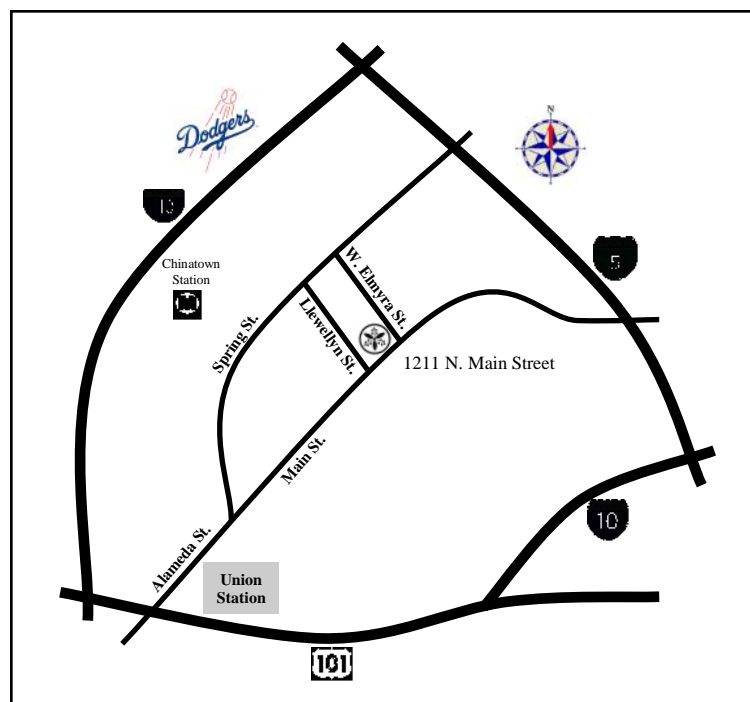
Sundays

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.