

Aikido Center of Los Angeles, LLC, 1211 N. Main Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012, Tel: (323) 225-1424 www.aikidocenterla.com



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

This month I find it hard to know what to say, because frankly, I've never felt more tired or insufficient. This month, three of us will take our black belt tests; we've trained hard for nearly a year, trying to prepare ourselves to meet this milestone in our practice with something akin to a warrior spirit and martial discipline. Speaking for myself, I feel like anything but a warrior. Speaking for myself, although everyone in the dojo has very kindly and patiently worked day after day to help me improve, I think I've never felt less talented.

I suppose these feelings and this fatigue come with the territory; after all, many rites of passage build us up only after they break us down. Yet, although I've deliberately chosen to develop myself by following this path, I harbor a lot of fear about where it will lead me beyond the test. The crux or nub of the matter comes down to my own reluctance to

accept who I am here and now. Despite all the work I've done to become a better person and to live life fully and well, I have to face the fact that I relentlessly keep looking forward, hoping that the reflection I see in the mirror each morning will change in some way tomorrow, because what I see right now leaves me unimpressed.

Don't get me wrong: I've had a blessed life. I know and give thanks for all the wondrous events and people that have filled it thus far. Yet like all of us I've had my share of failures, some of which continue to haunt me, waking or sleeping. I have so much I want to do but I have no idea how to begin. I have so much I want to give but I lack the belief that what I have to share would make any difference to anyone. For four years I've worked very hard to overcome my late start in Aikido, my age, my lack of fitness, and lack of natural ability. I've done my best to overcome my laziness, my fear, and my ignorance of what Aikido is all about. I have made progress.

Continued on page 3...

Upcoming Events

September 25th:
Instructor's Intensive

September 25th:
Shodan Test

October 9th:
JANM Demonstration

October 30th:
Instructor's Intensive

October 31st:
Children's Class Halloween Party

November 25-26th:
Dojo Closed: Thanksgiving

Aikido's Three Stages

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

Training in any traditional martial art inevitably leads the student, whether by design or happenstance, onto a journey of self-discovery. As they train, students find themselves at one of three different stages of development (body, mind, or spirit), since the goal of martial arts training is to harden your body, temper your mind, and reveal your true inner spirit.

Most students enter into Aikido training trying to develop some aspect of their physical bodies. Aikido to them becomes a physical reality and a tangible skill. This beginning stage is the most egalitarian of the three stages whether or not you are athletic or have two left feet; hard work will always level the playing field. Everyone experiences something different at this initial, physical stage. Some athletically gifted students have no problem with the training while others wrestle with it at every turn. Some students are blessed with an unreal amount of courage and confidence while some others struggle to believe in themselves. At this stage, students define themselves by their physical bodies and what they can do with them. It is where we first confront our fears and beliefs about our body, what it can do, and its limits. The hardest thing to do at this stage is to turn off our mind, move our body, and trust that our teacher will lead us the right way.

Most beginners try to intellectualize Aikido too much only to become completely confused. So many students seem to me like flowers about to blossom but picked before their prime when they become frustrated and quit because they don't think they are developing. Nothing is sadder than cutting ourselves off from our development. Although repetition can certainly feel monotonous, we must be patient and just practice.

Once we learn to turn off our minds and move our bodies instead, something incredible happens; we start to understand in a new way, and we begin to see not only our body change but our self-perceptions as well. Physical competence leads to physical confidence, but only with the absence of inner dialogue can we concentrate on copying the techniques and just moving our body. (Coincidentally, this is also one of the reasons why there is no talking in class.) Legendary dancer Martha Graham revealed a similar understanding of how bodies learn when she said, "The body says what words cannot." Day in and day out, repetition after repetition, we polish our skill and our sweat becomes the equity of our physical development. Sensei would often say, "Don't think, just practice."



"Before you come into the dojo, cut off your head and leave it outside with your mind and your ego."
~Reverend Kensho Furuya

Students need to trust the process and allow the mastering of Aikido's physical movements to become infused within their bodies. If we can do this, Aikido will become second nature and become imprinted in our subconscious. We might actually catch ourselves practicing when we least expect it or moving a certain way without thinking about it, which is when they can begin to master the movement. Once, I was at an antique store with Sensei; while he was perusing the aisles, he absent-mindedly practiced the kokyu movement with his hand as he walked. When he realized that I was looking, he immediately stopped and gave me a scornful glare. The goal of this stage is to become one with the movement.

Once we master the corporeal aspects of Aikido, we can realize the effect the mind has on Aikido technique. This intangible stage of Aikido usually comes after the tangible stage of mastery and is more about what is going on inside of us than what happens on the outside. We can begin to understand what the Dalai Lama means when he says, "We cannot control what happens to us, but we can control what happens inside of us." Aikido begins to metamorphose within us, from a merely physical skill into a state of mind. Our outer movement exemplifies our inner temperament; as Sensei once told me, "You can learn everything you need

to know about someone by the way they do Aikido." This phase of change can also be where we experience the most disappointment and despair in our Aikido training. Once we reintroduce our minds into the technique, we begin to think about the movement and find that nothing seems to work anymore, and that what once seemed easy no longer works. Commonly heard at this stage are complaints such as, "I've lost it," or "I just don't have it anymore." We might feel this way because we've forgotten that

thinking and mind are not the same; thinking is an aspect of mind, but mind is not an aspect of thinking. In the context of the mind it refers more to mental and emotional state than intellectual contemplation. Once we realize the mind's role, we strive to achieve emotional balance and shed our egos. An often-heard, but appropriate, cliché is, "The mind makes an excellent servant but a terrible master." Another one of Sensei's age-old aphorisms was, "Before you come into the dojo, cut off your head and leave it outside with your mind and your ego." The goal of this stage is to realize who you are and to overcome your mind.

Continued on page 3...

Aikido's Three Stages *continued from page 2...*

The last stage of development is where the mind and body coalesce and unify, and marks the spiritual aspect of martial arts training. It is spiritual because we begin to see the deep reason for training. The martial arts aren't a way to destroy the world or beat someone up, but a vehicle to reveal our true inner self. At this point, we have developed our minds and hardened bodies and begin to do Aikido effortlessly. Aikido also becomes a way of life and we begin to see Aikido in everything that we do, from the way we treat others to the way we treat ourselves. We might notice that we somehow do things differently.

This stage also serves as the milestone where we lose our desire to fight; Aikido ceases to represent a means toward the destruction of others and more of a method to deconstruct the self, and we realize that the only opponent that exists is our own inner self. Realizing this, we become not so much a *different* person as much as a *changed* person. Aikido develops a kind of awareness and our Aikido begins to reflect that awareness at this point. Our mind and body don't move independently any more, but rather as one entity. When attacked, we move according to the situation and our mind is still. *No mind* or *nothingness* would be the Buddhist term – not being spaced out, but empty or devoid of thinking. This shift also allows our intuition to flower; our mind and body sense and react as one, but we move based on feeling rather than thinking; we now seem to know what will happen before it happens. Part of this expansion comes from rote physical train-



ing, which is why we must train ourselves to be devoid of thought and engrain the movement into our subconscious. The goal of this stage is embody Aikido not only on the mat, but also in our daily life.

Along your journey through the process of learning Aikido, you will develop your outer body, then your inner mind, and in the process realize yourself – possibly for the first time in your life. You will realize that Aikido is not designed to ruin the world as much as to reveal your true inner self. To do this, accept the great potential of your body, mold it, and take command of it. Confront your inner self and realize the impact it has on not only Aikido movement but also on every aspect of your life. Finally, allow your mind and body to unite and forge your spirit, and you will have become the embodiment of true Aikido.

The Buddha once said, “Well diggers guide water. Carpenters bend wood. Fletchers make arrows. Wise men shape themselves.” The *do* in Aikido is a means to shape yourself. The path or way suggests that training is not a means to an end but a journey of self-awareness. This everyday journey of Aikido training is about self-realization and self-mastery used as a path toward enlightenment. O’Sensei said, “Everyone has a spirit that can be refined, a body that can be trained in some manner, a suitable path to follow. You are here to realize your inner divinity and manifest your innate enlightenment.” Let’s all do our best to continue to train faithfully and seek the place where we don’t think, but just practice . . . in everything we do.

Letter From the Editor *continued from page 1...*

Interestingly enough, my limitations — once things I simply tried to conquer — have become opportunities for exploration, which unfold my understanding of who I am. I guess that’s what Aikido has taught me thus far: it has given me a better sense of who I am and, just as you can tell everything you need to know about someone from the way they do Aikido, you can tell even more about yourself from the way *you* do Aikido.

There’s a song from a band I like which contains a lyric that has run constantly through my head in recent weeks:

*Failure
Is always the best way to learn
Retracing your steps til you know
Have no fear
Your wounds will heal*

Initially I believed the persistent echo of these words in my head amounted to little more than morbid anticipation of the test. Now I think that perhaps I’ve begun to process for the first time how

I’ve managed to develop in Aikido. My failures have guided me towards becoming stronger and wiser. I fail a little every day, but every failure has lead me closer towards success, whether in my job or my life or on the mat. More than ever, I appreciate how much of a process this test is, rather than a mere goal. I will likely fall short during the ordeal, but I imagine that by doing my best after all the hours of hard training will in some way help me reach the next level in my training, the level Sensei would call *the beginning*.

I want to thank Leonard Manoukian and Lucas Cyril Plouviez, my fellow shodan candidates, and our collective *uke* Jason Markowski for all his hard work to help each of us succeed. I want to thank Ito Sensei for creating an environment where we could give this test the attention it deserves. And special thanks to all of my fellow students, junior and senior, who make me better every day by example and joyful, vibrant practice. I also hope that wherever he is, Sensei looks down on our test and enjoys the effort we will give, if not the product. In many ways, I think the three of us do this for him as much as for ourselves, and I wouldn’t have it any other way.



Our Neighbors, Our Food

by Maria Murakawa, Aikido 2nd Dan

Strawberry Cones

Pizza Makes Its Way to the New World . . . in a New Way

It used to be that eating Japanese pizza was something you would unwittingly stumble upon in Japan at a cute cafe serving ice cream parfaits and hot dogs. It was an oddity, an eccentric dish not to be attempted by a visitor, unless that visitor wanted a bland disk of dough spread with a half-hearted version of tomato sauce (most likely ketchup), suboptimal and strange cheese, and canned, tired mushrooms.

Cut to Los Angeles, 2010: Enter **Strawberry Cones**, which claims to be the “World’s best pizza since 1993 in Japan”, with a trademark logo that looks decidedly like the Domino’s sign, all red, white, and blue. Ordering my first pizza at their little kiosk in the Little Tokyo Shopping Center, I felt anxious; this stuff could be really bad or at best moderately passable. Nonetheless I felt quite excited to try their Ninja pizza, about which I’d heard a lot.

Luckily the experience exceeded my expectations. The standout was the Margherita, a simple pie with tomatoes, basil, garlic, and mozzarella and romano cheeses: one bite brought me back to the checca sauce made by an Italian friend, and the rice flour crust made for a substantial heartiness to the light, summery flavors. The Teriyaki Mochi Chicken pizza, also on the rice flour crust, is the Japanese version of the BBQ chicken pizza so popular in America today. Using chicken and mochi, glazed with teriyaki sauce, and topped with mayonnaise and seaweed, this is a Japanese pizza with an Italian accent, mochi and romano cheese stretching in harmony together. Then, lurking out of the shadows of the oven (which is actually in the Beard Papas store across the way, where everything is baked to order), the Ninja pizza appears: the crust is as black as the Ninja’s garb, made from the use of charred Japanese bamboo called *mousouchiku* – apparently it absorbs impurities and is good for the body. But the mystery ends there as the crust actually tastes quite similar to the rice flour crust, and the toppings are tame in comparison, using no meat. The Pizza Maiko Ninja pizza has the benefits of several flavors in one, tomatoes on one side and vegetables with four different cheeses on the other. If you want to try four flavors at once, there is the Four Seasons Pizza, with Winter versions and Spring versions. Yes, the Japanese are proud of their seasons, and now they have a pizza to be proud of as well. I would urge those of you ready to wander off the beaten pizza path to give this place a try.



Margherita Pizza



Maiko Pizza



Teriyaki Mochi Pizza

Strawberry Cones

(Across from Beard Papas on the 1st floor)

333 S. Alameda St. #106

Los Angeles, CA 90013

213-620-0028

<http://www.strawberrycones.ca/>

(Canadian website)

<http://www.strawberrycones.com/en/>

(Japanese website)

Training Beyond the Plateau

by Steven Shaw, Aikido 2nd Dan, Iaido 3rd Dan



Real geniuses appear few and far between. As a teacher, I see the growth of around 150 students every year, and of that 150 there might be seven that are really great, but I have yet to see a genius. Granted, my students are between the ages of 12

and 14 and outside of rarities like Mozart, we don't look to that age for genius. Even Mozart, though, had daily practice; he played on musical instruments early and began his instruction at four, and by age five was composing little pieces.

I am no Mozart. I have never met a Mozart, though I remember seeing some talented kids with skateboards that dashed my hope of ever being good at that sport. Sensei was no Mozart, and if *A Life in Aikido* gives any indication, O'Sensei wasn't a Mozart either, yet I consider both men to possess genius. Eventually, through hard work and preparation, genius can be developed, and these teachers did it.

Many books have been written on the creative process, and those who discuss genius classify it into two types: the Mozart type, who is incredibly gifted with talent and almost whimsically employs it to fulfill desire in the moment, and the slow plodder who achieves a sustaining genius through hard work propelled by per-

sistent desire. Aikido seems a path tailor-made for the latter type of genius: the daily practice and consistent work eventually allows Aikido practitioners the development of what an outsider might call a sense of timing or an incredibly strong skill base. We can guess, for example, at the amount of work it took to achieve a glimmer of effortlessness so apparent in the art of the Founder.

Recently, due to injury, I found myself watching a lot of Aikido rather than training. I watched kyu tests, and classes, and black belt tests, and classes, and hours of training at a seminar. As I watched I violated one of my principles and gave in to awe. It was beautiful. Aikido is beautiful. The connection between humans and the harmony of movement struck me as being incredible, awesome. Yet, upon reflection, I realized that those who made my jaw drop with awe were the ones who had logged the most hours training. The genius unfolding wasn't Mozart; these people were not savants. They were slow plodders who over years of battling ego and maintaining a beginner's mind had achieved genius. It's easy to get to a point of thinking that we know how to do something, but the genius of these plodders is always finding things to learn, and their journey has become a relentless search. The moment we stop searching for answers is when we reach a plateau in our training. We become too busy enjoying the view, admiring how far we've come, instead of looking where we still have left to go. O'Sensei searched; he kept climbing, even after he had glimmers of insight. These glimmers fueled his enlightenment from *jutsu* to *do* after years of plodding.

I haven't had a moment of enlightenment yet. Maybe I'll never have one, but I will keep training. Perhaps, someday, a biography will be written about me and my moments of enlightenment, or my genius, but I'm not counting on it, nor is that my goal. I'll be long gone and forgotten, but the training will go on.

Kotowaza: Japanese Proverb

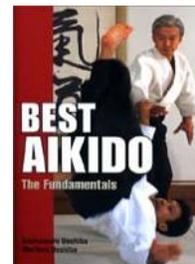
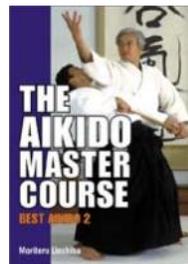
Dorobo Mo Junen

"It also takes a thief 10 years."

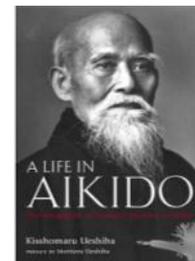
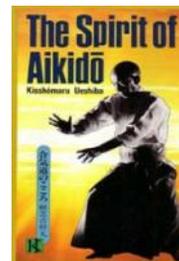


This means that even a thief must train for 10 years before he can call himself a thief. In traditional martial arts, it takes at least 10 years of diligent study to achieve basic mastery of a traditional art form. This saying is used as an admonishment to young people to pursue their vocations diligently no matter if they are thieves or doctors. In Japan, training is a privilege and not a right. Those who have the opportunity to do so do not undertake its pursuit lightly.

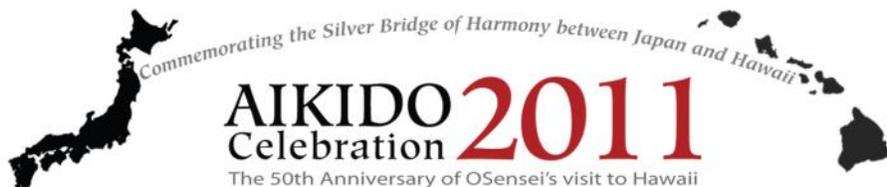
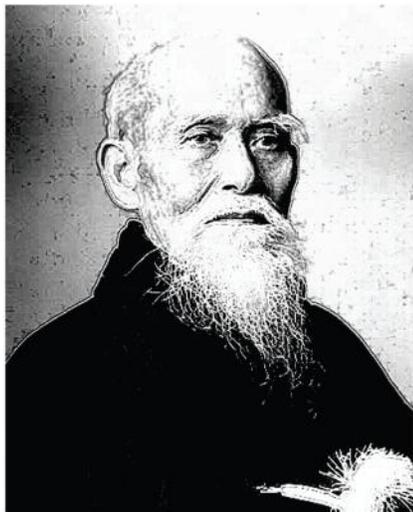
Recommended Readings:



by Ueshiba Moriteru



by Ueshiba Kisshomaru



Aikido Celebration 2011 is a public commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the first and only visit made to Hawaii by the founder of Aikido, O Sensei Morihei Ueshiba. A commemorative seminar and banquet with Sandai Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba, the grandson of Aikido founder Morihei Ueshiba, will be held in Hawaii.

February 18th -21st, 2011

Aikido Celebration 2011 is the collaborative effort of more than 20 Aikido dojo throughout the state of Hawaii. Would you or your organization like to participate in the commemoration of the Founder's visit to the United States?

We invite and appreciate the support of individuals and groups from both inside and outside Hawaii. Please join us.

www.aikidohawaii2011.org

Current Schedule (subject to change):

Friday February 18th: Evening rededication ceremony of Honolulu Aiki Dojo

Saturday February 19th: 4 classes (morning and afternoon)

Sunday February 20th: 4 classes (morning and afternoon)

Sunday February 20th: Banquet (evening)

Monday February 21st: 1 morning class with Doshu followed by demonstration

Registration is currently under way. Please sign up and support our friends in Hawaii. Visit their website for more information, registration forms, and payment details.



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

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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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Enabling Ourselves to Learn

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

The learning process in martial arts is very profound and I think has become something that we are not accustomed to today or a skill we have, in large part, forgotten. Unlike a typical classroom, sports gym, or health club, learning in martial arts is not limited to time, space, circumstances, or events; learning takes place every second of the day. One can say that in martial arts, learning takes place even when we are sleeping, not just during our waking hours. It has nothing to do with when our eyes or open or shut.

Learning, practicing, reflection, review, further refinement, testing in practice again and again, trying to penetrate to a deeper level or higher meaning of what we are doing, constant and endless refinement and further refinement: this is martial arts practice. At the same time, the martial arts are not simply acquiring physical skill or strength; there is the requirement that we also gear all our effort or training towards developing our character and spiritual side. This has nothing to do with subscribing to any particular religion, but rather with attaining a more profound attunement to Nature and the

world at large – meaning that we cultivate a greater sense of the oneness or harmony of the world. This attunement is also not imagination or fantasy or willful thinking or dreaming, but the actual attainment of an acute sensitivity to everything going on



“The martial arts are not simply acquiring physical skill or strength; there is the requirement that we also gear all our effort or training towards developing our character and spiritual side.”

around us. Finally, acquiring this sensitivity takes us one tiny step towards wisdom or enlightenment – but even this has nothing to do with cultivating money, power, or success, nothing to do with winning or losing, and nothing to do with being weak or strong. It is the process of life itself that we are trying to penetrate: in this effort there is purity.

With this purity comes what? You will discover that for yourself through your own

training the answer to that question; it is something that no other person but you can name. Yet such a process feels difficult for us nowadays because we have become so goal-oriented or obsessed with success and money. Of course, every human being wants money and success, even me. But we must understand that we have to decide at what level we are going to live our lives.

Nowadays, martial arts is becoming more and more violent, not so much because it is an effective means; it is simply more entertaining to spectators and we can make a lot of money in the entertainment world. This predilection for entertaining through violence may signal the end of martial arts if

we are not careful. True martial arts herald the “end” of violence, they never glorify it. It is to this

degree that we have molested the martial arts. Please continue to devote yourselves to your correct training.

Furuya’s Law: Incorrect and faulty teaching leads to arrogance. Correct teaching leads to further learning.

Editor’s note: Sensei originally posted this article in slightly different form, to the ACLA Daily Message board on March 15, 2001.



AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES AFFILIATED DOJOS

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Aikido Kodokai

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www.kodokai.com

Mexico

Veracruz Aikikai

Veracruz, Mexico

Chief Instructors:

Dr. Jose Roberto Magallanes Molina

Dr. Alvaro Rodolfo Hernandez Meza

www.veracruz-aikikai.com

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Aikido Renbukai of Arizona

Surprise, Arizona

Chief Instructor: Michael Van Ruth

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 Open

Wednesdays

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

6:30 AM Instructor's Intensive: last Saturday of the month.*

* These classes are not open for visitors to watch.

We are directly affiliated with:
AIKIDO WORLD HEADQUARTERS

Aikido So-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 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.



Iaido TRAINING SCHEDULE

TRADITIONAL JAPANESE IAIDO SWORDSMANSHIP

Saturdays

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

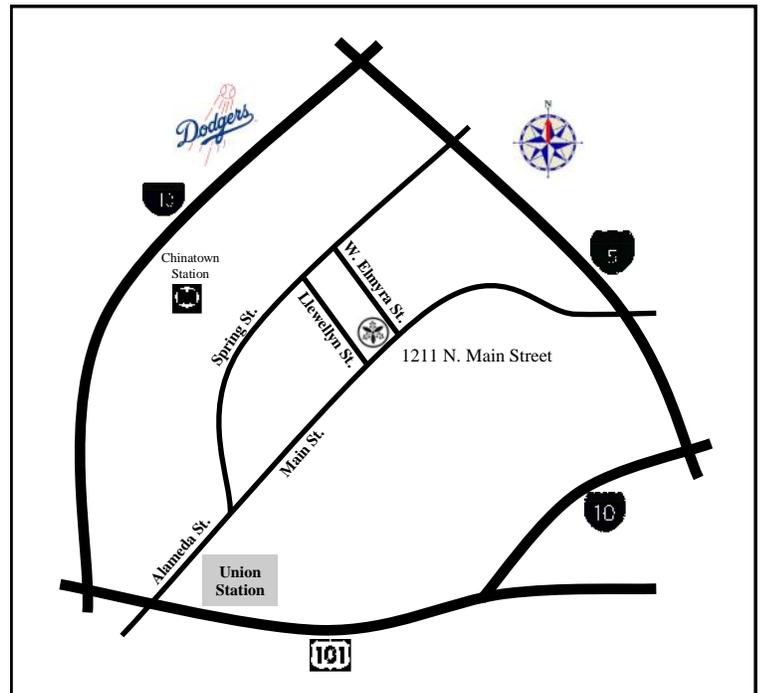
Sundays

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.