

The Aikido Center of Los Angeles



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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

Warm summer weather continues on, even though for many of us, family and friends have returned to school days and homework. A few lucky ones still have some vacation plans in the works, as we eke out some last, lazy days before the longer nights grow cooler and the holidays loom larger on the horizon. At ACLA, we've stayed the course and keep training – or some of us do.

This issue, *The Aiki Dojo* contributors focus on a recent event where we conducted a demonstration in the Little Tokyo community and consider lessons learned as well as the lessons we need to learn still. Ito Sensei reminisces on his first demonstration experience and draws parallels between training and life, where every situation, properly viewed, gives us an opportunity to improve. Watanabe Sensei implores us who have chosen to take things easy over the last few months to refocus on our training by analyzing where we showed room for improvement at the Nisei

Week Demonstration (read: sloppiness) and how to see real progress in our training, we need to apply ourselves consistently, not just when we have a demonstration or a test or a desire to compress our schedule. And as we always do, we have Sensei pay us a visit from the archives to remind us that the power of Aikido techniques come from proper form, which stems solely from applying proper attention and concentration when observing the teacher and executing the technique, rather than exercising brute force or relying on speed to cover our openings and mistakes. As a bonus, we share some wonderful news celebrated by members of the ACLA family, which we hope will bring a smile to our readers' faces. I found a lot to contemplate and internalize in this month's issue, and I think you'll find it well worth your careful reading and reflection. This effort could lead to your next breakthrough in practice!

Finally, permit me to add my own words of thanks to Ito Sensei's and Watanabe Sensei's, extended to everyone who came out to support the demonstration. Keep up your training. Until next time, I'll see you on the mat!

Upcoming Events

September 1st
Dojo Closed
Labor Day

September 27th
Instructor's intensive

October 25th
Instructor's intensive

October 26th
Children's Class Halloween Party

November 27-29th
Dojo Closed
Thanksgiving

December 6th:
Dojo Christmas Party

What Demonstrations Teach

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

A few weeks ago ACLA participated in the annual Nisei Week festivities by demonstrating Aikido and Iaido. Sensei first gave a Nisei Week demonstration in 1979. Our dojo has not demonstrated publicly for some time, not because we didn't want to, but usually because the timing didn't work out. This year was no different but, even though I was away, I thought it would help our training and so we accepted an invitation to demonstrate, because I believe that demonstrations offer one of the best training tools for students at any level.

When I was a student, every summer we would demonstrate at least once a month; sometimes we would demonstrate every weekend, and sometimes as often as two or three times a day. I first demonstrated during the Obon festival at Zenshuji when I took Ishmael Arajuo's *ukemi* in 1991. It was one of those things that just happened: I showed up to give out flyers and Ishmael needed an *uke* and at the last minute I was ordered to take his *ukemi*. It was probably better this way because had they asked me earlier I would have pined over it all night and showed up a nervous wreck. So the "Hey I need you to take his *ukemi* and you're going up next" approach kind of worked out in my favor because I had no time to think.

Our demonstration went fine and from that point forward I was volunteered to demonstrate (I say that I was volunteered because nobody asked me but it was now expected of me). I used to get so nervous before the demonstrations, but a funny thing happened after a few years of doing demonstrations – I started to hate them. I find this funny because I stopped dreading them and found them more of an inconvenience or a burden than something frightening. Somewhere along the way I lost my anxiety, which brought me to a place where one day I stopped preparing or even stretching before the demonstrations and just went on cold. When I realized my change in attitude I felt very happy because prior to that moment I would have never had the courage to volunteer to do anything in front of a crowd, let alone demonstrate Aikido with everyone from the dojo.

Everything that happens to us gives us fodder to help us change our lives for the better. Demonstrations serve as a great tool to gauge our development and training quality, as well our level of ability. This is the same thing Sensei told me that he used demonstrations for as well. Something about the anxiety or fear that demonstrations bring about also helps us uncover things about ourselves. Demonstrations reveal some good things, but they also uncover some areas where we need to improve.

If we have the eyes for it, demonstrations can help us see some good things about ourselves. The thing I love to see in students who demonstrate for the first time is the surprise on their faces when it is over. I hope that the surprise comes because they discover something about themselves. I remember how one year we coaxed this third *kyu* white belt student into demonstrating. He looked so scared but at the end he felt so happy that he thanked us for getting him to do it. Did he uncover some courage, determina-

tion, or some lost sense of self-esteem that he didn't know he had before, or was he just happy to be alive? I hope it amounted to a little bit of all of those things. For first timers, I imagine that they discover that they aren't as bad at Aikido as they thought and realize they know more than they thought they knew.

After we get a few demonstrations under our belts, we start to see things that we want to improve upon, not only technically but emotionally and mentally as well. For instance, I used to have longer hair with bangs right around the time I passed my *shodan* exam. That same year Sensei made the *Art of Aikido* video series and wanted me to appear in the *shodan* exam portion. My bangs had grown quite long and whenever I demonstrated I kept swiping them back into place after every technique. My demonstrations of Aikido went fine, but my hair swiping became so distracting that Sensei had to re-shoot that entire portion. This hair brushing habit became so ingrained that I didn't even know I was doing it, so I cut my bangs off so that I could improve my technique and demonstration ability. There was also this time when I became so completely obsessed with having a perfect demonstration that I used to get extremely angry at my *uke* whenever I screwed up. When I realized this one day when Sensei got mad at me, I relaxed my standards and focused less on perfection of the technique and more on perfecting my mind and inner state of calm.

We can also learn from other people's mistakes. I remember that one year this sister and brother who were both black belts demonstrated together and the brother did *koshi-nage* (or hip throw) on his sister. The problem wasn't that they did *koshi-nage* but that they didn't practice it beforehand and it showed when the brother went to do the technique and fell over. Afterwards, Sensei rebuked him and said, "Never do anything in a demonstration you don't do regularly in class, and the techniques should be orthodox and straightforward." From that point forward, I tried never to do anything fancy or unique that I didn't practice beforehand.

Don't think of the demonstration in terms of good or bad, but in terms of what we can do better next time. Demonstrations do nothing more than shine a light on what we can do well and where we can improve. In Aikido we don't have competitions or tournaments, so the demonstration becomes the only competition type stressor or thing that we have that still stays in line with O Sensei's *masakatsu agatsu*, where the only opponent worth beating is ourselves. As we step on the mat to demonstrate, we confront the reality of who we are and what we can do in that present moment, which yields all sorts of information. When we step on the path towards improving ourselves we sometimes need things to push us through or over our own personal obstacles. When we get over obstacles this usually becomes the place where we find the biggest breakthroughs in not only our training, but in our life as well. For me, I love challenging myself; I love pushing myself to the edge and looking over it to see the person that I really am, and for me demonstrations serve as one of the ways of doing just that.

I feel very glad and appreciative that so many people came out to support the dojo at the demonstration and I hope we all learned something about ourselves too. Please let's make sure to continue to practice regularly and apply what we learned in our training.

Mastery is the New Normal

by Ken Watanabe, Iaido Chief Instructor

Many years ago, Sensei told me a story about a student who declared that he was changing his training schedule to only one day a week; however, on his one day of practice he would attend every single class, both morning classes and evening classes. Following that student's example, I'm going to warn all of my readers that I'm planning to brush my teeth only once a week on Sundays, but don't worry: I'll brush them extra diligently and make sure they are clean enough for the rest of the week.

What does practicing martial arts have to do with brushing our teeth? Both seem to have absolutely nothing in common with each other; one deals with personal hygiene and common decency while the other deals with self-defense and staying alive. Yet, in the Eastern tradition of training, a mundane activity like brushing teeth has everything to do with training in the dojo.

The similarity between these two activities is the importance of consistency. Both brushing our teeth and practicing in the dojo require consistent attention in order to reap any benefit. As tedious as both may seem, both are important. In traditional Japanese training, we do not reserve practice for special occasions, but like brushing our teeth, we make it a necessary part of our daily regimen. When training becomes irregular or sporadic our lack of practice shows. Like brushing our teeth or taking a shower, nobody compliments us for doing it, yet it becomes obviously unpleasant when we neglect to do it.

Until our mind and body become accustomed to the art we are studying, we can very easily regress in our level. Ito Sensei always reminds us that these skills are perishable. Many of these skills, without constant reinforcement, get easily lost and never become a natural part of ourselves.

An example of this regression we can see from last month's demonstration at the JACCC. Many things that normally seem second nature, under the stress of demonstrating, became forgotten in the heat of the moment. Basics like walking onto the mat properly and bowing in unison we either forgot or did sloppily. The resulting lack of caring and focus from sporadic practice became evident during the demonstration. One does not need years of training to see how sloppy a simple thing like bowing to enter the mat and bowing together appeared. One does not need to be an expert to see the lack of energy and focus in our demonstration.

It's easy to see the results of students who practice without the proper focus by the way they bow, clean up, walk in the dojo, or enter the mat, not to mention the careless, sloppy way some students practice the technique in class. If we fail to exercise care and focus during practice, the skills and basics taught in class will

be difficult to call upon when we need them; if our training is sporadic in the first place, well then, it will be impossible.

Regular practice enforces the proper foundation in the basics allowing us to show the art properly in spite of ourselves, both on and off the mat. Demonstrating energetic techniques that are full of meaning rather than a collection of dull, mindless, empty movements as well as conducting ourselves in a manner befitting well trained martial artists will come only from proper, regular and consistent practice. Good students practice to make the proper technique the norm rather than the exception and without regular practice, the goal of having the art become part of our everyday, natural self will become impossible.

In Japan, a common way to scold a student goes *shugyo ga tari-nai*; that is, "not enough training". It is to this extent that the importance of daily practice is ingrained into the Eastern method of training. In short, in the Eastern tradition, when studying any of the traditional arts, practice affects everything. Practice *is* everything.



It's said that there might one day come people after O Sensei possessing more talent and genius, but nobody will ever practice as much as O Sensei practiced. I'm not saying that everyone should be like O Sensei and practice 24 hours a day. I'm not even forcing anyone to attend every class; in contemporary society that's impractical and the sacrifices one must endure are too much. Yet, the way some students regard training, it's as if I practiced guitar by watching YouTube

clips and reading a few blog articles and proudly thinking "Yeah, of course I play!" – basically doing everything short of actually picking up and practicing on a guitar. I know it sounds ridiculous and unreasonable, but some students remind me of this. With this kind of spirit, without care and love for the practice itself, progress will never come.

As busy as I know everyone is, it's impossible to overemphasize the importance of regular practice with the correct attitude. For masters like O Sensei, he practiced so much that he became the art and the art became him; the two were indistinguishable. Whatever O Sensei did – walking, eating, writing calligraphy – was Aikido. Even at the end of his life, O Sensei claimed to be just a baby in Aikido, humbly implying that there was more to this art despite countless hours of practice – and he was the one who invented it! When I compare O Sensei's or my own teacher's attitude toward practice to my own or to our students, there seems no comparison. In practice, our lofty goal is to make the art become our everyday self and our everyday self become the art.

In Zen they say that in practice, students meditate by assuming the posture and breathing of the Buddha when he attained enlightenment; that is, during practice, in copying the Buddha we become him. Who do YOU try to copy during practice – that is, if you come to class all?



Nisei Week Demonstration at the JACCC by Ken Watanabe, Iaido Chief Instructor

I would like to thank everyone who took the time to help out with the Aikido and Iaido demonstration at JACCC for Little Tokyo's Nisei Week on August 10th. Everyone worked hard to insure the demonstration went smoothly. Without your support, it would be almost impossible for the dojo to give these demonstrations.

Overall, the demonstration came out "okay". It went better than expected, but it did not have the edge that a martial arts demonstration requires, both in the planning and in the execution. Yes, it's the first time many students demonstrated in public, and certain mistakes can be forgiven for those who have never demonstrated in public before, but if anything, the demonstration showed what happens from lack of regular practice. When I say "practice" I'm not only talking about prepping for the demonstration itself, but regular, daily practice with the proper attitude and concentration. Aspects highlighting training and small things that we normally consider second nature, were done sloppily and without the kind of care befitting a martial art.

Basics like bowing before getting onto the mat and bowing to each other – parts of training that we try to ingrain into our mentality – were done in a cursory manner, without that edge (the sense of purpose and understanding) a martial artist ideally possesses. Whether it's due to nervousness, neglect, or complacency, there is no excuse for such sloppiness. Martial arts begins and ends with proper *reigi saho* (etiquette) and if we cannot even demonstrate this most basic characteristic, then everything in between becomes meaningless, only proving that we need a lot more training.

During the weeks leading up to the demonstration, we usually practice a little more intensely preparing for the demonstration,

but in this instance, there seemed to be no change in the usual complacent manner of practice; that is, if we showed up for practice at all. Particularly for many of the intermediate and advanced students, I thought, "These guys must be really confident!" The attitude of some of the students I can only interpret as either a complete lack of care, or an incredibly self-satisfied feeling regarding their own level. The lack of practice became evident in the way the most of the students took *ukemi* and executed the techniques.

Often, we do not realize how much of our training gets revealed in everyday simple acts seemingly unrelated to practice or martial arts. It's important to remember proper protocol so miscommunications do not create misunderstandings. Demonstrating Aikido and Iaido for the public poses a difficult enough challenge to the dojo without adding unnecessary burdens like mental clutter and confusion. Whether planning logistics, helping out with flyers, or demonstrating, we must try to maintain the mental stance of a martial artist and all that such a stance implies.



For these demonstrations and for our own training, we have to work together. When O Sensei created Aikido, he purposely designed it so it became all but impossible to go off and train alone. Aikido's design requires that we can only make progress by working together with our partner, giving and taking, in a natural manner.

Please realize that the demonstrations are very important to ACLA. Like most training in the dojo, demonstrations seem a thankless task, the benefits of which we do not immediately perceive. These demonstrations not only help to publicize the dojo and allow us to show the public both Aikido and Iaido, but also serve as an excellent way to determine the level of our training. Regardless of our role, whether we demonstrate on the stage or just provide support, the level of training – the care and attention given to the task at hand – reflects the efforts we put into our own practice.



ANNOUNCING

Sara Mitsuyo Ito

Born August 25, 2014
Weighing 5 pounds, 10.8 ounces and 19.25 inches long



Members of the ACLA:

Thank you for all your kind wishes and support. Katy, Michael, Sara, and I really appreciate it. Also, a special thanks goes out to Mark Ehrlich who helped our family out during this stressful time. I also wanted to thank everyone who helped out at the dojo while I was away.

David Ito

Congratulations!

Shaun Menashe, *MTOM*

Shaun graduated from Emperor's College with a Master's degree in Traditional Oriental Medicine



Hello! Exploring the Supercute World of Hello Kitty

October 11, 2014 - April 26, 2015



The Japanese American National Museum and Sanrio present *Hello! Exploring the Supercute World of Hello Kitty*, the world's first large-scale Hello Kitty museum retrospective.

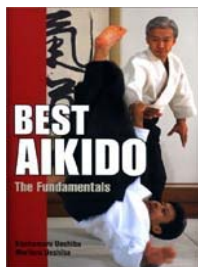
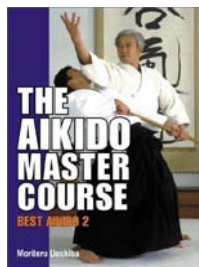
Organized as part of the global icon's 40th-anniversary celebrations, the exhibition examines the colorful history of Hello Kitty and her influence on popular culture. *Hello!* includes an extensive product survey, with rare and unique items from the Sanrio archives, alongside a selection of innovative contemporary artworks inspired by Hello Kitty and her world.

Hello!, the first exhibition of its kind in the world, is curated by Christine Yano, Ph.D., author of *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek Across the Pacific*, and Jamie Rivadeneira, founder and owner of pop culture-inspired boutique JapanLA.

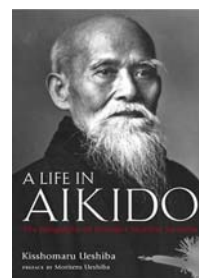
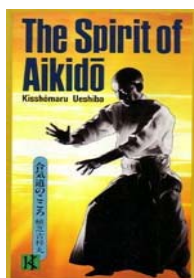
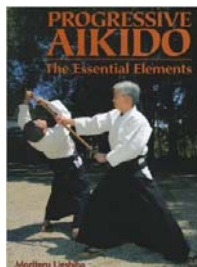
Hello! Exploring the Supercute World of Hello Kitty will be a specially ticketed exhibition. Tickets are \$20 for adults, \$10 for ages 6-17, free for ages 5 and under. All admissions based on timed entry. Obtaining tickets in advance is strongly encouraged. Tickets on sale September 29, 2014.

For more information: <http://www.janm.org/exhibits/hellokitty/>

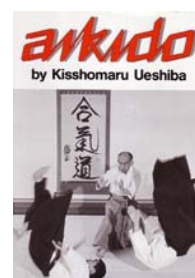
Recommended Readings:



by Ueshiba Moriteru



by Ueshiba Kisshomaru



The Fullness of Power

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

I know many students have become a little frustrated because the techniques lately seem so difficult in class. Yes, I know this. I am not teaching them because they are particularly difficult or to give anyone a bad time; I think it is the kind of training we need at the moment. Most students have progressed very well in the fundamentals and we do need to keep up this training. At the moment, we are training in the finer aspects of timing.

I notice that many of us still move as a “reaction” to our opponent’s attack. We do not create “original” movement, we move as a secondary reaction; however, this type of movement is very weak in martial arts.

As our opponent moves towards us in the attack and even before she begins her attack, we should already be moving with her, projecting our hand or fist towards her as in *atemi*. It is important for clean execution of the Aikido technique that our opponent moves into our sphere of movement, not necessarily that we simply react to his movement. In other martial arts, this is called *sen*, or “initiative,” but this is not exactly the right translation either. I think more closely, initiative in the sense of “before” or “first” (but not aggressively, more “positively”). In my own personal experience it feels like I “fill up” all the space between me and my opponent with my own energy or power. This is only how I look at it personally.

Although Aikido movement has a sense of “yielding” in our sense or interpretation of “blending” with the opponent, it is definitely not “surrendering” but, on the contrary, it is very “positive”. When I evaluate my own technique and that of my students, I look at it from the standpoint of the “fullness (or projection) of power”, as opposed to “dead” or “empty” power.

As a simple example, in *iriminage* or *tenchinage*, in the ending form as students prepare to throw, I notice that, many times, their lower hands remain “empty” or without any energy or consciousness, with many putting too much power or “emphasis” into the upper hand which they think of as the hand that throws. In both cases, we should feel a strong “projection” of energy throughout both of our hands with the center of balance strongly focused in

our center.

In another example, it is common in *shihonage* (again in the ending form as we prepare to throw) for us oftentimes to leave too much weight distributed on the back foot, not on the front lead foot, where we actually need it. We often lose this sense of the “fullness” of power or proper extension of the circle as we pivot. In other words, during the pivot or, more correctly, as we move to the other side of our opponent’s arm in *shihonage*, we often collapse our own arms, which causes us to shift our weight to the rear or back foot. This is not strong or well-postured *shihonage*. Often, our center of gravity slips down into our rear-ends as a result, not out our centers, where it should be. I find this kind of collapsing arm *shihonage* not effective in the long run in training.



O Sensei performing atemi from the seated position

In *kokyu-dosa* as well, many of us leave our arms collapsed or weak until our partner grabs both of them. Ideally, before our partner or *uke* even grabs our arms or hands, we have properly and fully extended them with energy. I think that it is very easy to see in this instance.

Part of these problems find their roots in our desire to create very small, tight movements from the beginning. I believe that Aikido can effectively deliver techniques in smaller movements at a later stage. I feel that beginning students must create big, full, positive movements in the beginning of their training in order to generate power. Once we understand how to create power in the movements, we can then proceed to study how to concentrate each movement.

In *tenkan kokyu-ho*, we create our movement before our opponent grabs, even before we begin our movement. As our partner begins to grab our hand, we have already established proper *ma-ai* or spacing (another point we need much more work on) and thus proper extension or “fullness” of power already exist in our hand and body as he makes contact.

This stuff is very hard to write about, so let’s practice this more and more on the mats. Come to class often!

Editor’s Note: Sensei originally published this article, in slightly

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 Advanced*

6:30 AM Instructor's Intensive:

last Saturday of the month by invitation only.*

* These classes are not open for visitors to watch.

Iaido TRAINING SCHEDULE

TRADITIONAL JAPANESE IAIDO SWORDSMANSHIP

Saturdays

8:00-9:00 AM

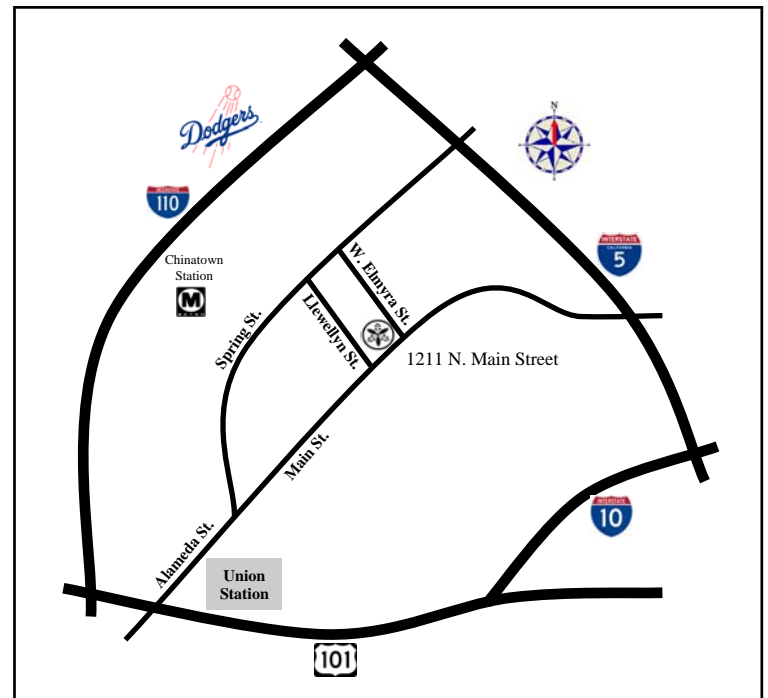
Sundays

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.

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



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.