



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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O'Sensei

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Ito Sensei discusses what makes O'Sensei a great teacher.

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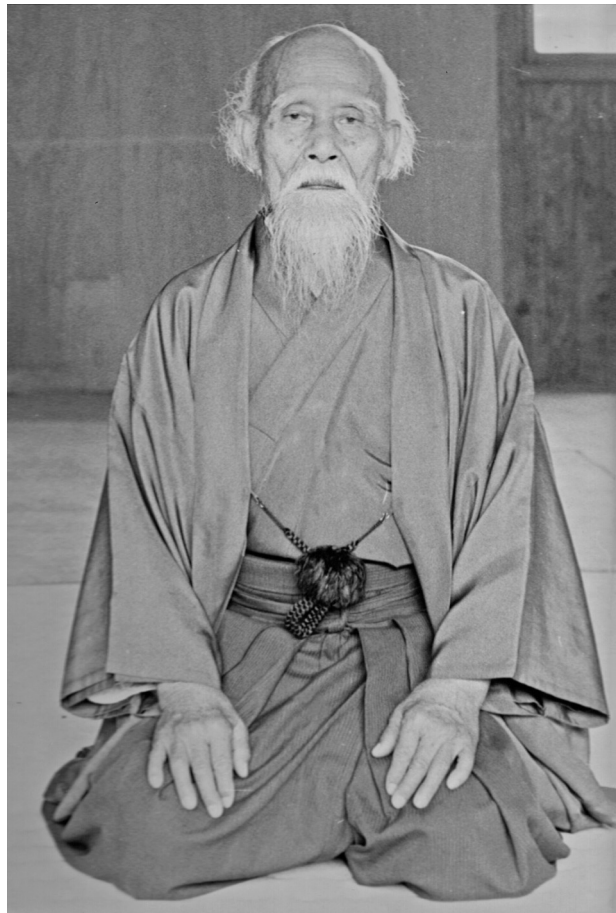
Almaraz Sensei explains how Aikido brings order to chaos.

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The Gift of Life

by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Furuya Sensei illustrates how we should honor our lives.



Morihei Ueshiba
1883 – 1969

This month, we remember O'Sensei on the 55th year since his passing.

Nowadays, as I look around, there are hundreds if not thousands of *senseis* in Aikido, but there are very few that I would consider actual *senseis*. Most people, regardless of the title, are just instructors. As I look around at my contemporaries, it makes me wonder, "What does it mean to be a good teacher?"

Perhaps it helps to define the word teacher, as teacher simply means "one who teaches." According to an academic paper, "The professor is the highest academic title, the teacher has a professional master's degree, the instructor is a university position." In Japanese traditional training, teacher or *sensei* is considered the highest level. A professor is more of an academic position that usually only exists within formal academia. On a certain level, martial arts training is not considered formal academia and so the title of "professor" doesn't usually exist in traditional martial arts training.

In the west, the title of "sensei" has become a bit of a catch-all used in reference to all teachers and instructors regardless of rank, experience, or ability. For Aikido or other traditional martial arts, the first level of pedagogical training is "assistant instructor" or *fukushidojin* (副指導員). An assistant instructor is a person with very little experience and is someone with a low level of technical skill and who is supporting instructors or *senseis* while they are gaining experience. An "instructor" or *shidojin* (指導員) is someone who has a certain level of physical mastery but doesn't have rank or the maturity or the experience to be a *sensei*. An instructor teaches under the auspices of a *sensei* in order to improve their skills and deepen their understanding of the art. An instructor also may or may not be on the road to becoming a *sensei*. Teaching titles like *Shihan* notwithstanding, *sensei* is the highest level of teaching, and that person is someone who embodies the art physically, mentally, and spiritually. In addition, with each position or title there is an implication of a certain level of authority and responsibility associated with the rank and not just one's technical or teaching skill.

When trying to understand "What it means to be a teacher?" these definitions help to clarify the hierarchy within teaching but may not help to understand the deeper meaning of what it means to be a teacher.

The other day, I read this quote by O'Sensei: "One should be prepared to receive 99% of an enemy's attack and stare death right in the face in order to illumine the Path." This quote is from the book *The Art of Peace* by O'Sensei and translated by John Stevens Sensei. I know firsthand that Stevens Sensei took some "liberties" while translating O'Sensei's teachings, but I found the usage of the word illumine to be interesting. Illumine means to "brighten," but it can also mean "to enlighten (someone) spiritually or intellectually."

Because of the usage of the word illumine, when I first read

O'Sensei's quote, it reminded me of something that Furuya Sensei wrote, "Many of us would gladly give up our lives for our students in order for the student to obtain their enlightenment." (This quote appears in this month's article by Furuya Sensei.) Therefore, at first blush, I thought that O'Sensei's quote was about teaching. Not until I read it again later did it even dawn on me that O'Sensei mentioned the words "attack" or "death."



O'Sensei



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

The other day when I was practicing calligraphy with my teacher Yoshida Kuniharu, he said, "Having a teacher is the ultimate short cut." What he meant was that learning is a singular pursuit where we ultimately teach ourselves. Teachers cannot force us to learn, they can only take us to the precipice of learning or realization. We have to be willing to jump off and learn and thus by applying ourselves we gain experience and learn. Teachers may teach us, but they are really just guides pointing us in the right direction. The best teachers do not stand above us from an exalted position expounding on how to be better. The best teachers stand next to us, point us in the right direction and whisper in our ear. By having a teacher, we benefit when they shed light onto the pitfalls and show us the best way around them including, hopefully, a faster way up the mountain.

Morihei Ueshiba is often referred to as O'Sensei. Depending on how one writes "O'Sensei" (大先生/翁先生), it can mean "great teacher" or "honorable teacher." Furuya Sensei would often say that Morihei Ueshiba wasn't just called O'Sensei out of respect for creating Aikido but that he was O'Sensei because he created so many great teachers.

The word *sensei* (先生) means "teacher," but it literally translates as "one who comes before." The study of the martial arts is thought to be a *do* (道) or "way." So the usage of "before" connotes that the teacher and the student are on the same path, but that the teacher is just slightly ahead of the student and thus the teacher is brightening the path for the student. Perhaps that is why illumine made me think about teaching.

A person isn't necessarily great because they do great things. A person's true greatness is in their ability to make those around them great too - they "enlighten" us. William Arthur Ward once said, "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires." Morihei Ueshiba is not O'Sensei because he created Aikido and he is also not O'Sensei because he was physically talented. Morihei Ueshiba is O'Sensei because he has inspired so many people. Today, Morihei Ueshiba has been gone from this Earth for over 50 years yet his teachings live on and inspire generation after generation. That is why Morihei Ueshiba is O'Sensei.

Today, I still don't know what it means to be a good teacher. When I look around, I see so many people not living the Way. However, I try not to be disheartened by the people around me because, after all, they are on their own path just trying to figure it out too. I am inspired by O'Sensei every day to not only be stronger but to work harder inside and out. •

The samurai code emphasizes loyalty to one's master or one's family. During the early feudal era of Japan (1185-1603 CE), samurai and their lords were generally family members. Over time, samurais were hired for their sword skills, and it is said that during the Sengoku era or the Warring States period (1467-1615), it became quite common for a samurai to change clans. As we can see, the value of loyalty has evolved through the ages. In terms of loyalty, sometimes we must make some difficult choices to survive but what is the most important value for a relationship to last?

Originally, I came from a different dojo and was training under Larry Reynosa Sensei. In 2020, the pandemic forced people to close their businesses or to adapt to the restrictions. Unfortunately, the dojo where I trained in Ventura closed and all the members were scattered or retired from Aikido. It was a heart-breaking experience.

I didn't know what to do because I didn't want to be disrespectful to my sensei. However, on the other hand, after training seven days a week at the dojo and for so many years, I didn't want my training to go to waste.

I was also thinking that I would be disloyal to my sensei if I looked for another organization or if I created my own school. The situation was very difficult, but a decision needed to be made as soon as possible because there were still a few students who wanted to train. Fortunately, Reynosa Sensei, after announcing his retirement, gave me his blessings to start a dojo so my hesitance resolved naturally. He had taught me to never give up, no matter the challenge. The pandemic was my test and I needed to respond accordingly to that challenge.

Martial artists must adapt to their environment and to the conditions that have been created against their will. We must always move forward and we should never give up. The pandemic restrictions imposed by the local authorities allowed us to practice outdoors and the restrictions were minimal, so it was a relief, and I felt some comfort when I read the famous quote of by Morihei Ueshiba: "One does not need buildings, money, power, or status to practice the Art of Peace. Heaven is right where you are standing, and that is the place to train."



Loyalty



by **Alexandre Hillairet**
Chief Instructor, Ventura Aikido

mentioned during class and once a year a memorial service is held in his honor. David Ito Sensei's commitment to Aikido is contagious and his students' loyalty and his loyalty to his teacher's legacy is unconditional. I am not a samurai from the feudal era, but I believe that loyalty is a most valuable currency for a relationship to last.

I would like to thank the Aikikai Foundation for giving me this opportunity to meet Ito Sensei and join his organization, a referral that I will value for a very long time. I hope to live up to the samurai ethos of loyalty and teach it to my students as well. •

So my next steps in Aikido were to create a business model, a marketing plan and find an organization affiliated with the Aikikai foundation.

Sometime in 2021, I corresponded with the Aikikai foundation in Tokyo to obtain some recommendations and advice. I was referred to the Aikido Center of Los Angeles. I was not familiar with the dojo but I knew about Furuya Sensei, because I had read his book *Kodo: Ancient Ways* many years ago. I contacted David Ito Sensei, and I explained my situation and I started to meet and got to know each other. It took about one year from our first meeting to fully commit myself and join their organization. We both knew that it was going to take time to develop and cultivate a positive and healthy relationship.

Why did I join this organization? Over the year, I noticed that David Ito sensei and his team were fully committed to all the values that represented a martial arts school. All the students train hard, and everyone is also involved in the community. The dojo and the students donate their time to different events in Little Tokyo and for the local Zen temple. Once a year, there is also a street cleaning called Little Spar-

kle in Little Tokyo organized by another organization, and Ito Sensei makes sure that everyone shows the true meaning of being martial artists by working hard, and efficiently as a team. Teamwork, unity and the spirit of community always gets promoted at the dojo for all activities. Ito Sensei's leadership is inspirational.

Furuya Sensei, the founder of the Aikido Center of Los Angeles, passed away 16 years ago, but his presence is still felt at the dojo. His memory is kept alive by his former students, he is often



When watching an Aikido demonstration, one of the things people say is, “It looks fake,” or “It looks like the attacker is throwing themselves.” Why is Aikido like that? Isn’t it a martial art? So why not resist the technique? How do we know who is better? How do we know who is stronger?

It is true that in class, the *uke* or “the one attacking,” practices how to follow the technique that the *nage* or “the one defending,” is applying to the attacker. However, *ukemi* or the practice of attacking the being thrown or pinned is more than just throwing yourself for the other person.

Generally speaking, the reason why we take *ukemi* the way we do is that Aikido trains us how not to oppose the force of the attack, but to blend with it. This is one of the main reasons why the *uke* appears to move with the technique. It is from learning how to stay connected and follow the technique’s movement that the student learns to feel how the technique works. It is from keeping up with the technique that the student develops effective footwork. It is from maintaining the connection and allowing themselves to be thrown that the student learns how to throw.

For the sake of competition, if the student fought against the technique’s movement and resisted their partner, then in the most basic sense, the *uke* could win but from the standpoint of Aikido it is not correct Aikido practice. The only way for the student to develop themselves and truly understand Aikido is by following the technique.

If it is true that resisting the movement builds things like physical strength, then why can’t we resist and fight our partner’s technique? If we go with the throw, then how do we know if the technique works? If we allow ourselves to be thrown, then how do we know who wins? The simplest answer is that a true martial art transcends winning and losing; it is not a sport nor a competition. The ultimate goal is not to win but to learn and develop ourselves.

The complicated answer is the following: When we follow the *nage*’s movements, we are not simply throwing ourselves; we are following the *nage*’s movements so we can develop very important skills needed to do good and strong Aikido and wield it as an effective martial art.



by Ken Watanabe
Technical Director

The quintessential skill that we learn when we are following the technique during practice is how to read our opponent’s movements. When following the movements, we try not to lag too far behind nor do we try to predict what the throw will be. We train our mind and body to follow without ego.

At the same time that we learn how read our opponent, we train our feet to move so we can keep up with the technique and we try to keep the connection with our partner as the *nage* is practicing how to keep the connection with us. It is from becoming skillful in both following the *nage*’s movement and keeping the connection that we can begin to read their energy and match it. This is the simplest definition for “aiki.”

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It Does Look Fake, but it's not *continued from page 4...*

The practice of following the technique as we try to keep the connection is a big part of *ukemi*. When we become skillful at following the technique we learn how to position ourselves to be thrown or pinned safely. Moving with the technique teaches the basics of self defense. In a way, when we attack, our partner neutralizes our attack, unbalances us, and positions themselves to counter-attack with an Aikido technique.

When we move with the technique, what we are also trying to practice how to move with the technique so the *nage's* only option is to throw or pin us. For example, often when moving with the technique, we try to keep our centerline pointed away from the *nage*. If we moved any way we wanted to against the technique, that may render a particular throw or pin ineffective, but opens us up to multiple other attacks or techniques.

The idea of moving with the technique eliminates all the options the defender would have against us. Their only choice would be to do the throw. Furthermore, when we move to a position from where we can be thrown or pinned safely, the *nage* can practice the technique as energetically and powerful as they want without worrying about hurting us.

The skills we develop from being compliant with our partner can be applied to when it is our turn to throw or pin. When we are able to follow the *nage's* movement's skillfully, when we are the *nage* and the opponent attacks us, then we can naturally begin reading their movement, timing, and energy. We also start to see how our center connects with our opponent's center.

It is only by following the movement when we are taking *ukemi* that we can develop our Aikido into an effective martial art. To think of stopping our partner's technique or resisting their movements by being stiff is only to satisfying our ego. All we are developing by this kind of practice is how to be stiff and there is plenty of time to be stiff as we get older! There's really no time for this kind of practice since many of these basic skills take years to develop.

When we practice the *ukemi* correctly, it prepares us to be able to throw or pin anybody and compel them to follow our movements. In a way, it is true that we are "going with" the technique and yes, it is "fake." However, the reality is that all martial arts training is fake as the attack is pre-defined which renders it contrived. This is necessary so that one gets injured or is dead at the end of class!

Aikido is designed so that we can practice as hard as we can without unnecessarily injuring our partner. Although the *uke* can attack as powerfully as they please, following the movement actually protects them from the technique. Stopping and resisting only opens them up to attack or injury.

When the *uke* can attack effectively and follow the technique's movement, that is when the real martial arts aspect of Aikido comes out. It is something that is not obvious to the casual observer but can only be understood through diligent training that is done correctly and by developing the movement and energy in our practice until our attacker is thrown so effectively that, yes, it does look "fake." •

You don't have to be an expert in martial arts to watch a fight that appears on television or in the movies to know that those "martial arts" techniques are not real. Most of techniques that we see in these programs are choreographed and are designed so that the audience can see the action. The cinematographer gives us the best view to see each blow, each block and each spectacular move. Every move is studied so that the movie maker can demonstrate all the drama with more spectacle and visual intensity than could be achieved otherwise.

On the other hand, I think most of us know that, in reality, in a situation like a fight, the actions that take place are completely the opposite of what we see in a movie. In a real fight there is chaos, disorder and the "action" is completely the opposite of what we would normally expect on the basis of these situations.

In Aikido, the practitioners are supposed to "bring order to chaos." Aikido doesn't oppose chaos, but rather uses it for its own benefit. Our opponents are trying to cause discord and we counter that conflict by keeping ourselves in order by remaining calm and relying on our movement. Watanabe Sensei explains it as "Order in this sense means that we neutralize our opponent's attack with our movement."

When we see videos of O'Sensei or many of the Aikido masters of that time, we see a more dynamic Aikido and their movements are difficult to see. Today, for many, perhaps these old master's movements are a bit too chaotic or disordered for them to understand. I am sure that their movements are a response to their attacker's movements which are most likely unplanned and more instinctive. Their movements are a precise reaction to each attack of their opponents which simply flows. Today, most of us are trying to learn these movements and move like the old masters did.

I believe that the movements in Aikido are one of the most important and most complicated parts when it comes to executing the techniques. The movements determine our positioning and spacing, thus placing us in a suitable position to perform the technique correctly. These factors help us to create the dynamic movements to execute the techniques with efficiency and power.

Understanding this, the *kihon-waza* or basic movements like *irimi*, *tenkan*, and *tenshin* should be a priority in classes for at least the first 10 years of one's practice. These movements have to be created with the lower body and feet. I think that the problem with Aikido as practiced today is that it focuses a lot on creating the technique with the hands and especially the upper part

of our body or "what is seen." Doing Aikido this way neglects the movements of what is "less seen."

When I was a student under Furuya Sensei more than two decades ago, I can remember that he wore his *hakama* very low. When I asked Sensei about this, he said that he did this to hide his footwork and the movements of his lower body. This came from an old style of thinking where if your opponent knew your footwork then they could figure out the technique.



Since the first day of practice at Sensei's Los Angeles Dojo 25 years ago, we started each class with *gyaku hanmi tenkan kokyu-ho*. We did it every class and every day. I still maintain this practice in my dojo day after day. I do this because this what Sensei did, and he told me that there is secret to Aikido hidden inside of *gyaku hanmi tenkan kokyu-ho* that can only be unlocked with hun-

dreds of thousands of repetitions – maybe even a million repetitions.

Just Move



by **Santiago Garcia Almaraz**
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai

I think that *gyaku hanmi tenkan kokyu-ho*, along with *kokyu-dosa*, are one of the most complicated and most incomprehensible exercises for most practitioners, especially beginners. However, if one has the patience and a dedicated practice, then in the end the key to the lock that holds the secrets will be revealed to us and we will gain a greater knowledge of the rest of the techniques in Aikido.

Sensei wasn't a small person, but despite his size, he moved incredibly fast. Not fast in the sense of being "fast" but fast as in being efficient and effective with each of his movements. He was always in the right place at the right time so that he could execute the technique with hardly any force while still projecting the *uke* with a tremendous amount of power.

The student of Aikido is supposed to be developing their eyes to be able to "see" Aikido. This means that they have to look beyond the force being generated by the upper body and see that movement that is hidden within the technique.

A good student makes a dedicated effort regardless of whether they understand the movement or not. Part of the student's path is to develop themselves and develop faith in their movement. So next time class starts, and someone reaches out and grabs your hand to do *gyaku hanmi tenkan kokyu-ho*, just trust the movement and remember to move!•

I think it is a shame that many great people have to die in order for their message to be heard, but this is the way of the world. Sadly, it seems like this is true and those with a message must be prepared for this.

Many small animals and some birds, and even some little turtles will sacrifice their lives to lure a predator away from the nest of their babies. Salmon fight for their lives up the river to lay their eggs only to end up dying from the struggle. I think that many parents out there know that, in their hearts, they would give up their lives for their children and loved ones. It is the same for teachers as well. Many of us would gladly give up our lives for our students in order for the student to obtain their enlightenment. In all these cases, we hope it will never happen, but we must also be prepared for this and without this resolve in our hearts, how can we be true parents? How can we be true teachers? Just as parents and children must realize this, I think this point of Life must be well understood by both teachers and students too. Just as parents do, teachers can be in the position in life to give their lives for others, and that we must accept this fact and be resolved to this. This is just one of those truths that we have found from the beginning of wisdom. This sacrifice is what makes Life and all its difficult minutia beautiful in this world. Finally, with this understanding, Life is no longer petty and small-minded anymore.

I say such words from my own experience and so this act of Love is not only just a theory.

When I was young, I had received permission to go to Japan to study at Hombu Dojo to study under O'Sensei. However, at the same time, I had been attending the University of Southern California (USC) to study Asian Studies and Eastern Religions with a scholarship from the National Defense Education Act and won a prestigious grant from the Carnegie project to spend two years studying at Harvard University at the Yenching Institute. My parents and all my friends convinced me to attend Harvard and go to Japan in the following year. Reluctantly, I attended Harvard and, of course, it was a great educational experience for me. In the course of waiting that extra time, just several months before I was to finally meet O'Sensei,

he had passed away. This was a devastating shock to me. However, I went to Japan anyways, and studied under 2nd Doshu and this was also a great experience for me, and it changed my Life too.



At the same time, unbeknownst to me, however, was the fact that my grandfather was suffering from cancer. Knowing that I would cancel my trip if this were known, he and my grandmother decided to keep it a secret from the family so that nothing would stop my trip to Japan to study Aikido. Regrettably, the delay in surgery caused his cancer to grow to a point where it was untreatable. My family called me back from Japan and I had to make a quick return to American and was lucky to arrive just seconds before he passed away. It was as if he was waiting for me to return to see him alive one last time. No one could understand this but in the "old" world, one would gladly sacrifice their life for another. In my grandfather's eyes, my training was more important than his own life. This is something that I always

The Gift of Life



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

keep in mind when I teach each day. I always think, someday I may have to repay the same debt to another who is seeking the Way.

Each day, I must think to myself to not to hold on to my life so dearly. After all, Life is a gift which someday must be given to another.

On days like today, we remember those who have made such sacrifices for their beliefs and had to pay for it with their lives. It is always very sad to remember, but, at the same time, it is a wonderful and great beauty to live such a life as well.

Today, few people remember O'Sensei. No one remembers my poor grandfather so many years later, but he sacrificed his life for another. I have to remember him every day when I teach. Don't forget that everything in this world is a gift. With this thought, be grateful for everything in your Life, even your own Life itself. •

Editor's note: *Furuya Sensei posted this article in a slightly different format on his Daily Message on January 16, 2005.*

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

Dojo Coronavirus update:

Currently, the City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles has lifted the face mask mandate for all persons vaccinated or not. Anyone who still wants to wear a face covering in class is welcome to do so. There is also no vaccination requirement to attend classes.

IMPORTANT DATES

April 22nd: 11:30 AM O'Sensei memorial service
April 29th: Senior's Intensive Seminar
May 27th: Senior's Intensive Seminar
May 29th: Closed Memorial Day
July 4th: Closed 4th of July
July 8-9: Zenshuji Obon volunteering
October: Dates TBA - Spain 25th anniversary seminar

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, gender identification, national or ethnic origin or sexual orientation in administration of their educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.

Aikido Training Schedule

合気道 時間割

Saturdays

10:15-11:15 AM Advanced
 11:30 AM-12:30 PM Theory

Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular
 8:30-9:30 PM Fundamentals @Budokan

Sundays

9:00-10:00 AM Children's Class
 10:15-11:15 AM Regular
 11:30 AM-12:30 PM Fundamentals

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

Mondays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Tuesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Weapons

NOTE: Visitors are welcome to observe our Fundamentals, or Regular Classes.

Iaido Training Schedule

居合道 時間割

Saturdays

8:00-9:00 AM Regular Class

Tuesdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class

Thursdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class



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The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

has been awarded Official *Konin* recognition by the Aikikai Foundation, Aikido World Headquarters.

Our dojos are committed to the study and practice of the teachings of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba and his legitimate successors, Nidai Doshu, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, the present Doshu, Moriteru Ueshiba and Hombu Dojo-Cho, Mitsuteru Ueshiba.

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Aikido La Gomera Aikikai
Kodokai Dojo



Aikido
Salamanca Aikikai
Kodokai Dojo



Aikido Valladolid Aikikai
Kodokai 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 will also dedicate yourself to your training and enjoy all the benefits that Aikido and Iaido have to offer.

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