



# The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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## Teaching and Learning



In my opinion, the best teachers always have these four characteristics: skill, intention, awareness, and compassion.

Technical proficiency is a given, but a teacher must have a certain level of technical competency. Being skillful means that they will not only know what they should be doing but also know what not to do. In an Aikido sense, it means being knowledgeable about the *kihon-waza* or “basic techniques.” In order to do that, a teacher needs to have put in the work. Although having skill is the first element and probably the most basic element, it is not the most crucial.

The teacher also needs to have the proper intention. Why are we doing the thing that we are doing at that particular moment? Intention is the “why” or reason we are doing something. The best teachers focus more on the student and less on their own well-being or desires. Lots of times, we accidentally teach so that people will like us and so we teach things or in a way that will help us gain approval rather than help the student gain mastery. The problem with this method is that the intention is centered on us and our fears and desires. As a teacher, who is expected to be at a higher level, we also understand how our own consciousness has an effect on the outcome. Thus, on a deeper level, starting with the right intention means that we are able to channel our intention or consciousness into the teaching environment. Having the right intention means starting out on the right foot and for the right reason.

A teacher is supposed to be more aware than the average person. Awareness enables us to get out our minds and “see” what reality is truly. The basis of the teacher’s curriculum should be grounded in awareness. Being aware means being able to ascertain what the student needs, what the student can do, what they can’t do and how they learn the best. Qualifying them based on their ability and needs will enable the teacher to develop a curriculum which enables the student to learn faster and more efficiently. This awareness is not just about the student and how we should teach - it is also about the self as well. We cannot become technically capable, be in touch with our intention or be able to be compassionate without the ability to “see” inside ourselves first. Thus, the best teachers are aware of themselves just as

much as they are aware of the wants and needs of the student.

Compassion is the final characteristic, but it is probably the most important.

Having compassion is the trait which ensures the other three qualities of a teacher. It is the why and how or the bones of teaching. To be compassionate means “Feeling or showing sympathy and concern for others.” Roughly put it means to care. We care so we try to develop ourselves to our highest level. A teacher cares and wants to help and so their intention must be steeped in compassion but not just for others but especially for themselves as well. O’Sensei said, “Aiki is not a technique to fight with or defeat an enemy. It is the way to reconcile the world and make human beings one family.” Compassion is at the root of Aikido and all teaching.

## True Learning



by **David Ito**  
Aikido Chief Instructor

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**True Learning** *continued from page 2...*

Long ago there was a samurai named Zenkai. He was the son of a high-ranking samurai and so he journeyed to Edo and became the retainer of a high official. While in service, he fell in love with the official's wife, and they were discovered. In self-defense, he drew his sword and killed the official. Zenkai and the woman ran away together and later became thieves. Soon, the woman became greedy and Zenkai became disgusted and left her. Zenkai journeyed to the province of Buzen, where he became a begging monk. To atone for his past, Zenkai wanted to accomplish one good deed in his lifetime. Sitting around with a group of laborers, he heard of a dangerous road over a cliff that had caused the death and injury of many people. At that moment he knew what he wanted to do and resolved to cut a tunnel through the mountain. Zenkai begged for food during the day and worked at night to dig the tunnel. After 30 years, the tunnel was 2,280 feet long, 20 feet high, and 30 feet wide, but still not finished. Then one day, the son of the official he had killed had found him. He was now a grown man and a skillful swordsman. He told Zenkai who he was and that he was going to take his revenge. Zenkai bowed and said, "I will give you my life willingly but on one condition."

The intrigued samurai indulged him. Zenkai said, "Please let me finish this work. On the day it is completed, then you may kill me." The son agreed and waited and watched day and night for several months as Zenkai kept on digging. The son grew tired of doing nothing and began to help Zenkai with the digging. After he had helped for more than a year, he came to ad-

mire Zenkai's selflessness and his strong will and character. After three years, the tunnel was completed, and the people could use it to travel safely. When it opened the townspeople, all gathered and thanked them. Afterwards, Zenkai turned to the son and said, "My work is done, please cut off my head." So moved by Zenkai's sacrifice, the son turned to him with tears in his eyes and said, "How can I cut off my own teacher's head?"



Was Zenkai this person's teacher? Was the son Zenkai's student? We don't know, but what is apparent is that throughout the digging there was a change taking place in not only the mountain but in Zenkai and the son too.

Zenkai realized that he was wrong and wanted to atone for his past deeds. As penance he was resolved to make the lives of others better no matter how long it took. At some point, the son must have realized that hate and revenge are meaningless. After watching for several months and then helping Zenkai finish his task, the son might have also realized that each person is flawed, suffers, and makes mistakes. When the tunnel was finished both must have realized that they both had learned and grew as human beings.


A dojo is a place of change. The teacher provides the space and the lessons for the student to learn and grow. The student puts in the hard work to overcome

their obstacles and learn and grow. The learning environment is symbiotic where the teacher thinks of the student and the student thinks of the teacher.


The teacher thinks of the student by being relentless in improving their skill, by being resolute in their intention, by being aware of the student and themselves and most of all by having compassion for themselves and others.

Zenkai became the son's teacher because the son learned and grew as a person after meeting and following Zenkai. What are we as teachers really trying to teach? After the physical movement, the teaching is really how to become better human beings. These three characteristics of intention, awareness, and compassion that a teacher is trying to embody is really what a teacher is really trying to teach the student anyways in not only Aikido but in life as well. •

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 **2/minute aikido technique**

In traditional training, questions are usually discouraged, but are they? Yes, it's true that in the old days of training, the teacher always answered the student with the same answer: "Keep practicing!" along with some other choice words of critical "encouragement."

Why is asking questions discouraged? In traditional training, the idea is that the student should not take the easy way out and questions are the easy way out. The harder path is discovering the answer for oneself. Nowadays, we can go online and search for any kind of information we want and in a click the answer comes that easily.

Before the internet, when we needed to know something, we had to have some knowledge of it to begin our search. We'd search down one path, only to find it's a dead end, and go down another. Knowledge, perseverance, and experience all played a part in the search. If we were lucky enough, we might have a friend or know someone who had some knowledge on the subject on which we were searching.

The student only dared ask their teacher a question after they tried their best to get the answer on their own and were at their absolute wit's end despite trying to find the answer themselves. A student would only ask the teacher if they were so hungry to "know" that incurring their teacher's ire was worth it.

To ask the teacher for help too early was seen as the easy way out and if traditional training forges anything in the student it is their perseverance. Many times, when the student sets out earnestly to find the answer, they manage to find the answer, all on their own power. For the student who discovered the answer under their own power, that lesson would never be forgotten. How many times have we sat in a lecture, wrote down notes, and retained nothing? All of this information was just spoon fed to us while we sat there.

The teacher student relationship can be summed up like this: The teacher and student both shoot arrows in the sky towards each other hoping that they will hit midair. These are the slim odds of the knowledge being transmitted to the student completely and correctly and this is why mindlessly asking a question is not enough.

In traditional training, knowledge is not only mental, but it has a very strong physical element as well. The student learns with their bodies as much as they learn with their minds. That is why asking is in a way taking the easy way out.



Learning to find the answer on our own instills independence and forges perseverance. Yes, it's easier to just get the answer, but when we get the answer so easily, it doesn't permeate our bones and become part of us. Later, when we are on our own and have no one to depend on, who or where will we turn to? This is the conundrum when the teacher passes away. If we figured it out then we have learned to be self-sufficient and we will be okay.

Through our teaching and our practice, it is possible to answer our own questions about the technique. Without having our sensei giving us advice, we will have to rely upon our own training, experience, and knowledge. Being self-sufficient enables us to not make wild assumptions, but to truly answer our own questions in a way that makes sense from a martial arts point of view.

Without training there can be no questions and without experiencing obstacles there can be no real knowledge. How do we learn? By practicing – day in and day out. When will questions arise? True questions only arise by practicing. Both complement each other.

Even if the student was allowed to ask the question, the teacher would never give them the full answer; they would give just a hint to where the student could find the answer. The student still had to put in the work. This effort is the only way for the art to steep into the student's mind and body. In practice, one must completely immerse themselves into the training. As time and training accumulates, more and more of the art builds up in the student. Stay away too long and the art dries up; return regularly and the art stays fresh.

Practice is about constantly asking questions and getting answers as we train with our training partners. In my own experience, sometimes I get answers to questions that I haven't even thought of yet, and at other times I may not understand the answer in my head until my body understands it first. Nowadays we allow students to ask questions because the dojo is more friendly and questions appeals to the mindset current people have, but just remember that the answers we are looking for are not found through idle chit-chat, but always through practice. •

## Traditional Training



by Ken Watanabe  
Technical Director

The line between learning and teaching is very fine. As the years go by, it is only natural that a teacher keeps changing their way of teaching. Rather they adjust or mature in their way of teaching in order to transmit the teachings of the past in the best possible way to the students of today. In the student-teacher relationship, the teacher is also learning. With this learning over the years, the teacher learns to become better at explaining or transmitting what their teachers taught them.

In my little experience, there are many things that we can teach a student but there are many other things that we cannot. Like most things in life, the student must experience and discover them for themselves. Most of the important things cannot be taught, but they can be learned. The trend of today is that from the first day, we give many explanations and a lot of information with the aim of helping the student. Some think that by giving the student all the necessary information to understand the technique or movement that they will improve faster.

Unlike many years ago, when a student enrolled in a dojo, they were required to be 100% attentive to everything if they wanted to learn. This total attentiveness was required because the teacher explanations were very scarce, especially the first few years so we had to be dedicated to seeing, doing, and trying to copy the instructors and teachers as best we could. If we survived the first years, then little by little we would receive more attention and corrections from the teacher that would help us move forward little by little.

Perhaps the old method was a more demanding method of teaching for the student but this method of experimenting and learning, falling, and getting up is something we do from birth. When we are small, our parents tell us that we should not touch the electrical plugs or to be careful when closing the door, crossing the street, or when using scissors. All these warnings and tips at the beginning when we receive them are simple and concise orders. That is, we are directed to not touch, get away from or leave something alone. The orders are quick and short because, as children, we do not need more information and we do not question why you should do or not do it. When we get older, we somehow “need” more information and the simple “no” is not enough and we want to know more and “why” we can’t do this or that. Adults need to “know” and so we explain to them that if they touch the plug that it could cause damage, an injury or even something more serious and so they are better able to understand the gravity of their actions. Thus, we have to somehow convince and educate people that an action from our experience can be detrimental to them. Some accept our explanations, but there are still many who de-



## I Can't Teach You That



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

to avoid accidents, but on the other hand, we become more careless and less attentive as we wait for the vehicle to warn us with a beep. The same goes for cars with self-parking cars, back up cameras and 360-degree proximity detectors. They help us but what are we losing? Maybe, skill and dexterity but I think what they really do is make us lazy.

cide to have their own experience and touch the plug!

This phenomenon of self-understanding is something that also happens in Aikido training. The students need to put in the work and once the work is done, they will have a better background and will better understand the advice and details from the teacher. We cannot speed up the steps that the student has to go through or else they will not truly understand.

Thus, giving too much information can have an adverse effect on the student's understanding and can make the student lazy because they are used to being spoon fed. Understanding this, a teacher's explanations should be short, simple, clear, and concise. Most of the student's understanding needs to come from their own experience. There is an old Chinese proverb that is apropos, “I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.”

“More is better” is the trend in all the fields of life. Some people today want things made easier and simpler. An example of this is all of the new driving aids in cars. I think many are positive and help us

The teacher always wants the student to learn as quickly as they can but the speed in which they learn should be tempered. The teacher should give the student the proper tools to learn faster and just more information. Information helps but the best tool is in learning how to learn, and problem solve. Teachers should also not get frustrated because we want the students to learn. My teacher Furuya Sensei would often say, “There is no time to lose, there is still much to teach.” Now so many years later, I realize what he was saying. All of us have a learning rhythm and as teachers need to understand what each student needs and as well as what they don't need. Knowing this takes experience for not only the teacher but the student too. Many times, as teachers who mean well, we insist on giving advice so that the student can learn faster and sometimes we overlook errors too. Regardless of how we teach, we have to make sure that our intention is good, the information we are giving is relevant to the person and the situation so that students can learn the best way they can. Teachers need patience and restraint, but students do too. Teachers can't teach students really anything, but a good student can learn everything. •



The other day, I mentioned to one of my senior instructors, “You must not yell or talk so strongly in the kids in children’s class.” He is also a boy scout camp leader, so I am sure that he is used to yelling out and barking orders at all of the young kids going wild in some camp or event if only to be heard. He looked at me very puzzled and kind of shook his head sadly as he walked away.

At that moment, I realized he did not understand at all what I was talking about. For me, it sounded very rude and like a lot of yelling, but for him, I think it was quite normal and he had no idea that he was yelling or speaking harshly to other people at all – at least, by his standards.

It reminds me of one of the very rare social gatherings I have ever attended. I really don’t go out at all, but I thought it would be a good chance to get out of the dojo for a few hours and enjoy a little change of scenery. I didn’t know anyone at this party except the host. I was so surprised when I saw one couple arguing very loudly and there was also another husband and wife that were nose to nose and I thought were close to coming to blows. Another guy was arguing about something so passionately that his face was starting to turn bright red. Someone else was complaining about the food or something and someone else in the corner was waving his hands in the air as he was talking like he was mad, with his face all contorted and upset.

I left early, as usual, and as I was leaving, I told my friend and host, “Gee, I am so sorry your party is such a disaster.” He looked

at me with surprise and said, “What do you mean ‘disaster?’” I said, “Well, it is obvious, isn’t it? Look how everyone is fighting and so unhappy!” “No, no,” he said, “That’s the way they always act, everyone is really having a good time!” I walked away looking very puzzled and shaking my head.

## Violence



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Perhaps I tend to stay too much in the orderly, disciplined confines of the dojo and do not get out enough. It certainly looked like a lot of arguing and a lot of very unhappy people to me! How can anyone be happy yelling and screaming and fighting with others like that?

I suppose there are many varying “levels of violence.” Most of the time, I think that we do not even realize that we are arguing or fighting or being very violent at all.

Once, a while back, a friend of mine was denied a promotion at his job because apparently there had been reports filed of incidences where he had argued loudly with his supervisors and fought openly with other co-workers. He was deemed “hot-headed” and “argumentative.” He was in shock and dismay and couldn’t even believe that such vicious lies were said against him. I was really shocked at his reaction because he is, and I really hate to say this, very explosive and short tempered that several times I was even shocked and surprised.

I guess we all have different levels or varying definitions and parameters of what is violent and what is not.

*Continued on page 7...*



**Violence** *continued from page 6...*

I saw a well-known samurai *chambara* film in which the hero goes to great pains to gently scoop a spider off the table and into his hands and release it outside where it will be free and safe. Then, one minute later, he goes and slaughters 30-40 men with his sword.

Perhaps, it is not violent to step on a single ant or small bug. I am sure there is no difference between killing even a big bug. What's next, I think we can get away with killing perhaps a lizard or snake because everyone hates snakes, so it is ok to kill them? After snakes, what's next? Maybe small birds and perhaps a bigger bird once in a while? After birds, let's move on to small cats and dogs. If we can kill a bird, it is not such a big leap to cats and dogs.

Gee, from a small bug, there is not much of a jump until we get to human beings. Strangers first, followed by "bad people" then co-workers, and finally members of the family and loved ones? Is this the rational order or natural progression of the validation of violence?

What level of violence do you live at?

I always tell the story of a fellow priest who relates about how he spent seven years in his temple undergoing his training. When he was sent out, the first thing he did was to grab a newspaper to see what was happening in the world. Suddenly, he said that his hands began to shake upon reading about all of the killing and wars in the world. He was so frightened that he wanted to run back and reenter the temple again immediately.

In our big cities, we read about killings and shootings every day.

There was one statistic that a violent death occurs every single minute of the day in this country. See? Just now, several people, somewhere in this country were killed!

Every weekend, I am accustomed to reading about several dozen people killed or shot in the bad areas of Los Angeles. This is such a "normal" occurrence that we don't really think anything about it anymore.

When my Japanese guests read about it, they are terrified to come here. For them, because the violent crime rate is so low in Japan, about 1% of ours in the whole country, that they have labeled us, "a gun-crazy, violent land!" Can you believe that? How did that happen?

Today, in the newspaper, there is an article about how violent crime is up again, but shootings are down. No one can understand this trend. We distinguish violent crime by whether someone gets shot or dies. No one seems to care or mention about the actual shooting itself.

On a certain level, just the "thought" of picking up a gun and thinking of shooting it or killing or injuring another living thing is already a crime happening.

I guess, it all depends on what level of violence we determine ourselves to live at.

In Aikido practice, we talk about non-violence all of the time, but I think that most of us have a long way to go before we truly understand its meaning. •

*Editor's note: Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on September 15, 2004.*

# UPCOMING EVENTS

行事 .....

## Dojo Coronavirus update:

The dojo is now fully open for indoors training with contact.

- Your temperature will be checked upon entry.
- People with showing symptoms will not be allowed to train.
- Currently, LA County is requiring that all people vaccinated or not must wear a mask indoors.

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 Regular Class  
11:30 AM-12:30 PM Regular Class

### Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

### Sundays

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

### Thursdays

No Class

### Mondays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

### Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

### Tuesdays

No Class

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

*\*Last Saturday of the month is Intensive Seminar by Invitation only.*

## Iaido Training Schedule

居合道 時間割 .....

### Saturdays

8:00-9:00 AM Regular Class

### Wednesdays

7:45-8:45 Regular Class

### Saturdays

7:45-8:45 AM Regular class



# The Aiki Dojo

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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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### The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

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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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