



# The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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## Goodbye Summer!



I recently had an interesting conversation with a friend who practiced and taught Karate long ago for more than 30 years. Our conversation was quite serious, and we talked about the experiences that we had in the beginning of our days in the martial arts and how much it has changed over the years. As we laughed and lamented about the “old days” of the martial arts, we continually found ourselves talking about attitude. What we surmised was that the attitude of the student today is completely different than the attitude of the student 30 years ago.

During our conversation, we came to the conclusion that what happens is that the student does not arrive at the dojo with a bad behavioral attitude but more that they arrive with their own script or narrative of what and how training should be. This idea is their own plan of how the classes should be, the intensity, the physical level, etc. If somehow their plan does not fit the reality or if they don't like something in this equation, they leave. They had their own ideas and when the reality doesn't compare, they leave because they believe that what they are doing is not the best for their objective - their script is not being followed.

In the past, a student had access to less information and thus

had to be completely open to the martial art. They could not question the training because they didn't “know” anything, and they did not know whether the teacher was doing the right thing or not.

## Past and Present



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

That is why they say that the best student just “follows.” If they had to fall 50 times, do the whole class in *suwari waza*, repeat something over and over again, or clean the dojo after class, they would just do it because they put their trust in the teacher and didn't have any of their own notions or ideas. They trusted that the teacher knew that this was the best way to improve. Students didn't question their teachers because of blind faith, they just trusted them as the expert. That is why the most important step in learning is to choose a good teacher. It is also clear that finding a good teacher has an element of luck. The best teachers were thought to be strict because they had to be given the latitude to teach the student any way possible to get them to improve as fast as possible. Sometimes, the way in which students were trained was harsh, but that was because it was necessary to get them on the battlefield as fast as possible and teach them to be effective too.

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**Past and Present** *continued from page 2...*

Nowadays, we don't go off to war so I think that students can't understand or don't want the harshness of the past. Students today are more impressionable, and it is more difficult to capture their attention. Students are bombarded with information from many different teachers, many different martial arts, and many different other sources. This gives them information but as Furuya Sensei said, "Information is not the same thing as knowledge." Sometimes, students misunderstand that consuming information is the same as putting in time in the dojo. Having all this information gives the student a very wide range of possibilities (maybe too many possibilities) and this information qualifies them to question every decision of the instructor. The truth is that it is important to be informed but being informed isn't the same thing as being experienced. To know Aikido as an art can only be acquired through practicing it. Also, when I talk about learning an art like Aikido or Karate, I am not referring to it in a mental sense, but more in a physical sense or mechanical memorization of the techniques. Copying the techniques as closely as we can is an integral part of our practice. Many students, especially the younger students and beginners, see the practice more like a learning activity as it happens in school or universities in which they have a series of subjects such as mathematics or physics and their objective is merely to memorize them. However, in the context of a traditional martial arts, such as Aikido, memorizing is only just the first layer of the many layers a student must master before they can consider themselves knowledgeable. Those of us who understand that Aikido is an art and is something much deeper than a hobby or an extra activity in our lives know that learning is itself an art.

In class a few days ago it was horribly hot here in Spain. It was about 41 degrees Celsius, and the extreme heat made the class very intense. We were all sweating just by breathing! It was apparent how this heat influenced the attitudes of the students. It caused a lack of concentration, it broke the rhythm and made everything slower, just to name a few. After class, many students told me that it was impossible to concentrate when it's hot. Jokingly, I said, "Imagine how many of you would last on a battlefield wearing full armor in this heat! Most of us would just

be easy targets and you complain about a one-hour aikido class!" I am sure most were thinking I was being a tad bit crazy.

The truth is, outside of jokes, training is designed for us to know our limits. Sensei used to say, "Cry in the dojo, laugh on the battlefield." With every obstacle, we get to know our own limits, where we would typically give up or what it would take for us to give up. We find our limits when we are tired, having a bad day, are in a bad mood, or when it is too hot or too cold. The American General George Patton said, "Fatigue makes cowards of us

all." What he meant was that at our outer limits, our true character is revealed. Most people don't see a martial art like Aikido as anything more than a means to destroy others and so they just focus on the technical stuff but that is just the beginning. Later on, when we master the physical, we take the journey inward and that is where we come to understand how important attitude is in learning a martial art.

Today, things are easy and readily available. We think that because we "know" that it isn't necessary to be uncomfortable or to suffer. The poet, Matsuo Basho said, "Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the wise. Seek what they sought." O'Sensei said, "The Art of Peace begins with you. Work on yourself and your appointed task in the Art of Peace. 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. Foster peace in your own life and then apply the Art to all that you encounter." To do what O'Sensei is advocating is impossible from an information standpoint. If people want to be like O'Sensei, they need to acquire knowledge and knowledge can only be acquired through experience. If we only train a few days a week with air conditioning when it's hot or heating when it's cold, how can we expect to master ourselves, let alone become like O'Sensei?

I think that teachers need to find a balance between maintaining the teaching that their teachers left them with how students of today learn. Likewise, students need to have faith and trust that their teachers are teaching them the "right way" even if it doesn't follow their plan. Regardless, teachers should always do their best and students should always train hard – this has always been the spirit of learning regardless of era. •





The simplest techniques are often the best techniques for training. When a student wants to demonstrate their skill, they might believe that doing advanced techniques might be more appropriate because of the complexity, danger, or fanciness. Everyone wants to be good and show how good they are so the fancier the technique demonstrated, the better.

Instead of practicing a fancier, seemingly advanced technique, the simpler, more basic techniques are more important to master. In Aikido, the simplest techniques are important to practice because they break down many important Aikido principles into manageable chunks. Furuya Sensei said that hidden inside every basic technique is a secret to Aikido. Simple or basic techniques may not be the most exciting to practice but doing them well – and understanding their value – ensures that our basics are solid.

When our Aikido basics are solid, these basics can be applied to learning any Aikido technique. We can apply what we learn from practicing these very basic techniques to other more complex and advanced techniques

One of the most important basic Aikido techniques is *ikkyo ude osae*. *Ikkyo* translates to “first teaching,” and *ude osae* means to “arm pin.” The *ikkyo* arm pin can be practiced from many different attacks, but its practice is especially emphasized from *shomenuchi* or “a front strike to the head.” This strike is supposed to resemble the cut of a sword.

To pass a *shodan* (初段) examination, a candidate must be able to demonstrate the basics of *ikkyo*, *nikyo*, *sankyo*, and *yonkyo* from all the basic attacks, but traditionally, one of the first techniques a new student learns is *shomenuchi ikkyo*. Without mastering the basics of *ikkyo*, the rest of the four basic pinning techniques are impossible to learn.

## The Simplest



by Ken Watanabe  
Technical Director

Sensei once pondered, “Why do they teach such a complicated technique to beginners?” He wondered why a complicated technique like *shomenuchi ikkyo* would be taught so early on. After studying *ikkyo*, we realize how it is more than just forcing our opponent down and immobilizing them. Also, a strong *shomenuchi* attack, although it looks simple and stylized, is actually difficult to negotiate.

Why is *shomenuchi ikkyo* so important? A big reason why a technique like *shomenuchi ikkyo* was one of the first things taught to a new student is that it is easier for beginners to practice. A beginner’s falling skills may not be as developed and so it is far safer to practice a pinning technique energetically than a throwing technique. Another reason *shomenuchi ikkyo* is one of the first techniques taught is that the skills learned from its practice – both in the role of *nage*, the one throwing or pinning, and as the *uke*, the one being thrown or pinned – can be applied to many other Aikido techniques.

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### The Simplest continued from page 4...

What can we get from practicing a technique like *shomenuchi ikkyo*? To start with, *shomenuchi* is a difficult attack to negotiate. In Japanese swordsmanship, *shomenuchi* would be impossible to stop; the attacking sword will either cut through the blocking sword or it will push the defender's blade into themselves. Regardless, for one to negotiate a true cut of a sword would require the skills of a master.

After negotiating the overhead cut successfully doing *ikkyo* would be equally difficult. Thus, when attacked by *shomenuchi*, the student practices their timing and spacing, as well as how to use circular movement in order to neutralize the power in a linear attack. The student also practices blending with the attack without blocking, pushing, or resisting it. Once the student can neutralize the attack, they practice how to bring the attacker's movement into their own movement and practice the proper spacing so that they can be in the proper position to unbalance the attacker.

From the standpoint of the *nage*, students learn the basics of timing and spacing. They learn how to negotiate the attack's power and at the same time, learn how to *irimi* or "move in" deeply. A strong *irimi* enables the student to learn how to bring the attack into their own movement. Students must also learn how to maintain the extension of their *ki* or "energy" without pushing or using physical strength. By playing the role of the *nage*, we learn how to unbalance our opponents by moving our bodies in the proper direction with the proper energy and focus.

From the standpoint of the *uke*, we learn how to attack with energy but also in a flexible and dynamic manner. The *uke* practices making a strong, dynamic attack without becoming stiff and rigid. Then as the technique is applied, the student practices their flexibility to defend against a technique like *ikkyo* so they could be unbalanced and be pinned safely.

Both *nage* and *uke* learn the basics of offense and defense, and how it switches back and forth in a natural way. Therefore, in a sense, Aikido has a huge connection component. Both *nage* and *uke* are learning how to stay connected with each other – one from an offensive standpoint and another from a defensive standpoint. At a high level, the line between *uke* and *nage* is blurred because they are both moving as one cohesive unit.

It can be said that there are no advanced techniques, there are only advanced practitioners. At the higher levels of training, depending on the quality of the student's timing, spacing, footwork, connection, extension of *ki*, focus – to name a few – a basic technique like *shomenuchi ikkyo* becomes a very advanced level technique to execute.

*Shomenuchi ikkyo* is such a basic technique that it's almost an "aiki-cliche," but *shomenuchi ikkyo* also serves as one of the true benchmarks for an Aikidoist's skill level. A beautiful *ikkyo* is not just nice to look at but means that it is "effortlessly" effective, much like we strive all of our Aikido to be. That is why something seemingly simple like *shomenuchi ikkyo* is so important to our training. •



Much of what we do in Aikido practice is to remove the gaps and breaks in our movement to create a strong flow in our technique. However, this flow is not merely physical movement as many of us well know, it is greatly dependent on the strong flow of our own mental energy.

Physical gaps are easy to see and easier to repair. However, mental gaps are more difficult to be aware of than physical gaps in our technique and thus they are harder to eradicate. Because of this, great awareness and self-reflection is required in our practice and in how we study ourselves. Some might call this “fine tuning” in our practice as we study ourselves more deeply to discover the finer points of what we do.

One hint is to keep movement in “movement” status. More often, without conscious awareness, we immediately respond incorrectly or only respond physically.

As an example, when someone says “hi,” in the morning, we simultaneously respond with “hi!” without thinking. We don’t need to think things like “why does he talk to me?” or “how am I supposed to respond to this?” and on and on. If we were to think that way, we would have already created a gap in our thinking and actions. When we have to stop and ask ourselves, “how,” “why,” or “what” we have already moved into the “intellectual” world of our own minds in which we carry on this constant dialogue with ourselves of “blah, blah, blah. . .” This type of thinking is within the realm of the ego – the skeptical, self-absorbed, and self-centered part of ourselves which continually questions everything around us with suspicion and prejudice.

Many years ago, I remember one student who had this problem. In class, if I would happen to say, “Bring your hand a little higher.” He would suddenly become still, so self-absorbed

within himself, and lost in his own thoughts. With his internal dialogue, he would think to himself, “why does Sensei say this?” “what does he mean?” and “how do I raise my hand up?” that he wouldn’t be able to move at all! And once this internal dialogue began in his head – he lost all touch with reality and lost the moment. He could never understand that “moving the hand up” for example, was simply “moving the hand up” without any other intrigue, meaning or intention! Sometimes, I used to think, “it is better not to say anything to him, he will only get more confused!” In this case, he continually creates gaps in his thinking which impacts his actions and

## The Persistence Gap

impedes his Aikido.



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Of course, this is a very natural moment to moment response that a normal person might have. It is not like planning to build a bridge or making a decision to buy a house where deliberation is necessary – these are simple every day, every minute responses in the course of one’s daily activities. Of course, I remember a friend, a long time ago, who decided to buy a used car and began to look for the best deal. He went to all kinds of dealerships, looked in all kinds of newspapers, tv ads, etc. In fact, he started to make graphs and charts to show comparisons in which to see which was the best deal, plus and minus analysis of each car on sale and on and on. After six months, almost one year as I remember, he never bought a car, somewhere in all of this, it became too much work and he gave up! Instead of getting the car he wanted and just looking at the most natural and convenient choices open to him, he got so involved in “finding the best deal” and the car itself that buying became merely a side issue for him. This big gap made him lose his intention and direction, and he simply got lost in all of his actions and his own self-centered discussion.

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**The Persistence Gap** *continued from page 6...*

I see this happen in Aikido all the time. Instead of focusing on the moment, what we are doing at the moment (reality) becomes a side issue as we move everything into our own personal, internal world of thought where we think, “me, me, me, me!”

Most instructions are simple and clear-cut. In Zen, there is a saying, “There are no secrets in the world!” Yet, in practice, most people make too much of what is said or done or usually, more often than not, get mixed up in their own internal dialogues, creating this gap between the here and now and what is inside their own heads. As a result they can’t move – they become physically and mentally paralyzed, which will never do in the martial arts, especially in Aikido as we must respond naturally and spontaneously to the attack or the reality at hand.

I remember another student who was very hard to teach. Each time I gave him advice, he always thought that it was a personal insult or that he was being challenged or put down. He could never accept anyone’s help or advice and thus was always alone. In addition, he could never respond or blend with his partner, it was always too much about himself and in his own mind and body; there was no room for anyone or anything else. He totally cut himself from the here and now and the world around him.

**Untitled**

No one can climb the mountain so high and tall.  
 But we can all take one tiny step after another. . .  
 Even the greatest ocean can be crossed,  
 Not by swinging our tiny arms and legs,  
 But by using our spontaneous creativity.

Later, he confessed to me, “Aikido is too difficult.” “No,” I said to him, “Aikido is not difficult at all, but you make it difficult!”

In practice, it is important to keep our intentions and mental attitudes “pure.” What I mean is not adding so much “baggage” and “history” to everything we do. Some things are basically simple just as they are! I used to know one friend who could never enjoy a meal no matter how good it was. If we were eating lunch, he would always say, “Oh, I went to another restaurant the other day, and they make this sandwich so much better than this.” No matter how the food was, he would always focus on something better on some other day, in some other place, or at some other time. I don’t know how he could ever enjoy or appreciate anything he did, because he always focused on something else far far away inside his own head. Eventually he lost his job and his wife. I hate to think that he kept complaining so much, comparing everything to his own world, not the present here and now world, but the made-up world created by his own inner dialogue, which ruined his life. In life and in Aikido, there is just too much blah, blah blah! Keep on practicing and filling those gaps, mentally and physically. •

*Editor’s note: Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on October 16, 2003.*

# 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

**August 3rd:** Terasaki Budokan Aikido Center begins

**August 19-21:** Dojo camping trip

**August 27th:** Intensive Seminar

**September 5th:** Dojo closed for Labor Day

**September 24th:** Intensive Seminar

**October 9-20:** Spain trip

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  
11:30 AM-12:30 PM Theory

### Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 AM Fundamentals  
6:30-7:30 PM Regular

### 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



# The Aiki Dojo

is the Official publication of the

**Aikido Center of Los Angeles**

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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.

### Affiliated Dojos of the Aikido Center of Los Angeles



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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2 minute aikido technique