



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Stay Cool This Summer!

When we practice or when we are carrying out the daily tasks of our lives, there are times that for different reasons require that we make an extra effort or demand that we give a little bit more. Sometimes, this extra effort puts us in a bad mood and causes us to get upset. We complain or get angry because we have to work more to get the most out of our life, be more comfortable, or enjoy ourselves. However, even if we don't see it, the person who benefits from this extra effort is us.

In Aikido training, we know that all those small moments in which we do not give in to our laziness will forge our character and make us more disciplined. Building character and becoming more disciplined will inevitably make us a better person. Also, that improvement will have an indirect impact on everyone around us.

All the obstacles that we must overcome, we must overcome them by ourselves. Having the support of those around us is important but, in the end, we can only do by and for ourselves and without the desire for reward or praise.

Perhaps this "do it by yourself, for yourself" mentality is a very martial arts mindset and may even seem radical to those who don't train in a martial art. However, if we train in a martial art, we have to have this "it's our duty" mindset because in the end it is our choice and thus our responsibility. If we do it for the prizes, money, or recognition, we run the risk of feeling dissatisfaction in the end because those external things are not worth the effort. External rewards are empty and, most times, lead to feelings of dissatisfaction which will poison our love and passion for Aikido.

Many times in class, I move around with the intention of helping the students by giving them corrections or explanations. Sometimes, I notice that many try to impress me with break falls or with their power and speed.

It goes without saying that after a few years of teaching, most teachers quickly get to know these types of students who try to impress everyone with their break falls or power. Most times, they are really just showing their lack of humility and how ignorant they are about the practice of Aikido.

Aikido is a unique martial art because it has no competition. Having no competition forces the practitioner to focus on the

form, philosophies and underlying purpose of practice. In other words, the training has to be internalized. However, even though Aikido is not competitive, deep down it is practiced as a competition with ourselves. We "compete" with our desires to show off, to gain reward, or hurt people to name just a few. With each person that we work with, we have to respect their level and not intentionally hurt them. Hurting others, becoming frustrated, or being too aggressive is just a form of competition because we don't want to feel inferior or less skilled than others and so we

seek the "win" to impress them with our ability and feed our egos.

The real practice has to be on the inside where we strive to be more mature and train hard with people in the spirit of improving them and not with the desire to hurt them. I know from my own experience that this is hard and that getting there is a journey.

I love all sports, especially those that are competitive, but I make a clear distinction in my mind that Aikido is not a sport. Aikido is a way of life. Furuya Sensei said,

"Aikido is more than just a means of throwing people down." Aikido requires a deep

understanding of the self and thus we strive to not only master ourselves physically but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually too.

When we treat Aikido as a Way of life then there are no final prizes, there are no goals, and there are no winners or losers since the purpose and practice of Aikido is infinite. In sports and especially in competition it is different, since the purposes and goals fuel our progress and prizes and victories dictate how hard we will work. Regardless of how

hard we train or how well we know the technique, the self will always be a foreign concept.

O'Sensei advocated *masakatsu agatsu* (正勝吾勝) or that "the true victory is self-victory." In Aikido, we work hard, study hard, and practice hard to know ourselves. We do not depend on trophies because our focus is deeper than that. Aikido training is supposed to help us in our daily lives. If we practice to impress others so that we can feed our egos or collect accolades, we run the risk that those "motivations" won't be enough to surmount real hardships in our daily lives. Forget about praise, rewards, or impressing everyone else. If you want to impress someone, impress yourself!•



Impress Yourself



by Santiago Garcia Almaraz
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai

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OCTUBRE
14/15
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SENSEI DAVID ITO
6º DAN AIKIDO AIKIKAI

SENSEI SANTIAGO ALMARAZ
5º DAN AIKIDO AIKIKAI

Celebramos Nuestro 25º Aniversario 1998 - 2023

There are many components that make a business successful but there are two principal actors that are contributing to that success, the business owner, and the customer or student. I have been a business owner for the last twenty years and I ran the educational and training programs at the Ojai Valley Inn and Spa, Ojai California for fourteen years. I have learnt that it takes the collaboration of experts to start and then to keep a business running. It also takes: “a village to raise a child”– *African proverb*, and it takes a community to develop an Aikido student.

My mentor and friend, David Allen, New York Times bestselling author of *Getting Things Done* has told me many business lessons. One of the most important lessons that I learnt was that starting a business is like farming, we must make sure that we have all the conditions present to plant and grow the crops. Starting a business: an Aikido School requires a lot of attention, and it takes patience and dedication for an infinite amount of time.

The reality, it is not that easy to start a business. Trends and fashion are affecting the fate of many businesses. In the 80’s and 90’s, Aikido was extremely popular, but that popularity has decreased over time. The business and the marketing of an Aikido dojo should not be about trends and fashion, it should only be about martial art. I strongly believe that if a student studies a martial art, just because it is popular, then he is not a true martial artist. There is a famous quote credited to Lao Tzu: “when the student is ready, the teacher will appear...” In this context, the student cannot be ready to learn if the teacher is not true to himself. “Breaking through comes from staying true to oneself

and one’s value.”– Jon Michail-Forbes (March 16th, 2023). There are no shortcuts in life, we all must pay our dues.

Knowing



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

When I started my Aikido program, a few years ago, I only wanted to focus on teenagers and adults while keeping in mind that in Ventura, California, there are a lot of young families. My former teacher always said that we must have a children’s program to bring a steady income. It has been my struggle because I am not ready yet, and it takes a different time commitment and training to develop such a program. The learning challenges ahead and putting every piece together and in motion, keeps me motivated and excited about the entire process. Finding ways to share the message is a challenging task but it is our responsibility to give back as yudansha(s).

When I started martial arts as a child, I trained a lot, but it took many years to realize that the study of a martial art is a lifetime journey, and as David Ito sensei has said that there is no destination, and there are no rewards therefore it is easy to deviate from the path and lose focus. Challenges are present to lead me away from the path, but daily practice helps me to stay focused. I also never miss a class because I am afraid that I am going to miss something important that is going to be essential to my progress.

As a business owner, an Aikido instructor, and a student, I always keep the beginner’s mind because as Socrates said: “The only true wisdom is in knowing that you know nothing.” I must constantly study to improve myself, but I cannot do it alone. It takes a community to develop students, to forge the best martial artists, teachers, and together we can keep the spark alive. •



Volunteering at Zenshuji Soto Mission's Obon Carnival.

In Aikido practice, we usually refer to this energy as “ki” (氣), yet when I was training, Furuya Sensei never used the word “ki.” He rarely talked about it despite the fact that the word “ki” takes up a third of the word, “Aikido.”

Sensei's instructions would always center on physical things such as our posture, our movement, and our focus. He would remind us not to use our physical strength to push our opponent, yet admonish us whenever our arms lost energy and collapsed. Sensei would also instruct us in the mental aspect of the technique. Our movements and focus were always directed toward our opponent. Even the direction we looked when doing the technique was important.

Sensei also mentioned that he did not like using the word “ki” simply because it is a loaded term. Meaning that it is too vague and is open to many interpretations. I really don't like using the word “ki” for the same reason either. When talking about “ki” it's too easy to forget about the physical aspects of training. Whenever the talking starts, practice stops.

The reason we never mention “ki” during class is because we are already using it when we are practicing Aikido. We don't need to talk about it when we are already learning how to do it. Our posture, our movement, and our focus are the basic building blocks of developing energy.

For example, in Aikido, the power comes from posture and extension rather than contraction and physical strength. When we think of getting stronger, we usually think of someone at the gym doing bicep curls; we close and tighten our arms, contracting our muscles to build up our biceps.

Aikido movement is different from “working out.” Our muscles don't contract. Our muscles extend and they extend from a solid foundation, and to have a solid foundation requires having the correct posture. In essence, Aikido uses the whole body.

Developing Energy



by Ken Watanabe
Technical Director

An example of this extending power is our footwork or “ashi sabaki.” Our steps are the base of our foundation, and it is how we generate movement in Aikido. Our footwork stretches our body. When we *irimi* or “move forward,” our back leg stretches back as our front leg stretches forward. Our center harnesses this stretching energy to create powerful body movement or “taisabaki.”

Whether we use *irimi*, *tenkan*, or *tenshin*, the energy in this stretching step creates movement and creates energy in our hips and center. Our footwork, our posture, and our body movement or “taisabaki” move as one unit. When we master this posture and can synchronize our body movement, it creates the right conditions for our energy to move freely and effectively.

Continued on page 5...



Developing Energy *continued from page 4...*

How we use our eyes is also a part of developing our energy. For example, when we practice *tenkan*, as we step back, turn our center, and line up with our partner, we should be looking forward, not down. Our gaze should be directed outward and its direction should match our opponent's attacking direction. Our eyes and how we use them reflect our mental state and our level of focus. If we focus strongly and correctly out, towards our opponent, then our eyes will become "alive" rather than "sleepy." It's said that "the eyes are the window to the soul" and the eyes of a student or how they "see" can be a big indicator of their potential and future ability.

Even our posture when we are sitting uses this extending type of power. When sitting in *seiza*, we are supposed to sit as if the top of our head was being pulled up from above. Also, at the same time, we close our armpits and lower our shoulders. Even when we are still, there is movement, which is another major part of developing energy.

Aikido derives its power from movement, and in Aikido, movement equals energy. To many students who are beginning practice, energy can be a very abstract concept. This is why we first teach how to develop correct movement. In short, when the movement stops within the technique, the technique's energy dies; when the movement is smooth and continuous, then the energy is alive.

We use our whole body to generate power, and later, we issue power to throw or pin our opponent. This is different from practicing to be stronger or faster. Strength and speed have limits. Correct movement, correct technique, and solid basics enable us to use strength and speed efficiently and effectively.

We can think of ourselves and the technique's movement like a racing car engine – when the components are fitted together properly, we will be able to generate power effectively. However, when the components are fitted together carelessly, then the engine will fail when we need the speed and power the most.

Movement is an important part of developing our energy, but how we stop our movement is also important. When we practice, our ending posture is important. When our finish is incorrect or we are off balance, have bad posture, or our arms are in the wrong position, to name a few possible errors, that means there's a mistake somewhere in the technique. When our finish is correct, we are showing through our physical posture that our mental posture, and accompanying energy is also correct.

In short, when we practice correctly, when our movement is smooth, and when our speed is constant, we are showing that our energy is, for lack of a better word, correct.

As a beginner, it's natural to want to be strong and win. We practice hard and we want it to be effective. When I began practicing, I was always trying to use strength. I was always trying to go fast, but realistically, I was neither fast nor strong. I was always off balance.

I was working way too hard to throw or pin my partner, so when I heard Sensei mention, "just do the movement," I really had no choice. Remember, I was neither fast nor strong, so I had to be patient and try to develop my practice. It is also important to remember that even if we don't use strength, our strong movement will naturally get stronger as the movements become more correct and we develop our basics.

Energy is not the same thing as strength. It is similar to thinking that being physically strong and healthy are the same thing. Measuring energy in practice is difficult at first. It is not like subtracting pounds when we are dieting, or adding weight to the bar when we are bench pressing.

Energy and how we practice developing it can only be realized when our body understands it through correct practice. This is the reason why my teacher never discussed "ki," and why I rarely mention it. Bringing it up is too distracting. How we develop our energy is not up for debate and discussion; it should only be developed in our practice. •



One of the most easily recognized and popular icons of Japanese culture, I think, is Daruma-san. Almost everywhere we go in Japan, we see this round, paper mache image in red with a fierce expression, big bushy eyebrows and a mean grin. He looks mean and comical at the same time.

Daruma-san is actually a representation of Bodhidharma, the 27th Patriarch of the Meditation Sect in India who crossed over into China in 520 AD and become the first Patriarch of the Chan (Meditation) School in China. Several hundreds of years later, The Chan or Zen School was brought over into Japan by a priest who had traveled to China for training and had returned back to his home country.

There are so many legends and stories about the Bodhidharma, but we are not really certain of his actual existence. Purportedly, Bodhidharma is the author of the Lankavatara Sutra (The Sutra of the Buddha Entering Lanka) which consists of some of his final sermons before his passing. Bodhidharma is also said to be the creator of Kung Fu at the Shaolin Temple but none of this is really verifiable. We only have many stories regarding him which have survived over the centuries and are still read and studied today.

One of his most famous sayings is mu ku doku (無功無徳) which means "There is no merit." I think this is the hardest of all to understand, especially in the materialistic world we have created for ourselves today.

It is said that Bodhidharma was granted an interview with the Emperor Wu of the Liang who was an avid supporter of Bud-

dhism. When Bodhidharma was brought before him, Emperor Wu said, "Look what I have done, I have built many temples, supported many priests, written many sutras and have produced many golden Buddhas. What kind of merit do I have?" At this moment Bodhidharma uttered his two most well-known sayings. "There is no merit here. Everything originates from nothingness." Then he got up and left.

Illusion of Attainment



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

It is said that this angered the Emperor who sent his army after Bodhidharma to bring him back to the court to explain his words. It is written that Bodhidharma stepped onto a single bamboo leaf and floated across the wide Yangtze River to elude the army. Bodhidharma then entered a small temple in the mountains and meditated for nine years facing a wall.

For most of us, it is our passion to accumulate merit and be recognized for our efforts and work in this world. We collect and count our good deeds like putting pennies into a piggy bank and we expect people to recognize us for who we are and for what we do. For the most part, this is true. Without effort and hard work, how can we succeed in the world? If we are lazy, we will be penniless and homeless. Without our good deeds, no one will respect us, no one will look up to us and give us the attention and give us the respect and admiration that we crave.

In this, some of us are lucky and some of us are not so lucky. Some of us are rich and famous and some of us are not. We look at others and think "Why is life so easy for him?" We look at ourselves and think, "Why must it be so tough for me?" I ask myself these questions all the time, just like everyone else!

Continued on page 7...



Illusion of Attainment *continued from page 6...*

In Zen, we say, “Like the Daruma there is no merit or attainment.” The next inevitable question is always, “If there is no attainment, then what is the use of applying myself or working at this?”

I suppose, it might be like “brushing your teeth” as I usually say. No one can say, “Well, I have been brushing my teeth for the last 20 years, that is enough, I will stop.” Of course, this is silly. No matter how long you have been brushing your teeth, if you stop, your teeth will get bad.

In meditation, one assumes the same position and posture of the Buddha at the moment of his enlightenment. The “sitting” is the enlightenment itself. There is no attaining enlightenment, just sitting. In other words, we cannot say, “How long does it take?” Meditation itself in enlightenment, we do not count meditation and add up a total and calculate the result.

We can approach Aikido in the same way. Practice itself is enlightenment – this is why we continue to perfect our practice. It is not the accumulation or sum total of practice.

For promotions, we have to add up hours and days. But, I think, everyone knows that if it takes one person a number of practices to reach a certain level, it is not the same for others. It is different for each and every person. This method is not perfect but a compromise in order to issue ranks. Many old timers do not believe in rank at all. Many newer people are rank-obsessed and only think of their promotion and present status.

Ultimately, attainment is meaningless and only causes more suffering and misunderstanding. However good we are, there is always someone better. However strong we are, we will always weaken with age and sickness. Some are blessed with a so-called easy path in Life and some are not. We are all different. What is important is to practice with the spirit of “without merit” and “without attainment.”

Many years ago, one of my students came to me with problems

about his girlfriend. She was a very nice girl, so it was hard to imagine why he had such a hard time. His problem finally was that he wanted everything to be equal. If he bought dinner, he would expect her to buy dinner the next time. If it was un-even, he would immediately think he was being cheated. Even on dates, they would meet half-way so he wouldn’t lose out on gasoline money. It was so strange, and he complained so much, and she finally ran away. Although he wanted to love and be loved, everything was a “deal” for him and he wanted to make sure he got his money’s worth. Worrying about losing a few pennies, he lost something much more important. In love, there should be no expectation of a return – if it is true love.

We all want life to be equal and fair and we like to plan our lives like counting pennies and putting them into a piggy bank. However, we find that what we do counts for very little in this world and if we worry about it too much, we will only suffer.

Students always come to me worried about this and that. If I were my teacher, I would never answer them and only say, “Just go have a cup of tea!” That’s what my teacher would say to me whenever I asked him about the problems in my life. Today, I get what he was trying to teach me. Calm down, take a moment, and drink some tea.

Finally, when we see “no merit” in our lives, everything becomes so light and easy. With “no merit” in mind, we do things only because we love to do that thing. We practice Aikido because we love Aikido – there should be nothing more than this. With this mindset, it can be really quite simple and wonderful.

Anything outside of this love, or what taints this love, is not practice and only contributes to our painful desire for merit.

Like the Emperor of Wu, we can be angry at Bodhidharma’s words. However, unlike the Bodhidharma, we cannot float across the big river on a single bamboo leaf! Sigh!•

Editor’s note: *Furuya Sensei posted this article in a slightly different format on his Daily Message on July 26, 2004.*

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 26th:** Intensive Seminar
- September 5th:** Dojo Closed – Labor Day
- September 30th:** Watanabe Shihan celebration
- September 30th:** Intensives Seminar
- October 4th:** Special class with Didier Boyet Shihan
- October 9-20:** Spain 25th anniversary seminar
- October 28th:** Intensives Seminar
- November 22-24:** Dojo Closed – Thanksgiving

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
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Mondays

6:30-7:30 PM	Regular
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Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM	Regular Class
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Tuesdays

6:30-7:30 PM	Weapons
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NOTE: Visitors are welcome to observe our Fundamentals, or Regular Classes.

Iaido Training Schedule

居合道 時間割

Saturdays

9:00-10:00 AM	Regular Class
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Tuesdays

7:45-8:45 PM	Regular class
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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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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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