



Aiki Dojo

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風鈴は鳴らで時計の暑さかな
Furin wa narade tokei no atsuta kana
The wind bell is silent; The heat of the clock
— Yayu

AIKIDO CONTINUES AS CORONAVIRUS RISES



How Aikido Saved My Life (again) by James Takata Aikido 3rd Dan

Aikido saved my life for the first time back in 2005. It was Halloween night. My Aikido training enabled me to escape an attack by gang members armed with knives and tire irons (please refer to the January 2006 of the *Aiki Dojo* for the story, or buy me a beer after the pandemic). That experience proved to me the importance of realistic attacks in Aikido training, as well as the idea that, since life is short and fleeting, I shouldn't wait or be afraid to do certain things that I truly want to do. Within a year I was married to my longtime girlfriend and we were expecting our first daughter.

This March, I found myself in another life or death situation, facing multiple attacks of a different nature. Once again, my training helped me survive to tell the tale. I had recently returned from a work trip to Japan, and I found myself dealing with a rather traumatic break-up with my fiancé. I was emotionally drained, jet lagged, and physically exhausted from working in winter like conditions with very little rest. I went to bed one night feeling a little off and woke up the next morning with a 103.5-degree fever, chills, body aches, no appetite, and severe fatigue. It felt like the flu, and I hoped it was, because news and anxiety about the coronavirus was on the rise. Literally, the very next day, schools were closed, and Covid-19 had officially arrived in Los Angeles.

I saw my doctor on my 4th day of the symptoms, tested negative for the flu, and was scheduled for a coronavirus test. At that time, tests were so rare and in demand that she couldn't reveal the exact location of the test. The only treatment she could prescribe was rest, fluids, and alternating Advil and Tylenol every 3 hours to manage the fever (which would bring it down to 101 degrees). The nights were the worst as I would wake up with a raging fever and drenched in sweat, as if I were sitting in a sauna. I never developed a cough, which made me and the doctors I consulted with question if it was Covid, but my breath capacity slowly began to diminish. My thermometer glows red, yellow or green, depending on the temperature, and I dreaded seeing that red light each time I checked.

Day 5 and the fever persisted, I could only take in about 70% of my breath, I officially broke up with my fiancé, and she started moving out. Fun! Days 6 and 7 were more of the same agony. I tried to distract myself with TV and divided my time between the bed and the couch. I made great efforts to hydrate, but still had no appetite. Every day, my breath got shorter and shorter.

Continued on page 3...



How Aikido Saved My Life (again) *continued from page 2...*

On the 8th night, the sauna-like fever was still turned up all the way and I could only inhale about 25% of my breath. It was a major effort just to walk 10 feet to use the bathroom. At this point, I started to think that I might die, that I might not see my daughters again and that my cat is going to out-live me. I was terrified. I decided it was time to go to the emergency room. It was around 9pm, and I knew that I'd probably have to wait for many hours before I could be admitted. So, I decided the best thing to do was to rest in my own bed until the morning and then go. I was miserable and I called on whatever strength I could summon. I remembered my 3rd Dan test. It was a grueling day and I was physically and mentally exhausted, yet somehow found the fortitude to make it through to the finish. Knowing that I needed every ounce of energy I had, I refused to engage in the break-up drama still going on in my home. I went to sleep determined to heal myself.

When I woke the next morning on the 8th day, I checked the thermometer and it was green! My fever had broken! I spent the next couple of days anxiously wondering if it would return, but

with each green glow of the thermometer I felt safer and safer. I went in for my scheduled test, and a week later a call confirmed what I already knew; I was positive for SARS-Cov-2.

As I surveyed the scene I saw a grim picture. My city was in full lockdown along with most of the country, the global pandemic was raging, I had lost 15 lbs, my relationship had evaporated, I was alone in my home and I would have to isolate for another 14 days before I saw my kids again, but I was alive. Interestingly, where I had expected despair, I felt reborn.

I've fully embraced this difficult time as a chance to recover and refocus in all areas of life. Luckily, I've had no lingering symptoms and have steadily worked my way back to 100%. My *jo* and *bokken* practice have improved by leaps and bounds. I'm so thankful for the support that I received from Ito Sensei, Watanabe Sensei, and the other members of the ACLA via our nightly Zoom meetings and being able to make use of the available solo training. I'm also thankful for the tremendous support of my family and friends. I love you all. I'm ready to do my part in facing the tremendous challenges that lie before us. After all, as I learned for the 2nd time, we only have this moment. •

O'Sensei said, "Masakatsu agatsu" or "true victory is the victory over oneself." This quote may be more appropriate to Aikido training now more than any other time. Without a way to throw or pin our opponent, a large part of our training feels missing. How are we able to show our skill? How do we know if we're good? Where is our enjoyment in a hard practice?

Contactless training during this era of social distancing truly taxes our level of training and understanding for both students and instructors. This forces us to really ask ourselves some hard questions. How much do we actually know about the technique and training? What is important to the students? What is just playing around?

Before the pandemic, when we practiced with our partners, we could measure our skill or strength by comparing ourselves to our training partners. We felt good when we threw or pinned them down. It may have felt satisfying thinking that I'm better than, and stronger than others.

Warren Buffet said, "Only when the tide goes out do you discover who's been swimming naked." During this time, our own self is naked and we can feel exposed to our own imagined shortcomings, lack of level of training or understanding of the technique. Now, in this time of no-contact training, when that part of practice is taken away from us, the ego-driven part of our practice, what then? How do we continue?

Without a way to "throw down," some students might feel that they are left with nothing and training seems meaningless. Without a partner to throw down, what's left? Without someone to beat, what's left? The answer is, "ourselves."

It's important to realize how much we depend on our partner, not just as a person to throw or pin, but someone that forces us to refine our own focus, movement, spacing and connection. Whether we practice with a partner or ourselves, we have to intensify our own standard by which we move. Without this standard, why even focus when nothing matters to us?

As a student, when we practice against a static *uke*, what are we thinking? Where's our focus? Do we have a very clear picture of the technique in our head, or do we become confused? Even imagining our opponent as we practice the solo movements reveals our level of training.

As instructors, it's important to not only give the students a class that is full of physical movement but also one that trains their focus, as well as instill good habits. When moving against a stationary object, it's very easy to work out problems in our own movements, focus, connection, and spacing. As students and instructors, we are only limited by our own training, our own knowledge of the technique, or our own imagination.

How the classes are designed is the job of the instructor, and it is

influenced by how depth of their well of knowledge and experience. From that place they have to think hard about how to impress these points onto the students in the most clear and concise way.



What's Important



by Ken Watanabe
Technical Director

when we return to normal training when our partner grabs and strikes us? The way we move becomes completely untrained.

During this time, it is important to seize this chance to practice how to focus and move properly. Without the extra stress of someone trying to strike or grab us, this is the best time to take the opportunity to get an understanding of how to position our body in relation to the static uke.

During class, Furuya Sensei was very strict in how we practiced the basic techniques, not for himself but for us. He admonished that in a real situation, the effectiveness of our technique is cut by almost half. This means that if we are practicing the technique on the mat at only 70% then it won't be very effective at all.

By the same token, if we practice the solo movements in a haphazard, careless way, when we revert back to regular training where our partner strikes and grabs us, the level of our own focus and movement gets cut by half, and half of nothing, is nothing.

How we create this relaxed, dynamic power on our own, and in ourselves, is but a single facet of our practice – just one way we can attain victory over ourselves, and in turn, victory over this crisis. How to transcend and find order when we have nothing? Again, this falls back on our training and our basics.

Even in this time when our training seems thrown out of whack and nothing is normal, it is up to us as aikidoists to transcend this and emerge from it, hopefully with a little more than what we started with. That's a win in my book. •



The instinct to survive and the desire to move forward despite hardships is what makes us human beings, but what really sets us apart is the human characteristic of friendships.

Since antiquity, humanity has gone through different periods of great difficulties that endangered its survival. Whether it was due to war, famine, economic crisis, earthquakes, floods, natural disasters or even the COVID-19 global pandemic, society has made enormous efforts to overcome and survive against all odds. Today's crisis has forced our greatest minds to be creative, to improvise, to develop and fend off this virus with solutions that would otherwise not have even been considered before.

Scientists are not alone in their efforts. During this pandemic, the martial arts have been affected greatly by not only the virus and they must use all of their resources to overcome this adversity. It is not just the virus which makes things difficult because we also have all of the restrictions that have been put into place to keep everyone safe. Because our arts are 90% physical and that physicalness means touching then we have all been forced to reinvent our arts. What was once before a paired practice has now transformed into an individual practice. This is the new "normal" and it is especially difficult because many of us were not taught to practice in this individualized way and it doesn't feel "normal." I can empathize with many dojos and their teach-

ers who are frantically looking for ways to teach their students whether it is online, socially distanced or individually. Some are more successful and others are a little less successful but everyone is trying their best and doing it with great enthusiasm.

Seeing everyone trying so hard and working together helps me to rekindle my passion in the face of adversity. I am inspired and it helps me to resist the temptation to simply sit down without doing anything to make the situation change and give up.



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

Each one of us in our own practical way develops their own way of practicing and teaching. Some might be taking this opportunity to explain more while others are choosing to focus more on moving.

Some teachers are also using other things to simulate the *uke* or the attack. We are also all fortunate to have the benefit of using technology so that the classes can be online, videotaped or posted on social media. Despite not being able to touch each other, there is a lot that can be done. Our dojo has been promoting weapons work and emphasizing body movements. Today's solutions might not be in line with the methods of the past, but ultimately it is our job as teachers to look for any and all possible solutions so that the students can continue with their practice until the situation improves.

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Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”

Masaki Tani Sensei’s book, *Aikido My Way*, does just that. Before the passing of O’Sensei in 1969, Aikido had begun to spread all over the world. Under the direction of Nidai Doshu, Kisshomaru Ueshiba and Sandai Doshu, Moriteru Ueshiba, Aikido has spread to all seven continents and is enjoyed by millions of people all over the world. Many of Aikido practitioners have been fortunate enough to practice in many of these different places and with diverse cultures. With this opportunity comes a broadened worldview which yields many lessons about not only life but Aikido itself. Tani Sensei’s book brings over 50 years of Aikido training to life as he recounts many of his life lessons that he has learned during his travels on and off the mat. Many times, while reading Tani Sensei’s book, I found myself smiling or nodding my head as he mused about some story or lesson he gleaned while being slammed to the mat or while flying an airplane. As a student of Aikido in the USA, I often won-

Book Review:

Aikido My Way: An Endless Trail Towards A Fantasy Destination
by Masaki Tani, Aikido 7th Dan



dered how other practitioners experienced Aikido and after reading Tani Sensei’s book, I now have a slightly better understanding. The word for teacher in Japanese is “sensei” (先生) which means, “One who comes first.” Tani Sensei’s book illuminates a path that few tread upon and even fewer stay on for 50 years and his book, as Emerson’s asserts, is the trail he leaves behind for others to follow. *Aikido My Way* is wonderful book for those of us who have been on their Aikido journey for a while, but it is also good for anyone who might be just starting their Aikido journey as well. I highly recommend this book!•

Editor’s note: *Masaki Tani Sensei’s book is available in both English and Japanese. On Amazon in the US, it is only available in English but only on the Kindle format. It is available in both Japanese and English in both hard and digital copy on Amazon Japan. The prices is about ¥1,100 or \$10.00 USD.*



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

Reflections in Crisis *continued from page 5...*

Ultimately, martial artists are fighters and when I see everyone working hard and striving, I am proud to be part of this group. As aikidoists, we do not resist the attack, we harmonize with it. We also don’t just give up and resign ourselves to just sit and wait while complaining that we need “the sun to rise in order to walk.” Martial artists are people who are resolute and have perseverance. We never wait for the situation to change; we change the situation and solve the problem.

With this “new normal,” we all have been shown a better version of society and maybe even ourselves. Everywhere I look, I see compassion, support, self-discipline, and people willing to put in the work to help and protect others. Even in these bad times, students are adapting to the guidelines, and many are still coming to class whether it is in person or online.

In Japanese, they have a popular saying, “Nanakorobi yaoki” (七転び八起き) which means, “To fall down seven times, but get up eight.” This is the survival attitude that we learn in the study and practice of *budo*. This persevering attitude teaches us that many times the solution to our problems is within us. If we want to succeed in anything or just survive this pandemic, we are going to have to get up many times when life knocks us down. However, this doesn’t mean that we do everything all on our own.

Many times we need the help and support of our friends and family. During this time many of us have realized the true meaning of friendship. Friendship can encompass many things but in the end a friendship without “action” is not friendship and is just talk. Friendship like Aikido must be practiced with both people putting in the action to be friends. Seeing and understanding the true meaning of friendship in the Covid times has filled me with hope. Even when things have looked bleak and my spirits were low, it was my friendships that kept me going. I have

realized that true friendships are not a matter of physical closeness. Friendship can cross borders and we don’t have to be next to that person to make them feel like they are a part of our family. Our relationships and friendships depend on how we feel about that person and that is what creates the “closeness.”

Our dojo has been a part of the Aikido Center in Los Angeles family since 1997. Since that time, we have lived through many anniversaries, promotions, and student weddings, but we have also survived the dojo burning down and the passing of our teacher, Rev. Kensho Furuya and the death of our good friend, Hideo Yonemochi Sensei. With each of these battles and victories, our bonds of friendship have been strengthened. Over many years and many tribulations, the strength of our friendships have grown and strengthened and the coronavirus is no different. I am grateful to have been in contact with Ito Sensei regularly and he has always been supportive and checking to see if we need any help. Our conversations and his support have made this situation more bearable.

Aikido is about solidarity, family, support and commitment and we especially see this in these difficult times. I am so grateful for the support of our students and our friends who have collaborated in many ways to help us so that we can continue on and have a future in the arts that we love so much. I want to take this opportunity to thank each person who has continued to pay the monthly dues throughout this time and I also appreciate the support and collaboration that everyone has shown the dojo in one way or another. I also wanted to give a special thanks to my “family” from Los Angeles and everyone from the Aikido Center of Los Angeles, the Furuya Foundation, Ito Sensei and I especially want to thank James Doi for all of his kindness and support in these uncertain times.

It is times like these which show us who we are and who our friends are. I am glad to have friends and students who are supporting me during these hard times. •

In Aikido, everything is “positioning,” except we call this, “*ma-ai*” in Japanese or in another way we say, “spacing” which also includes “timing.” Actually, I think in English we do not have an accurate, equivalent for “*ma-ai*.” Before one even makes contact with their partner or opponent, one can see by how they position themselves or take *ma-ai*, if they are really skilled or not. In a real battle, an expert can see the outcome simply by observing the *ma-ai* each person takes. Bad positioning or lack of proper *ma-ai* always means disaster in a real encounter.

In Aikido, we often practice with “soft” attacks, and this often causes us to lose sight of this *ma-ai* training. We must be careful of this point and study this well.

Ma-ai is also important in Life as well. We often hear the term, “being in the right place at the right time,” – this is exactly what Aikido is all about!

Today, I heard that one of my students was in a bad car accident on the freeway – luckily he is ok but his car was totaled. Such a shame but I am glad that he is ok. When I heard what section of the freeway he was on, I was very concerned because this is a very dangerous part of the freeway – I don’t know why they don’t fix this section – it has been like this for as long as I can remember – 30-40 years? They continue to have accidents here every single day and I think my student was very lucky not to have any injuries. This area is very dangerous because it is an area where everyone is slowing down and in this process of slowing down and the dangerous curvature and narrowing of the road, truly fatal accidents are rare because cars are not really speeding. I always rebuke my student to never take this way and now he found a better way to downtown by bypassing this dangerous section. By continuing just a little further, he can exit easily and safely and actually this puts him in a much better position with a wider road that has less traffic and safer exits. This makes me think that it is all about positioning – never put yourself in a dangerous position.

This is true in Aikido practice also. One of my younger students was being lazy in class recently. I have been watching this hoping that he would change his attitude but after four weeks, he was still the same and getting worse. He was just being lazy in practice, being sloppy and not giving any effort at all. When I talked to him about this just the other day, he only showed me his bad attitude and just walked away from me. I am not going to say anything to him further on this point, but I was thinking that it is a shame that he really put himself in a bad position with his teacher. If he were more aware while thinking or prac-

ticating Aikido, he would never allow himself to be put in such constrained circumstances. I have a negative impression of him and have lost a little respect and confidence in him. Again, never put yourself in such a position. There is always a way to talk or act in order to be in a “good place,” always.

I saw some of my black belts today practicing *kokyu-dosa*, but not real *kokyu-dosa*, but some form of pushing like sumo. They are trying to see who is “stronger,” trying to see who is “better.” Just like animals fighting over food or a community of monkeys

trying to decide who the boss is and who controls the banana tree. How hard is *kokyu-dosa* to master! It takes years to understand this technique so who has time to fool around to prove who is “better?” How shameful – these are educated, professional and mature adults who are black belts in Aikido with many years of training under my instruction and they fool around like this.

In Life and in Aikido, we always protect one’s self by putting ourselves in a “good position” – this does not mean to take advantage of others nor to step on them or over them for our own advancement. “Good position” means to be proper and safe in our lives in a caring way. When I saw my students doing sumo, I could only shake my head – they have really put them-

selves in a bad position with me. I thought to myself, like being caught on a dangerous part of the freeway when someone else’s car goes out of control – there is nothing we can do – it is too late. A car accident such as this cannot be helped at all. Having a bad attitude or wasting time in practice is a matter of choice. We choose to show disrespect to the teacher with a bad attitude and we choose to waste our time in Aikido because we need to reinforce our egos by “outdoing” our partners. At least one of the black belts came up to me to apologize for his behavior. Showing a little regret or remorse is one way to correct the situation. To simply say, “I am sorry!” everything comes back into proper order and perspective and it doesn’t even cost ten cents just to say this – so simple! The other black belt did not say anything. To think the teacher does not know what is going on in class because they are not present in class is not good thinking – it’s just bad positioning once again!

Everything in Aikido and in Life is positioning – this means how we practice Aikido in every minute of the day. •

Editor’s note: *Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on December 14, 2005.*

Positioning



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

Dojo Coronavirus update:

The city of Los Angeles has cleared us to open, but with only classes outside. However, the number of coronavirus cases is still high and has not tapered. For the time being, we will only offer a limited schedule and all classes will be outside. Please maintain six feet social distancing and wear a mask at all times.

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, and national or ethnic origin 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

Mondays and Wednesdays

8:00-9:00 PM Regular Class



The Aiki Dojo

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Aikikai
Foundation



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Aikido World
Headquarters

Aikikai Foundation, Aikido World Headquarters

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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



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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