



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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The Dojo Reopens

Chinese Lunar New Year begins on February 12th. This Lunar New Year is the year of the Ox and it is incidentally also the start of a new decade.

2021 is a Metal Ox year that is earthly Yin. What that means is that those that work hard will be rewarded but also that things will happen slowly but at a stable pace. This is opposite to what happened last year. Last year was a Metal Rat Water year which means it was fast and constantly changing. This year is supposed to bring us calmness with a sense of steadiness and prosperity. The ox is a symbol, along with the Ume or plum blossoms, which signify the coming of spring and the beginning of agriculture. To Asian cultures, the ox is a symbol of prosperity and it can also be represented by bulls, cattle, and water buffalos. When we think of an ox, we think of a hardworking animal, but also an animal that can be extremely hard-headed and stubborn. This makes the ox the ideal animal to start the new year and new decade off with because this year we will need their hard-headed but cool determination. Thus, this year should be one of calmness, hard work and patience but also one of quiet determination.

In addition to prosperity, the ox is also associated with enlightenment. Wise men, like Lao Tzu, are often depicted riding on the back of oxen. There is also a famous series of poems and drawings called Ten Ox Herding that people often associate with the steps towards enlightenment in Zen Buddhism. The steps are: the search for the bull, discovering the footprints, perceiving the bull, catching the bull, taming the bull, riding the bull home, the bull transcended, both the bull and the self transcended, reaching the source and the world.

The image of the man pulling the ox is also said to represent the struggles that we all experience following the Way. Perhaps once we stop trying to pull and instead ride the ox then we will begin to see the Buddha nature which supposedly exists in all of us. That is why it is said that a warrior rides swiftly forward on a steed while a man of peace rides slowly upon an ox.

Writing about the Lunar New Year, author R. H. Blythe wrote, "The rejuvenation of nature coincided with a fresh trust in humanity, in one's own and other people's goodness, in the Buddha nature." With his words, I hope that 2021 is truly a fresh start. Last year, the last year of the last decade, was horrific and now Blythe's words have more feeling. We are all looking for the good and hoping that the unpleasantness of last year ended with

last year.

When we think of this year versus last year, it seems similar to a Japanese sword. Last year, it was *jigane ga deru* (地鉄が出る) which means "To polish the sword so much so that its true nature appears."

Our mettle was tested and many of us learned things we didn't know or didn't want to know about ourselves. This year is more like *yaki-naoshi* (焼き直し) or a "Re-tempering of a blade which has lost its edge."

In Aikido training, we all begin learning the basic movements or "kihon waza." Most of us start out clumsy and our movements are laborious with lots of starts and stops. Everything we do comes with resistance as we fight with the techniques. With time and training, we learn to trust the technique and our Aikido begins to flow. This is the point where our Aikido starts to look like Aikido.

Our lives are very similar. With the revelations of last year, many of us have experienced significant shifts in our lives and now we have to continue them or act upon them. As all the unpleasantness of

last year begins to thaw and spring begins to appear, the question becomes, "How do we live our lives?" Now is the time to re-temper ourselves and allow our true character to shine. Looking to the ox, we should be smart and reliable, but also hard working. This type of hard work, however, is done in the background, never demanding praise.

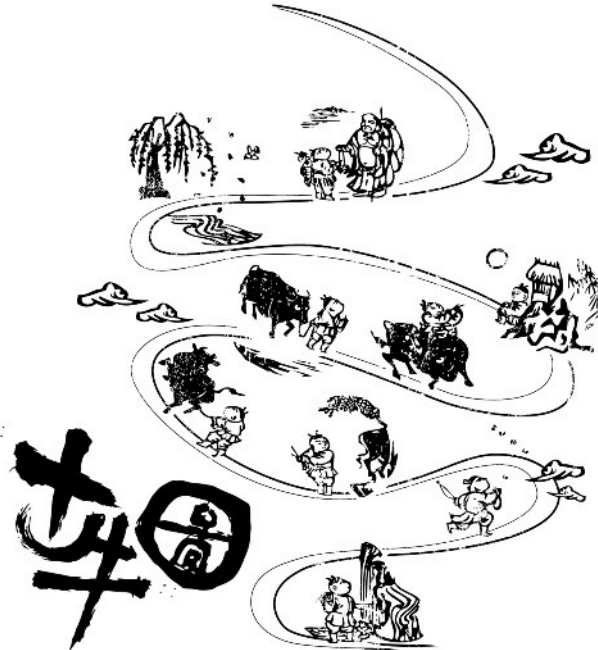


by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

The ox-type person is what Americans call the "strong silent type." They are in a sense *tatakiage* (叩き上げ) or a "self-made person." *Tataki* means "to hit" and *age* means "above." To make a beautiful sword, a piece *tamahagane* or "raw steel" is repeatedly heated and hit until it becomes the shape of a sword. Furuya Sensei once wrote, "When we suffer bad times, we always think that the world is against us. Actually, we can look at it in another way. The bad times that we suffer are actually blessings in disguise. Only the purest gold is tested in the hottest fire, lesser metals cannot take the heat."

Last year, we went through the fire and took repeated hammer blows. This year, we polish ourselves and with time and patience a beautiful sword will come into focus. I hope that this year is your best year ever. How could it not be? Trust the ox and take the slow and steady path forward. Best of luck this year!

Happy Lunar New Year!•



Year of the Ox



Next month is when I usually visit my Aikido family and friends in Los Angeles. Each year in March we meet to honor our teacher Rev. Kensho Furuya's passing. This will be the first time in 14 years that I won't be able to come and join my friends and family to remember Furuya Sensei.

Last year, just before the pandemic, I was in Los Angeles and left for my home in Spain just before California went into lockdown. From last year to now, so much has changed, and people can't train together or even eat in a restaurant together. At the same time, during this time of confinement and restrictions, we have rediscovered ourselves and many have found traits and skills inside that they didn't know were there. Many of us have worked to continue practicing, teaching and sharing despite all the setbacks.

From Los Angeles, Ito Sensei has worked tirelessly by making videos, writing articles and improving our members' online dojo experience. During this time, he has uploaded Sensei's entire *Art of Aikido* nine video series for people to watch while they are locked down – for free! Sensei's video series is a wonderful reference for anyone wanting to deepen their knowledge of Aikido. Releasing Sensei's video online reminded me of when I first received his video on VHS tapes. The first time I came to Los Angeles in 1997, Sensei's very first gifts to me were a set of these video tapes and a copy of his book *Kodo*.

These two gifts changed my life. Sensei's video series really helped me to fine tune my understanding of the technical as-

pects of Aikido technique. Although it sounds a bit strange, Sensei's lectures and his book helped to open the door spiritually to a part of the martial arts that I did not know.

Little Secrets



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

I watched Sensei's video tapes and read his book every day for the next 15 years. They were a daily reference for not only my Aikido training but my teacher training as well. Anytime I was stuck or in need of help, Sensei's references were there to help me. With every question, I looked to his videos or book and found that helped me to understand what was going on. With even the smallest word, gesture or movement I learned so much not only about Aikido but about this wonderful thing called Life.

Each year, I would come to Los Angeles and stay for about a month. Each day, I would spend time with Sensei asking questions and learning from him. In giving me his videos, Sensei was giving me a guide to reference when I returned to Spain so that I could continue practicing and teaching in my Dojo. Today, in order to be connected to our teachers we have many more resources, and we can follow them with online classes or on other platforms. In this way, the relationship with the teacher has changed and we can be connected even if we live halfway across the world. Now we have more tools and more immediate and accessible communication than in the 1990s. There is no excuse now for not continuing to practice and learn.

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Traditional training is often criticized for its emphasis on repetition. Detractors often say that this kind of training is dependent upon rote memorization rather than creativity and independent thinking. People believe that traditional training means doing the same movements over and over again like automatons with no minds.

It's true that a large part of traditional training involves repetition, but it's much more than simply mindlessly repeating an action. Yes, a large part of traditional training is repetition. However, many don't understand traditional training's emphasis on mindfulness.

Traditional training aspires to transform us, not simply physically but also mentally and spiritually. We aren't simply super gluing accessories onto ourselves like accessories on an action figure. Training is designed in a way that the teaching soaks into our very being and becomes part of us.

Repeating something over and over and still seeing it with the same eyes means we're doing it mindlessly and only wasting our time. When others talk of mindless repetition, they mistakenly think it is the actual act that is faulty. It isn't the repetitive nature of the activity that is at fault; it is our own mindset. If after doing something 1,000 times or even 10,000 times we see the same thing differently, then we've somehow transformed ourselves.

When we zone out during training, it often feels like we're just going through the motions. When we train, we can either coast through the movements ending up with disappointment or we can be thoughtful in our approach to train and practice correctly. This mindfulness enables us to make all kinds of discoveries and revelations on our own.

I practiced for many years, doing the same things over and over, without really understanding the how and the why. Maybe I was lucky that I didn't catch on quickly because I never really reached the mindless repetition stage. It always felt like I couldn't do anything correctly, so I constantly worked at improving the technique. Nothing felt right. Yes, I could throw my partner or twist their wrist or arm, but did I really do it right? I wondered, "How did the technique work?"

There was a lot of going back and doing stuff over and over again, trying to change the outcome. To me, everything was bewildering and seemed to be at odds with anything I thought was "natural." Of course, at that stage in my training, all I could see was the technique from my own limited vantage point. It was like I knew the right answer but had no idea how to arrive at it correctly or even what made it correct. It's like reliving the same day over and over trying to get it right.

Continued on page 5...

Traditional Training



by **Ken Watanabe**
Technical Director



Traditional Training *continued from page 4...*

As students, we are all stuck in our own version of the film, Groundhog Day. We're all Bill Murray reliving the same day repeatedly. We wake up the same morning and go through the day trying not to make the same mistakes over and over again, only to make an error in judgment. Then, we wake up the next day and go through the day again and try to navigate it a little smarter each time.

No one wants to relive the same day again and again only to arrive with the same result. Mindless repetition is basically not caring or simply giving up. What some mistake for "mindless" repetition is anything but mindless. Training requires the student to look at each individual instance in a new light, yet be able to retain everything from the prior instances. It's just like being caught in our own personal Groundhog Day. Like Bill Murray's character, we go through the same scenario over and over again, changing and adapting till we get it right and we become free of the time loop prison.

As students, we are forced to test ourselves and to try many dif-

ferent things to get it right. Sometimes there are false starts and dead ends, but from these repetitions, we narrow down the way until it becomes the true way. It's true that repetition is a hallmark of traditional training, but the repetitive nature of traditional training allows us to revisit each time we do a movement as another chance to look back at what we've tried in the past and try our best to get it right.

Each time we do a technique in each and every class, we come one step closer to liberating ourselves from the "prison" of repetition. We take in the instruction, we repeat the movement, until we don't even think of it anymore. Then we reflect on our prior attempts, both when we failed but also when we came close to getting it right. It is with that information that we use to eventually get it right.

To practice each technique over and over again, the same way, without taking any of the times we practiced before into consideration – that is mindless repetition. That will never get us out of the infinite time loop. Through proper training with the right spirit, we get closer to the correct answer without trapping ourselves in our own personal Groundhog Day. •



Little Secrets *continued from page 3...*

The interesting thing about Sensei's book is that every time I reread it, I would find some detail or interpretation that I did not read the previous time before. I am sure that people new to Sensei's videos will have the same experience as they "reread" these videos and find a multitude of "new" details that went unnoticed before.

The most curious phenomenon is that it was the same book and same video that we saw for the first time. All the information has always been there at our disposal without secrets or censorship waiting for you to notice, but we somehow overlooked it.

This is also true in our practice and with the Aikido techniques. The more we train, the more we evolve and as we evolve, the same phenomenon happens as with a book or video. When we go to class, we learn many of the same techniques. This can seem boring or mundane, but the more we seriously look, the more answers are revealed. The more I trained, the more I could see the smallest detail in Sensei's videos and with each explanation, I found something interesting that I would explore on the mat.

Over the years I have learned to see the smallest details that at first I was not able to see. Now that we have the opportunity to review Sensei's videos again, I invite everyone to watch them and open their eyes, ears and especially their minds so that they

can discover those small details that are there waiting patiently to be discovered.

Speaking of smallest details. Most know that Sensei's video collection is made up of nine videos and many would say that there is a wealth of information about Aikido philosophy and etiquette. However, many people may not know that the videos have an old samurai incantation hidden in them that is only revealed when all the videos are put together. On the spine of each video there is a kanji and each kanji alone is innocuous, but when put together they form a *kuji* (九字). A *kuji* is set of mudras or "sacred hand gestures" and mantras or "sacred words" that when done together summon a special power. The incantation on the back of the videos reads: *Rin byo to sha kai jin retsu zai zen*, which means, "The bravest warriors surpass all others at the front of the battlefield."

臨兵闘者皆陣列在前

Rin byo to sha kai jin retsu zai zen

The bravest warriors surpass all others at the front of the battlefield.

The question is, "How does the warrior surpass all others?" The warrior who seeks to understand themselves will undoubtedly pour themselves into the art and search for answers. The seeker will find the answers to their queries hidden in plain sight. However, in order to "see" the answers, the warrior has to put in the work and this undertaking requires bravery. I fondly look back 24 years ago when Sensei gave me a set of these videos and I am glad that he did because they really helped me in ways that he probably would never know. Push forth – the bravest warriors surpass all others at the front of the battlefield. •



We like to think that most problems in communication like speaking, seeing, and hearing are not a matter of good and bad. More often than not, it is simply a matter that we are not paying close enough attention.

As clearly as I try to explain and execute the techniques and create a training environment to enhance optimum performance, I usually find that most people are not really paying attention or paying attention at a level they need to be at in order to really learn Aikido effectively. As much as the teacher is paying attention to the needs of the student, the student must be paying equal or more attention to what is being taught. Teaching is a gift and the onus is on the receiver, not the giver - in most cases.

I know that in our normal lives, at work, at home and wherever we go, we are generally walking around in a daze. Most times, we are too self-absorbed with our own thoughts and perceptions to “bother” with what is going on around us.

When we are talking about *ki* (氣) and blending etc. in Aikido I often feel it is too hypocritical. How can there be this blending or harmony when we are not keenly aware of and attuned to the other person and what is going on around us. It seems, or at least appears to me, that most people are simply waiting for things to drop into their laps on a silver platter. Sorry, but Life doesn't work this way at all.

Before learning can begin, a connection must be made, and this can only be made through a strong sense of love or through this acute awareness. In the dojo, we rely on this acute awareness to be sensitive to everything going on around us and hopefully to the nature and form of instruction and practice. Ultimately this awareness becomes love at some point - not carnal love but love for the other person or for Life itself.

Not only is this awareness and “awake-ness” necessary in the process of learning and developing one's self in Aikido, but it is essential in any martial arts form. This “awake-ness” is also essential for every aspect or activity in our daily lives. We should try to develop this keen sense of awareness of one's opponent or whatever we encounter in Life from one moment to the next in our daily lives.

Train in Awareness



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Usually, people are too accustomed to “selective hearing” being only aware of what they accept or decide to accept and blocking out everything else. Of course, this is the most profound form of discrimination because it has an effect on us physically, mentally and spiritually, on all levels, and eventually on a social level as well.

How do we become “open” and more sensitive to what is around us? I think this is the essence of our Aikido training and discipline. It is something that we have to work very hard at because it is usually a process of UN-learning many years of bad habits and incorrect behavior.

In life and Aikido, it is best to be open and honest in one's training and be sensitive to the fact that we are very discriminatory animals, and this can be good and bad and could also potentially have harmful effects on our Lives.

One goal in Aikido training is to develop our sensitivity. To become very sensitive in Aikido and to truly learn Aikido, one must really throw one's self into our training without a regard for one's self in the sense of really seeing nothing else. Oddly, to become “open minded” and aware of what is going on around us in our training and in our Lives requires this “single-minded” devotion to training. This, in my own mind, is the great paradox of Aikido.♦

Editor's note: Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on May 28, 2004.

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

Dojo Coronavirus update:

The dojo will re-open for training on February 6th. Due to the high incidences of COVID-19 cases, the dojo will maintaining a limited schedule and all classes will be outside. We have purchased 6' x 12' mats for everyone to use so that we can still do ukemi safely. 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, 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

No Class

Fridays

No 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

8:00-9:00 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.

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Aikido La Gomera Aikikai
Kodokai Dojo



Aikido
Salamanca Aikikai
Kodokai Dojo



Aikido Valladolid Aikikai
Kodokai Dojo



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We are a not-for-profit, traditional Aikido dojo dedicated to preserving the honored values and traditions of the arts of Aikido and Iaido. With your continued understanding and support, we hope that you will also dedicate yourself to your training and enjoy all the benefits that Aikido and Iaido have to offer.

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