



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

2

The Year of the Tiger

By David Ito

Ito Sensei illustrates how the tiger's traits can help us in 2022.

4

Don't Despair

by Santiago Almaraz

Almaraz Sensei explains how feelings of despair can help us.

7

True Simplicity

by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Furuya Sensei writes about the power of simplicity.

Calligraphy by Yoshida Kuniharu



Happy Year of the Tiger!



In 1268, Hojo Tokimune became the Shikken or de facto ruler of Japan after being appointed by Shogun

Prince Koreyasu. At the time, he was 18 years old. Immediately after being appointed Shikken, Kublai Khan and his Mongol army began to threaten Japan. At first, the Mongols only demanded money and tribute. However, with each emissary, Tokimune defiantly turned them away to the dismay of many in the Japanese government and many members of the royal family. Many fearfully urged Tokimune to make a compromise but instead he just beheaded the leaders of the group and turned the rest away. Six years later in 1274, the Mongols grew impatient and crossed the Sea of Japan in an attempt to invade Japan. Tokimune was well versed in military strategy and tactics and was also a follower of Zen Buddhism. As the ruler of Japan, Tokimune was tasked with defending Japan and repelling the Mongol invasion. At the shoreline of the bay of Hakata, Kublai Khan's emissary demanded that Japan now surrender and become part of the Mongol empire but again Tokimune resisted. On the eve of the Mongol invasion, Tokimune was overcome with fear. Not wanting to succumb to his cowardice on the eve of his greatest battle, Tokimune sought the advice of his Zen master Mugaku Sogen. Tokimune said, "Now, reverend sir, an imminent peril threatens the land and now I face the greatest event of my life." Mugaku replied, "How will you face them?" To show his indomitable spirit when facing Japan's invaders, Tokimune shouted, "Katsu!" or "Victory!" Mugaku just

The Year of the Tiger



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

nodded his head and remarked, "It is true that the son of a lion roars as a lion. You are a genuine lion. Now, go and never turn back!"

With his teacher's encouragement, Tokimune charged forward and successfully repelled the invading Mongols. The victory was so swift that it forced the Mongols to hastily retreat leaving behind 10,000 troops on the beach to be slaughtered.

This year can be the greatest event of our lives if we dare to be. This month marks the beginning of *Toradoshi* (寅年) or "The Year of the Tiger." To the samurai, the tiger is a very auspicious symbol which is a supposed to signify strength, military prowess, vitality and courage. Some samurai would decorate their armor, weapons or other battle accoutrements with different tiger symbology in the hope of adopting the traits of the tiger on the battlefield. The Japanese say, *koketsuniirazunbakoji wo ezu* (虎穴に入らずんば虎子を得ず) which literally translates to that "If you don't enter the tiger's den, how will you get the tiger's cub?" In English, this proverb means something similar to "nothing ventured, nothing gained." Therefore, 2022 seems like a good time for us to adopt the traits of the tiger in order to make our goals come true.

Continued on page 3...



The Year of the Tiger *continued from page 2...*

One thing which all Aikidoists are trying to achieve in our movement is something called *ki no nagare* (氣の流れ) or “the flow of Ki.” To achieve the flow of *ki*, one’s *ki* needs to be activated at all times or, at the very least, at the beginning, middle and end of the confrontation. Having our *ki* flowing means that our minds and bodies are one and we are actively engaged in whatever it is we are doing.

The flow of *ki* is important because it enables us to be calm and centered at the moment of the *tachiai* (立合い) or “initial attack.” Being calm enables our *ki* to flow which enables us to *sente* (先手) or effectively “seize the initiative” in an encounter.

In swordsmanship, it is thought that seizing the initiative is the surest way to control the outcome of the confrontation. Seizing the initiative falls into three different categories: *go no sen*, *sen no sen* and *sen sen no sen*. *Go no sen* (後の先) is usually a beginner’s response where they wait until after they are attacked to move or “wait to take the initiative.” In *sen no sen* (先の先), the more experienced practitioner tries to react well before the attack reaches them or they “Take the initiative before being attacked.” At the highest level of Aikido, we are trying to reach the level of *sen sen no sen* (先先の先) where we move way before even being engaged and maybe even before the attack becomes a

thought in our opponent’s mind or “Take the initiative before the before of being attacked.”

Seize the initiative is about taking control of a situation and controlling it to dictate the outcome. In the Special Air Service or SAS which is the elite British military special forces, their motto is: “Who Dares Wins.” With this adage, it is thought that the person who dares to take the initiative is the person who is most likely going to win. We can’t win if we don’t take the initiative and we definitely can’t win if we don’t even try.

Therefore, when is the best time to do something? Now. Not later or soon, but right this moment. Things are starting to change and as we can see from the symbology of the tiger, they are changing in our favor. The Japanese proverb *toranoo wo fumu* (虎の尾を踏む) translates as “stepping on a tiger’s tail” but it’s supposed to mean to “do something dangerous and to take a risk.” Therefore, now is the time to show our mettle. The best time is always now and that’s why timing is everything to the best warriors.

Now, as in Tokimune’s case, it is “Katsu!” Now is the time to venture into the tiger’s den and step on the tiger’s tail while you take their cub and achieve your goals. The Year of the Tiger is about being daring enough to seize the initiative and do achieve whatever it is you want to do. Remember, in terms of the tiger, “Who dares wins.”•



Many times, during practice, we get confused or lost because we lose our motivation. Beginners and experts alike can lose the motivation to train.

For beginners, there is a lot of information that they have to process, and it can be very difficult to assimilate or understand everything that is being explained to them. Some newer students may finish the class with the feeling that they do not understand something or that they are somehow holding back the other students because they were unable to follow the techniques or execute them properly.

More experienced students may lose motivation because things are not happening fast enough or that they don't know enough.

To be honest, the feelings of frustration, discouragement or despair will never really go away. At all levels, we can get confused, frustrated, or overwhelmed by feelings of despair or discouragement. Sometimes we get frustrated by the technical parts of training. Other times it comes from the lack of motivation. Other times it is the result of interpersonal issues that have nothing to do with Aikido, with our family, work, classmates, teacher, etc.

Learning in any type of field requires discipline, perseverance, and a positive attitude. In my opinion these factors determine how quickly we progress more than ability, skill or strength.

Don't Despair



by Santiago Garcia Almaraz
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai

Learning in Aikido is not based only on memorizing a series of techniques or movements. In Aikido, we must also learn a series of protocols, a "Way," or philosophy which goes beyond the physical aspects of techniques, and I think this also adds to the complexity that a student has to get used to.

It is helpful to remember that a discipline like Aikido is a lot like a long-distance race which requires more than just speed. The path of learning Aikido is a journey rather than a destination. By looking at it this way, there are no goals, ends, or getting "there" as soon as possible. The important thing with this mentality is to keep a continuous and consistent level of practice. By having the journey mindset, time and perseverance will do the job of overcoming all of our moments of frustration and discouragement. This is something that one has to experience and not just understand.

From experience, I know that many students quickly quit after a month or so. I often ask myself, "Why didn't they continue?" In my opinion, I think that the student created an expectation which was unrealistic. In order for someone to earn a black belt they have to consistently and continually train for many years. They not only have to "learn" the physical movements of Aikido, but also learn to live the way of Aikido as well.

Continued on page 5...



Don't Despair *continued from page 4...*

As I said before, the decision to leave often depends on where your practice is, and depending on where you are, your reasons for this decision will be different.

A few years ago, I admit that it was difficult for me to understand why a student would quit training or leave the dojo. Over time, when someone has been practicing and teaching for years, it becomes totally normal that students quit quite easily. Practice can be monotonous and boring at times, and this makes training harder to maintain when there are many other things which also demand our time.

Furuya Sensei often talked about how being discouraged was a part of training. Therefore, it is only natural to think about quitting at some point or another while we are on our journey. However, the important thing is to understand one's own motivation and what drives them. It is obvious that the motivation that one has during their second week will not be the same as the motivation as one who has been there for fifteen years. The point is that motivation waxes and wanes and that each of us has to constantly be reminding ourselves or rediscovering our motivation in order to overcome the difficulties which come with following a path. Every person is at that their own level with their own motivation and will have to "know" clearly why they want to continue practicing.

Newer students can sometimes get frustrated because they are not capable of performing with coordination what others think

are the most basic movements. Students who have been training for longer will sometimes have deeper problems as they struggle to grasp the smaller details, or have difficulties with their own egos. Regardless of the experience level, each of us will have to confront the challenges that arise in training. That is why Sensei would often say, "The Way is hard." The road of training is hard not because it is long but because there are many things to learn or understand.

As I have said, practice is a long-distance race. With every kilometer, we have to be aware of ourselves. That means we have to be aware of what we are doing and also why we are doing it. I practice because I like it and because I enjoy it but that does not always mean that the classes are perfect, that everything goes well or that I don't get frustrated. On the contrary, I probably get more discouraged or frustrated than anyone else, but through training I have learned how to deal with adversity. I think that getting frustrated and enjoying myself go hand in hand. I have learned to see adversity as not only part of my training but where the real training exists. As long as we see adversity as a barrier that we have to jump over in order to continue learning, the more likely we are to choose to quit. The more we see difficulties as an important part of the journey, the more likely we are to keep on going. So, when things don't work out for us and we get frustrated, perfect! It's perfect because adversity is the door to improvement and so feeling despair gives you the motivation to keep practicing!

Even if you are frustrated, try to enjoy the practice!•

Aikido seems like a purely defensive martial art. If you look up the definition for Aikido, you'll learn that Aikido has no attacks. When we see an Aikido demonstration, we see one person attacking the defender who is then thrown or pinned over and over again by the defender. It looks like one person is doing all the attacking and the other person is doing all the defending.

We also find out that Aikido doesn't have any offensive techniques like punches or kicks. Unlike a martial art like Karate, there is no way for the defender to attack their assailant. Aikido also has throws and joint locks, but unlike a grappling martial art like Judo, the Aikido practitioner doesn't get to grab their opponent and throw them down. There doesn't seem to be a way to see who wins and who loses.

We can see that both striking martial arts and grappling martial arts have defensive moves in addition to attacks. So, what about Aikido? What can we do if we can't hit or kick our opponent or grab them to throw or pin them?

When we examine any martial art, we come to understand that no proper martial art technique is purely attack or purely defense. An attacking technique like a strike or kick always contains a defensive element to it, while a defensive technique like a block always contains an offensive element.

Good martial arts technique is always balanced between offense and defense. A block can be an attack against an opponent's punch, while a strike can be used as a parry against an attack. What's the difference? At the highest levels of martial arts, nothing. It is said that "all martial arts lead to the same place." At this place, offense and defense become one and the same.

When we start practicing Aikido's basic movements, we see it has *irimi* and *tenkan*. *Irimi* is a forward movement while *tenkan* is a turning movement. Similar to comparing offense to defense, *irimi* and *tenkan* seem like polar opposites, yet like offense and defense, they are closely related to each other.

When we watch *irimi*, it may appear as if we are defending against our opponent- dodging out of the way of the opponent's attack. However, as we move forward to protect ourselves, we also move forward with the focus of attacking our opponent. When we *irimi* it is both an offensive technique and a defensive technique. The balance in attack and defense must be very clear in *irimi*. We move forward very strongly as if to attack, yet we are still protecting ourselves against that attack.



When we *irimi* against our opponent we are simultaneously in attack and defense mode. Likewise, when we *tenkan* against our opponent, we aren't just turning in place trying to blend with the opponent's energy. When we look at *irimi* and *tenkan*, both are balanced between attack and defense but *irimi* and *tenkan* are also balanced against each other. *Irimi* contains a bit of *tenkan*'s turning and *tenkan* contains a little bit of *irimi*'s forward movement.

When we move in Aikido, at the moment of contact or *tachiai* we are at our opponent's blind side. When we *irimi* we are positioned facing to their rear. When we *tenkan*, we are positioned facing in the same direction as our opponent. Both *irimi* and *tenkan*, as disparate as they might appear, both require the same forward mental focus. We may not strike our opponent when we *irimi* or when we *tenkan*, but we still move with the spirit of striking our opponent whether we move in straight, or we turn and align with them.

When we *irimi*, we are not running away from the attack. When we move forward against our opponent's attack, it doesn't appear as if we are attacking our opponent; it appears that we are only focusing on defending ourselves and blending with the opponent's energy. The offensive aspect may be hidden away, but without the offensive element in the *irimi* movement, the technique will be out of balance.

The Genius of Aikido



by Ken Watanabe
Technical Director

This attacking mentality is very important in the technique because if we move in a purely defensive manner, it is easier for the opponent's power to overwhelm us. When we move in *irimi* or *tenkan*, it is important to move as much with our spirit and mental focus as we move with our feet.

Likewise, when it is our turn to attack our partner in practice, we practice stepping forward with the same power as if we are doing the technique. Aikido attacks in practice are designed that way for this very reason. When we can step forward strongly when we attack our training partner, then when it is our turn to do the technique, we can move with the same strength and focus.

Is Aikido an offensive or defensive art? Both. Aikido only appears as a defensive martial art. The offensive aspect of Aikido is hidden within its technique and within its movement. When we look beyond simply offense vs. defense, we can understand that attack and defense are the same thing. When we realize this in our practice, then we can begin to understand what a martial art is and the true genius of O'Sensei. •

There have been several thoughts rolling around in my head for several weeks now. Although these ideas are not quite matured and well thought out yet, I thought that I might just share my mental ramblings with everyone today as usual, however confused, and unclear as they may be. I have been contemplating Aikido and the trend of “simplification” of the techniques and trying to understand the real meaning of true “simplicity.”

My Iaido students continue to struggle in practice to catch on to the techniques, some still struggling after several years. Perhaps I should follow the current trend to simplify the techniques or lower my expectations. Today, martial arts in general are no longer a “teacher’s” art which is directed by the teacher, but rather a “student’s” art in which the art is governed by the taste and whims of the student’s desire.

In the “simple” act of drawing the sword, there is a very specific technique in the way the hands move toward the sword and the mental focus to draw the sword from the center of the body and then projecting power into the *monouchi*, or cutting area of the blade, as it penetrates the target area. This takes many years of training, practicing this single move over and over again. Today, to just grab the sword and draw it out of the scabbard only takes one minute to teach and even less time to do. We assume this is *atari-mae* (当たり前) or “natural” because it is the easiest thing to do at the moment. However, oversimplifying the move does not take into consideration the proper, most efficient and most effective method of drawing the sword to cut down one’s opponent. Perhaps, we do not live in the age of the warrior, so it makes no difference to us if the cut is effective or not, as long as it “looks” good and is pretty?

In Aikido techniques, it is a common practice to simplify and even over-simplify the techniques. Perhaps it is easier to teach this way – and maybe even easier to learn.

Nowadays, it seems like anyone can get a sword polished just about anywhere, even by untrained people. In this country, old blades are sand blasted with tiny glass beads to remove the rust. Various acids are used to bring out the temper line and finally it is buffed shiny on a machine. The blade is now shiny and appears clean and everybody is happy! So fast and easy and cheap! But some, like me, still do not consider this a polish. And this goes for especially true connoisseurs of the art. In Japan, it takes about 13-15 years of apprenticeship to fully learn the art of polishing a sword and even then nobody considers themselves a full fledge *togishi* (研ぎ師) or “sword polisher.” 18 different stones must be mastered to properly polish a sword. Without an experienced master polisher to instruct us, it is almost impossible to penetrate the secrets of the art. There is no easy way or short-cut, this is the way it is.

Nowadays, many of us are not educated enough to appreciate the difference between a shiny blade and true, correctly polished blade. Even some unscrupulous professional polishers today, use only six stones in an 18 stone process, and now some use machine-operated polishing stones. Regardless of the method or tool, an expert connoisseur or appraiser can still tell the difference between a properly and improperly polished blade. Without proper education and this obsession for easy and cheap, we will eventually understand that we are only cheating ourselves and not being cheated by others.

It is interesting for me to watch these various instructional shows on television. I like to watch one cooking show, for example, and the famous chef goes to great pains to gather fresh quality ingredients and spends the whole half-hour going through so many steps to bake one cake. In another show, a similar cake takes only three minutes to throw into the oven! I wonder which cake really tastes better?

In Aikido and Iaido, and in martial arts in general, we are always thinking, “This one is too hard while this is easier.” This is only natural as is the way of the modern person. When I began the study of tea ceremony of calligraphy or other arts – there was so easy way or hard way. The teachers would say, “No shortcuts at all!” The said that there was only one way – the correct way and that is way we all set out to do it. They didn’t care how long it took as long it was correct.

Some things take time, and some things are hard. Building a bridge is hard, I don’t know how to do it, but some people do and however difficult and challenging, we still have countless beautiful bridges all over the world all made by many different people. No decent person in their right mind will say, “Let’s make this bridge as cheap as possible and leave out this and that!”

I need to cut this discussion short, for right now. I think that there are some things are that simple by nature. Some things seem simple but are hard. Some difficult things we try to simplify and in some cases that is good and in some cases it is not. Some things are just difficult, and we just have to live with it.

I think we can continually refine our art, and this may mean that it becomes simpler and more refined. Some parts, as difficult as they are, must not be touched because they relay the very essence of the art. Some things must remain difficult while some things need to be simplified. The art is in knowing which is which and not mistaking one for the other. •

Editor’s note: Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on June 10, 2003.



True Simplicity



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

Dojo Coronavirus update:

The current City of Los Angeles mandates are:

- Masks are still required for everyone to be vaccinated or not.
- Proof of vaccination or a 72 hour negative COVID test will be required to train for anyone under 12 years old.
- You will need to show your proof or test result in order to train.

IMPORTANT DATES

February 26th (Saturday): Intensive Seminar

February 13th (Monday): Dojo Closed for President's Day

March 4-6 (Friday-Sunday): Furuya Sensei memorial seminar

March 5 (Saturday): Furuya Sensei meinichi - memorial service at 10:15 AM

March 26th (Saturday): Intensive Seminar

April 24 (Sunday): O'Sensei meinichi - memorial service at 11:00 AM

April 30th (Saturday): Intensive Seminar

October: 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 Class
11:30 AM-12:30 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

Mondays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Tuesdays

No Class

Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Thursdays

No Class

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular 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
7:45-8:45 Regular Class

Saturdays

7:45-8:45 AM 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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