



# AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES NEWSLETTER

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Los Angeles, California  
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## MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF INSTRUCTOR

We have many new students joining our dojo and I would like to welcome them. It is not difficult to begin Aikido training, but it is very difficult to continue training from day to day. This is where most students fail. In the first three to six months of training, I must urge all new students to have much courage and patience and, by all means, do not quit.

We join Aikido because of what we have read in books and magazines or heard about Aikido from our friends or acquaintances. Getting "some idea" about what Aikido is, we find a school such as ours and join. I think most new students must be very disappointed in their first class. We don't find ourselves throwing dozens of attackers to the ground with one finger; but, on the contrary, we begin with the warm-up exercises and ukemi. This, I know from my own personal experience as a young, new student of Aikido a long time ago, is very boring and painful. Not only that, most of us find that we cannot distinguish our left foot from our right hand! I know how discouraging it can be from my own personal experience.

When I first joined Aikido as a young kid, I had no time to decide if I wanted to join or not. The teacher grabbed me from my chair where I was sitting with my mother and began to show me "kotegaeshi" wrist exercises. By the first half an hour, he had me practicing forward ukemi. We had no time to pay for the first month's dues or even sign a paper. Thirty years ago, it was very simple. Today, it is much more complicated. We have so many choices and we are so accustomed to running around every which way, we don't know where we are going or what to do. We waste a great deal of time and energy.

Aikido looks so easy but actually it is very difficult. Aikido technique is very sophisticated and complex and requires a great deal of effort and training to execute. One should expect this of a martial art. Of course, Aikido is not magic but often it must be practiced like magic. The magician practices for hours to make one movement look simple and easy. It takes years to perfect even the simplest technique. Understanding this, the new student should not become discouraged if he finds Aikido difficult at first.

More often than not, new students come into Aikido with too many preconceived ideas. This always causes problems. Most new students are not disap-

pointed with Aikido. They give up in disappointment because their own preconceived ideas do not agree with what Aikido really is. This is always a sad misunderstanding. New students must come into Aikido free from all pre-established ideas. New students should begin Aikido training with nothing but his own eagerness and desire to learn.

There is a old saying in Zen from Master Dragon Claw (Ryuge Washo) of the 7th century in China. Training is like a "thief entering an empty house." This was a favorite lesson often taught by the Zen Master Sawaki Kodo Roshi. When a thief enters an empty house, he has no fear of doing anything wrong because there is nothing to steal. There is no fear of being caught by the police because no crime is being committed.

## YUDANSHA KAI BLACK BELT COMMITTEE

The Yudansha Kai (Black Belt Committee) has been reorganized under the leadership of Mr. Douglas Firestone. This committee involves all the black belts or "dan" holders in the dojo and black belt candidates. The purpose of the committee is to improve communication and coordinate dojo activities among the senior students and future leaders of the dojo. It is very important for all assistant instructors, "dan" holders and black belt candidates to attend the monthly meetings.

## CHILDREN'S CLASSES

The schedule for children's classes has been expanded. Classes are now every Sunday from 12:00pm noon to 1:00pm and every Tuesday and Thursday from 4:00pm to 5:00pm. Registration is now open for new students so please encourage your friends and neighbors to sign up their kids for Aikido.

## 5TH DAN CELEBRATION FOR SENSEI

About forty members of the dojo gathered together on Saturday evening, January 14th, at the Regent Seafood Restaurant in Chinatown, to honor Sensei for his promotion to 5th Dan by Grandmaster Kisshomaru Ueshiba on January 1, 1989. Everyone had a good time.

## NEW STUDENTS IN THE DOJO FOR JANUARY

Ed Labayna  
Scott Grant  
Charles Arijo  
Brad Rader  
Art Martinez  
Donald Brown  
David Lee  
Eriko Shoji Birnbaum  
Lennie Senibaldi  
Charles Thomas Jr.  
Tom Wyngarden

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**NEW STUDENTS cont.**

Brad Rader and Art Martinez have returned after a short absence. Erica Shoji Birnbaum trained at Hombu Dojo in Tokyo for two years and holds a first degree black belt. She has lived all over the country and has now settled down in Thousand Oaks. She commutes to the dojo as much as possible. Nels Israelson, who is a well known photographer in downtown Los Angeles living across the street from the dojo, has come back to training again. His busy work schedule which takes him all over the world has kept him away from Aikido.

**"CLUE YOU IN"**

Many people missed it, but on December 26, 1988 at 7:00pm on Channel 2, Sensei appeared on a special children's program, "Clue You In." He portrayed a famous Aikido instructor living in downtown Little Tokyo.

**"MARKET FOR TRADING COMPLAINTS"**

Lecture by Tozen Akiyama Sensei of the Milwaukee Zen Center. Published in the Milwaukee Zen Center Newsletter, November, 1988.

The American election is over, and now we can reflect on it. Sometimes political discussion is political complaining and has a negative tone. If we think about it, however, we do every day what happens in elections. We are always concerned to satisfy our desires, and we expect without any reason that everything will go as we wish. We exert every effort to satisfy our desires, and when something does not go as we wish, we do not reflect on ourselves and see that it is wrong to expect everything to go as we wish. Instead, we are envious, hold grudges, get angry, blame, quarrel and the like.

Uchiyama Roshi said that our world is nothing more than "guzuriai no hiroba" which may be translated "market for trading complaints," and that our homes, our businesses, our society, and even international relations are all markets for our complaints. This was Uchiyama Roshi's clever twist of a saying that used to be popular in Japan - "yuzuriai no hiroba," which means "market for trading compromises."

As you probably know, crowding on trains in Tokyo in the morning and evening rush hours is terrible. People scramble for seats. If they cannot get a seat, they are packed like sardines and cannot move at all in a joggling train. Sometimes their hands are holding a strap here, and their feet are over there. When the train arrives at the station, people standing near the door have to step out to let others get off. Those who have been able to stay on the train feel at ease briefly, but the next moment other people rush into

the train, and the crowding happens again. Station employees (some whom are hired part-time for this purpose) push in those who cannot get on. It is so difficult and takes so long to push the passengers all in that the starting signal for the train often keeps ringing and ringing.

The slogan "market for trading compromise" probably referred to those conditions. Since then "silver seats" covered with silver cloth, have been set aside for elderly or handicapped people or mothers with babies, but even these seats are often claimed by young, healthy people. Our desire to satisfy our desires is so strong.

Just as though on a train, we are absorbed in satisfying our desires in our daily lives and complain to each other instead of compromising with each other. Envy, grudges, anger, blame, quarreling and the like are all different forms of complaint. As long as we live to satisfy our desires, we can never be free from complaining.

**A THOUGHT ON REIGISAHO**

**"The Way to Show Respect and Appreciation"**

By Mitsunari Kanai Sensei, 7th Dan, Chief Instructor of the New England Aikikai. Technical Advisor for the United States Aikido Federation, Eastern Region.

Continued for the January 1989 Issue:

If we advance this way of thinking, the matter of Reigisaho becomes a question of how one should live life itself. It determines what one's mental frame and physical posture should be prior to any conflict situation. Furthermore, in the actual conflict situation, the guard-posture must have no openings. Thus, Reigisaho originates in a sincere and serious confrontation with life and death. Above all, Reigisaho is an expression of mutual respect in person to person encounters, a respect for each other's personalities, a respect which results from the martial artist's confrontations with life-or-death situations. The culmination of the martial artist's experience is the expression of love for all of humanity. This expression of love for all humanity is Reigisaho.

The martial artist's respect for the self and for others easily tends to become coarse and unpolished. So the idea of Reigisaho, that each person is important, functions as a filter to purify and sublimate the martial artist's personality and dignity. Reigisaho thus melts into a harmonious whole with the personal power and confidence that the martial artist possesses. This coming together establishes a peaceful, secure, and stable inner self which appears externally as the martial artist's personal dignity. Hence, a respectful personality with strength and independence is actualized. Therefore, Reigisaho is a form of self-expression. The formalized actions of Reigisaho reveal the total knowledge and personality of the martial artist.

We who are trying to actualize ourselves through Aikido

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**A THOUGH ON REIGISAHO cont.**

should recognize that we are each independent. Only with such deep awareness of the self, can we carry our a highly polished Rei with confidence.

In short, Reigisaho is to sit and bow perfectly and with dignity. In this formalized expression of Rei, there exists the martial artist's expression of self resulting from his or her philosophy of life and death. And, for this reason, the martial artist shows merciful care and concern for those who walk on the same path. The martial artist shows merciful care and concern for all who seek to develop themselves in mind, body, and spirit, with sincere respect for other human lives.

In order for any external, physical act to be complete, it must be an expression of the total person. Abstractly, the external form includes the inside. This is a complete form. For Reigisaho, that means that the external act was from the deep heart or mind. Also, the heart or mind was using the external act for its expression. The formalized expression of the inner and outer person harmonized is the Saho of the Reigi.

**"The culmination of the martial artist's experience is the expression of love for all of humanity. This expression of love for all of humanity in Reigisaho."**

Continued in the next issue.



**USAF EASTERN REGION NEWSLETTER**

Sensei is publishing the United States Aikido Federation Newsletter for the Eastern Region (East Coast) on a bi-monthly basis. The subscription is \$15.00 per year. Each member should subscribe for his own issue.

The response for the newsletter has been very good and we have received over one hundred subscriptions since the beginning of December. The premier, January issue is going fast. Please put in your order for subscriptions now!

**WORDS FROM DOSHU:**

**From The Spirit of Aikido, by Kisshomaru Ueshiba, Grandmaster of Aikido, the Aikido World Headquarters Tokyo, Japan**

**"Nen and Mind-body Clarity"**

As a child, when I learned that the earth was spherical, I imagined undertaking great adventures. I wanted to see whether I would return to the same spot if I moved directly forward and circled the earth, and I thought of tunneling straight through the earth and coming out on the opposite side. I suppose children everywhere have such dreams. Nowadays, with passenger jets circling the globe constantly, we can easily appear on the other side of the earth.

So it was that my childhood dream became a reality when a group of us from the Aikido Headquarters Dojo were invited to South America in September, 1978. The occasion was the Seventieth Anniversary Celebration of Japanese Immigration to Brazil. The invitation was extended to us by the Aikido Federation (R. Kawai, President), and we received a lively reception in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janero and Mogi das Cruzes, where many Japanese live and are influential in the community. The city council of Sao Paulo unanimously voted to confer upon me the distinction of honorary citizenship. This was gratifying, of course, but I was also deeply impressed by the serious and earnest attitude shown by both Aikido practitioners and potential students as they watched the public demonstrations and received instruction during practice sessions.

After our visit to Brazil, we went to Argentina for four days and to Uruguay for two days. Again we held public demonstrations and gave special instruction in Aikido in Buenos Aires and in Montevideo, and, again, in both cities we were overwhelmed by the warm reception we received and the sincere attitude of the Aikido practitioners.

The enthusiasm for Aikido wherever we went was far beyond our expectations, but one of the unforgettable moments was realizing my childhood dream of standing on the other side of the earth, for South America is on the other side of the earth from Japan, and Uruguay is directly opposite Japan.

Our visit to Montevideo on September 24 and 25 was one to be truly cherished, but another equally moving event awaited us. On the day following an Aikido demonstration held in the largest auditorium in Montevideo, built to commemorate independence from Spain, we were invited to the Uruguay Military Academy. This is an elite school with only 300 students, selected from among the brightest young men in the country, and in a curriculum heavily filled with courses in military science Aikido is a regular course. Why was only Aikido included in the curriculum when both judo and karate are also very popular in the country?

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**WORDS FROM DOSHU cont.**

At the conclusion of the public demonstration and my lecture on Aikido, the president of the military academy stood up and gave an inspiring speech. He said:

In the fluid movements of Aikido there is always a firm center. A sense of balance pervades every motion of the hand and foot and they glide smoothly, as if in a dance, because the movement of the whole body is nothing but the smooth movement of the center. I believe the main point in Aikido is the realization of a strong, firm center. What is essential for our country as it faces a turbulent world is to cultivate a spirit having a strong center within and a benevolent form without. I want students of this academy, who are destined to become leaders of our country, to train hard in Aikido and realize this strong center both spiritually and physically. This is the reason why Aikido is included in our regular curriculum.

The president expressed everything I had been thinking. A strong, firm center is what Master Ueshiba constantly called the unity of ki-mind-body. This is the critical essence of Aikido both in principle and in actual movement. While I was deeply impressed with his address, I was even more determined to fulfill our responsibility as students of Aikido to make sure that this legacy would be made more easily available to everyone, regardless of race or nationality. Aikido's unique teaching and techniques must always be in accord with the basic essence of Aikido. If we take pride only in its uniqueness and become attached to it, we may fall victim to myopic vision, dogmatism, self-conceit and provincialism. Having come to the opposite side of the earth, unexpectedly, I was given the opportunity to reflect on the future of Aikido.

The essence of Aikido, the unity of ki-mind-body, is to be realized by the whole person. If we grasp it merely as a spiritual reality, we may become doctrinaire and fall into abstraction. If we see it as a matter of technique and physical prowess, then we become satisfied with a simplistic explanation of motor movements. The essence encompasses both the spiritual and physical, and ultimately we must realize it as the budo unifying ki-mind-body from a philosophical and religious point of view.

?The best way to properly master this essence is to carefully consider the words of the Founder. His sayings may be somewhat difficult at first reading, but repeated reading and reflection will help to reveal the various levels of meaning contained within them. The frequent reference to the Japanese word,

*nen* may be bothersome, but we will retain the original term because of the lack of an exact English equivalent. (*Nen* connotes concentration, one-pointedness, thought-moment.) The realization of *nen* is the key to opening the essence of Aikido; in fact, it constitutes the very heart of Aikido. The following statement by Master Ueshiba clarifies what is meant by this:

This body is the concrete unification of the physical and spiritual created by the universe. It breathes the subtle essence of the universe and becomes one body with it, so training is training in the path of human life. In training the first task is to continually discipline the spirit, sharpen the power of *nen*, and unify body and mind. This is the foundation for the development of *waza*, which in turn unfolds endlessly through *nen*.

It is essential that *waza* always be in accord with the truth of the universe. For that to take place proper *nen* is necessary. If one's *nen* is connected to the desires of the small self, it is erroneous. Since training based upon erroneous ideas goes against the truth of the universe, it invited its own tragic consequences and eventual destruction.

*Nen* is never concerned with winning or losing, and it grows by becoming connected to the *ki* of the universe. When that happens, *nen* becomes a supernatural power that sees clearly all things in the world, even the smallest movement of hand or foot. One becomes like the clear mirror reflecting all things, and since one stands in the center of the universe, one can see with clarity that which is off-center. This is the truth of winning without fighting.

To develop the subtle movements of *ki* based on *nen*, you must understand that the left side of the body is the basis of martial art and the right side is where the *ki* of the universe appears. When one reaches the realm of absolute freedom, the body becomes light and manifests divine transformations. The right side brings forth power through the left. The left becomes a shield and the right the foundation of technique. This natural, spontaneous law of nature must be based in the centrum, and one must manifest the self freely as dynamic, spherical rotation.

Master Ueshiba taught that the cultivation of *nen* was the one-pointed concentration of the spirit as it seeks union with the universal reality that brought us into this life on earth. When the mind-body unified by *nen* harmonizes with the principle of an ordered universe, a person becomes free of self-centeredness and self-consciousness, giving birth to a supernatural all-seeing power. The person in accord with the principle of universal change moves deftly with lightness and agility, able to freely manifest himself in spherical movements.

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**WORDS FROM DOSHU cont.**

Nen, the single-hearted concentration seeking the unity of the order in the universe and the principle of change, becomes the wellspring of the subtle working of ki. When this subtle working, rooted in nen, is manifested in the heart and mind of a practitioner, he becomes free and open, and his insight becomes penetrating. When it works through the body, the result is spirited, dynamic movement in circular and spherical rotation. In short, nen is the line that connects ki-mind-body and the universal ki.

**POINTS TO PRACTICE**

Students should learn to come on time to the dojo. Students who come a little earlier can take a few minutes to sweep the doorway and change first to warm-up before class. This is an important part of training. When I was a young student, I was always the first one to class and the last one to leave. When other students practiced one hour, I would practice two. When other students practiced two hours, I would practice five.

Just one day in the whole year, I missed coming to class. I think I was sick or my mother had to take me somewhere, I don't remember clearly. Because my car was not parked in the parking lot, everyone who came to the dojo thought that class must be cancelled because I was not there and they all went home. Later, when the teacher arrived, there was no one to take class and he was very upset. He couldn't figure out why everyone thought there was no class.

I heard a story about a famous martial artist who used to sit in front of the doorway of the school and tell everyone that class was cancelled so that he would be the only one to take class from the teacher. Although this is a thoughtless trick, his spirit was admirable and it is no wonder that he became so great.

I rarely see students this devoted today. I think there is something missing in our lives. There was a survey done with many young Japanese in Japan very recently. When asked what was the most important thing in life, most everyone said, "making money." I think this is a very sad state of affairs. Everyone is trying to hard to satisfy their own petty desires that they forget how to live life. Aikido cultivates within ourselves a spirit of respect for all things. It is through this form of respect and through our daily training in the dojo that we begin to see the meaning of our lives. Without this, it is too easy to become very shallow and materialistic in our present society.

On January 7th, the Emperor of Japan passed away

after a long illness. At one time, Japanese considered him a god and many people were willing to die for him. After the war, he declared himself just another human being. Although he became just another person, there were still many people willing to die for him. I am not interested in their political motives or actions but I think it is interesting that a person can die for another person or can give up his own precious life for an idea. We often hear in old love stories, "I am willing to die for you." We never hear this today. We think it is too corny.

I still think it is very beautiful. I think we think about ourselves more today than before. I think people are much more selfish today than even twenty years ago. I don't meet many people today who are willing to give up their lives for what they believe in. Most people always think they can settle it with money and just run away.

In Aikido, you can't run away from anything and there is nothing you can settle with money. Practice is simply practice. Within this practice, we find that we are stuck with ourselves no matter what we do and how we think. Giving in to this, as we get to know ourselves and as we get to understand ourselves, we begin to see the meaning of our lives. This is the essence of our daily Aikido training.

Students should be very thankful for the beautiful dojo they have. It is not a success story but a story on not giving up despite continued failure. Perseverance and courage can turn failure into success. Most people give up before they have a chance to see this happen. We should all work together to build up our dojo and our membership. It is important to share our good fortune with others. It is important to share our practice with others. It is a shame to keep everything for ourselves if we have so much to give. This is not right.

Part of our training should be to encourage others to join our practice. New students coming into the dojo contribute to the variety and depth of our training. It is important to cultivate new students and transform them into good partners to further develop our training. Much of the time, we think too much of ourselves and only worry about getting to the dojo, practicing and rushing home to dinner. We must think about others as we go about our own daily activities. Eventually, we come to understand that what we do and what others do is one and same life. This is called our universal life as opposed to our petty small lives.



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**NEW YEAR'S PRACTICE**

Every year on the evening of December 31st from 11:30pm into the New Year, we conduct a special practice to bring in the New Year. Although it is a busy time for everyone, we had many students participating this year. Afterwards, we enjoyed a little party of cookies and tea.

Throughout Japan and especially at the Aikido Hombu Dojo, it is a very special occasion. We discussed this in our January issue. Traditionally, many eager students go to the ice covered river on New Year's Day, breaking a hole in the ice and jumping into the ice cold river to purify and strengthen themselves for the New Year. This is always preceded by special Aikido breathing exercises which protect the students against the cold. Unfortunately, this tradition is now discouraged. About fifteen years ago, a karate group in a big university wanted to copy our tradition and a group of their students went to the same river to practice this ice purification. When the karate school captain jumped into the river, he immediately had a stroke and died. They did not prepare themselves with the proper breathing techniques. This was a very unfortunate accident. Nowadays, we celebrate this tradition with a simple practice session in the dojo.

Students participating in the New Year's Practice:

Douglas Firestone  
Victor Rodriguez  
Tom McIntyre  
Bill Heath  
Dan Eaton  
Chris Prejean  
Sukkoo Lee  
Henrique Morimura  
David Wisotzki  
Steve Ostreicher

Congratulations!

**NEW YEAR'S PARTY AND SENSEI'S PROMOTION  
CELEBRATION PARTY ON JANUARY 14TH**

Ko Matsumoto  
Douglas Firestone  
Bill Heath  
Kathy Altieri  
Esther Tudor  
John Easton  
Brigido Anaya  
Tony Gonsalves  
Sukkoo Lee  
David Nava  
Ismael Araujo Jr.  
Andrea Guild  
Yasu Matsuki

**cont.**

Victor Rodriguez  
Richard Elorriaga  
Morgan Weisser  
Hieu T. Nguyen  
Brad Rader  
Ken Watanabe  
Junko Sakai  
Kaz Nishida  
Ron Hill  
Chris Prejean  
Mario Gonzales  
Kristofer Youngstrom  
Curtis Westfall  
Hope Westfall  
Dan Eaton  
Sherry Eaton  
Keiko Tomatsu  
Lee Hart  
Janet Hart  
Blake Ashley  
Steve Ostreicher  
Godo Astudillo  
Liza Astudillo  
Dan Yoshimura  
James Beal  
Henrique Morimura  
Charles Armija

Thank you for coming to the Party!

**THE AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES**

The Aikido Center of Los Angeles is dedicated to offering the finest facilities and instruction in traditional Aikido on the West Coast. The ACLA celebrates its twenty year affiliation with the Aikido World Headquarters in Tokyo, Japan, under the direction of Grandmaster Kisshomaru Ueshiba. The ACLA is also a member of the Eastern Region of the United States Aikido Federation. The Chief Instructor is a certified "shidoin" or instructor under the USAF and holds the rank of 5th Dan in Aikido. He is also President of the Southern California Sword Society and on the Board of Directors and the Publication Committee of the Japanese Sword Society of the United States, the largest organization of sword collectors outside of Japan. Furuya Sensei is also a contributing editor to Martial Arts Training magazine with his column, "Ancient Ways."

The Aikido Center of Los Angeles is open seven days a week with classes from beginning to advanced levels for men, women and children of all ages.

New students are welcome to join of practice.

Monthly dues are \$60.00 per month. For the first month, there is a \$25.00 membership application fee. Family rates are available. Uniforms are \$35.00 for adults. \$25.00 for children's sizes.

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**TRAINING SCHEDULE:**

Adult Classes:  
Monday through Friday Evenings  
6:15pm to 7:15pm

Monday, Thursday and Friday Evenings  
7:30pm to 8:30pm

Advanced Classes (3rd Kyu and up)  
Tuesday and Wednesday Evenings  
7:30pm to 8:30pm

Saturday Mornings  
10:15am to 11:15am

Children's Classes  
Tuesday and Thursday Afternoons  
4:00pm to 5:00pm

Sunday Noon  
12:00 Noon to 1:00pm

\* \* \* \* \*

Muso Shinden Ryu Iaido Swordsmanship

Wednesday Evenings  
8:45pm to 9:45pm

Saturday and Sunday Mornings  
9:00am to 10:00am

\* \* \* \* \*

**FEBRUARY PROMOTIONS**

The following promotions are effective as of February 1, 1989. Congratulations and please keep up the good work. Promotions are based on attendance and individual progress in Aikido.

Sixth Kyu  
Mr. Dan Morales  
Mr. Robert Ron  
Mr. Francis Gala

Fifth Kyu  
Mr. David Nava  
Mr. Jose Araujo  
Mr. Ken Watanabe  
Mr. Seiji Takada  
Mr. John Easton

Fourth Kyu  
Mr. Ismael Araujo

Third Kyu  
Mr. Koichi Matsumoto  
Mr. David Wisotzki  
Mr. Tom Baker

Congratulations!

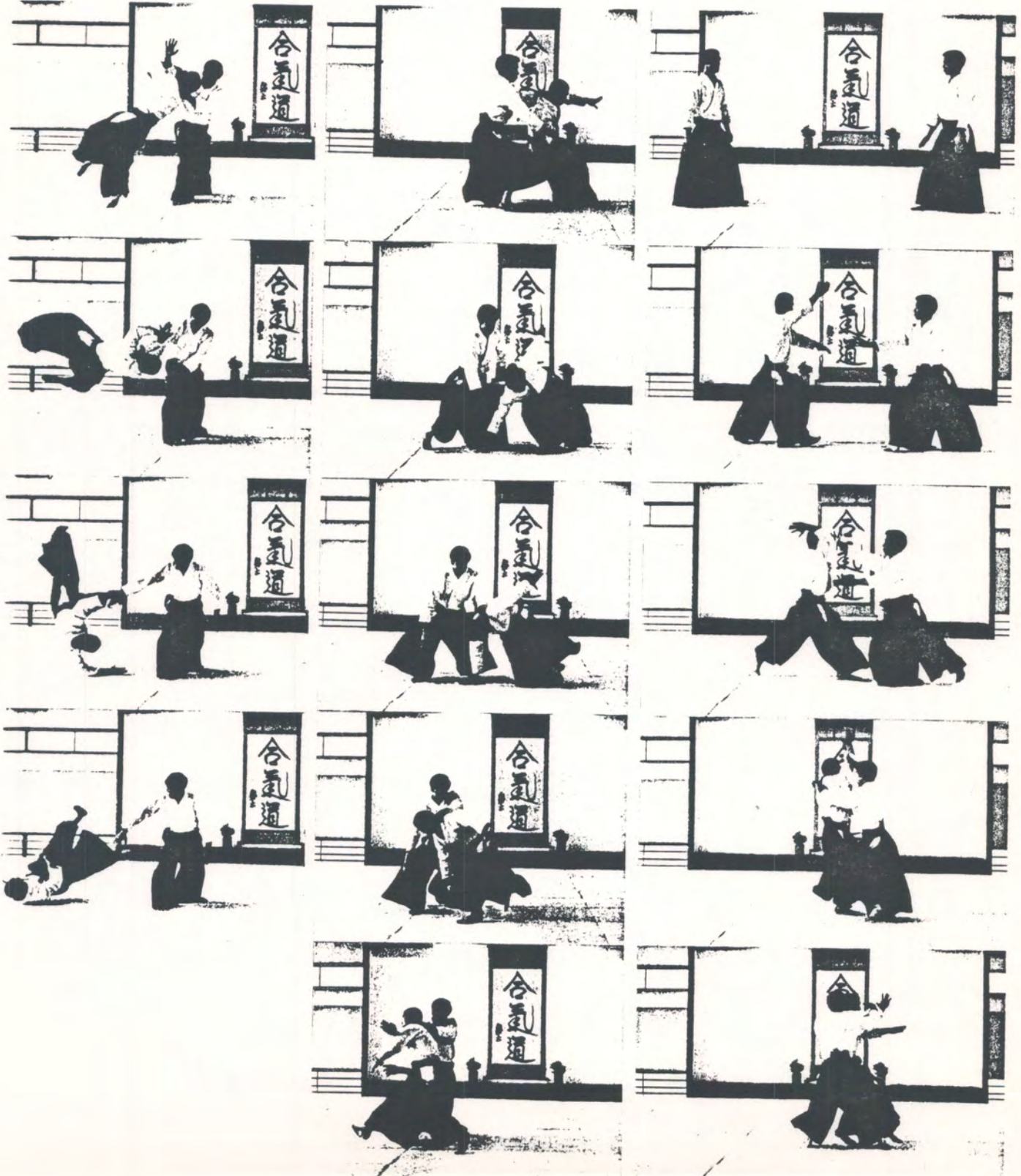


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**SHOMEN UCHI IRIMI NAGE:**

Superbly executed by Moriteru Ueshiba, Chief Instructor of the Aikido Hombu Dojo and grandson of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba O-Sensei.





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**STEVE STEPHANIDES: REPORT FROM HOMBU DOJO, JAPAN**

Note: Mr. Steve Stephanides is one of our students who is currently attending Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan and concurrently studying Aikido at the Aikido Hombu Dojo in Shinjuku. We have asked him to write for the newsletter during his ten months stay.

Sensei:

. . . I'm sorry this article has taken so long to get to you. Please excuse me if it caused you inconvenience. Regretably, the letter came to my school during the Winter break and I didn't receive it until I returned to school in January. Since then, I tried to assemble my thoughts and write it as soon as possible, but due to a very busy practice, school and work schedule, this proved to be not incredibly quick. Once again, I beg your pardon for any inconvenience.

If you would like me to write anything else for the newsletter, I would be more than happy to do so. Please simply let me know what type of thing you want me to write about and I'll do my best to get it to you (I will, however, be out of the country from late February to early April, as it is our vacation time). I was thinking of taking a weekend trip during spring semester to see one of the Japanese swordsmiths in person. If you would like me to write an article about this, I'd be more than happy to. Also, if you could give me some suggestions for background reading on the art of swordsmithing before I went, I'd appreciate it.

I would also like to take this chance to personally emphasize the appreciation I expressed in the article for ACLA and my appreciation for the job you are doing with it. I feel that you prepared me well for my training at Hombu Dojo. In fact, judging by the shodan test I recently watched, your standards are, if anything, higher than those at Hombu.

You will be pleased to know that I am practicing hard and looking forward to my return to ACLA. Likewise, I am working hard at Japanese and hope to be able to speak with you in Japanese next year. Please give my warmest regards to everybody at the dojo. I hope practice is going well for everybody and injuries are at a minimum. Also, if the shodan candidates haven't tested yet, please tell them "GANBATTE" for me. Or, if they have tested, please tell them "OMEDETOO." Once again, I hope everything is well, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Steve Stephanides.

**GOING TO JAPAN FOR AIKIDO TRAINING**

**By Steve Stephanides.**

When I was first led by a Japanese friend to the nondescript building nestled among private residences and apartment buildings in the Shinjuku area of Tokyo, I didn't know what to expect. Just like the art taught there, Aikikai Hombu Dojo is rather subtle. Inside, however, is an impressive five story dojo, complete with three dojos, with seven or eight open classes a day (beginners and advanced) as well as special classes for women, children, college Aikido clubs and private lessons.

The classes which I have been attending are very similar to those at the ACLA, a tribute to the great job done by Furuya Sensei in bringing the complete body of Aikido knowledge and practice to Los Angeles. Because of my experience at ACLA, when I started classes I was saved from the great trouble of learning new customs and protocols which plague most foreign visitors to Hombu. The techniques and teaching methods are almost identical to those at Furuya Dojo and an emphasis is placed on the basic techniques which we learn so well at ACLA. The only blatant difference in the classes is in the level of the students. It is not uncommon for me to attend a class in which, out of thirty or so students, there are only about four or five who haven't reached the black belt level.

The thing which makes Hombu Dojo different from other dojos is its diversity. Although this is not a quality unique to Hombu Dojo, it is probably more distinct here than at any other dojo. This is due to its position as the world headquarters of Aikido, which attracts Aikido devotees from around the world. In order to cover all of the classes required for this many people, a reasonably large number of senseis teach there. As each sensei has his own style, teaching methods and personal conception of Aikido, the classes are rather diverse. One can choose, for example, between the subtleties (and incomprehensible Japanese) of Yamaguchi Sensei or the energy of Waka-Sensei's early morning class, or go to both. Also in accordance with Hombu Dojo's role as an international center is the diversity of the students. The locker room is often reminiscent of a U.N. negotiating table, with locker room humor and discussions on technique being bantered around in a bizarre mixture of Japanese, English, French and other languages. Likewise the practice area is often cluttered with every conceivable body type: young, old, tall, short, fat, skinny, etc. (truly a test of one's ukemi to find a place to land after being thrown into such a swarm).

This great diversity of technique in both students and Senseis can reveal a lot about Aikido. When you work out with all of these different types of people, you are forced to vary your technique to fit each individual. Then small variations help you to better understand the techniques and the logic behind it. The different you see and experience in practice often lead to

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**continued.**

questions (such as why is there an omote and ura form of most techniques) and experimentation. You find yourself wondering why a technique is done differently by some people and how else it can be varied, for example.

Another advantage of Hombu Dojo is that when you have these questions, there are plenty of people around to give you a hand with them. For example, these is a Sensei (I've yet to learn his name, everybody just calls him Sensei) who, due to bad arthritis, is unable to participate in regular practices. Instead, he comes in between classes and teaches ukemi by throwing students around with a bunch of throws he has assembled with the purpose of improving ukemi (the only way I can describe it is that there's a lot of spinning around involved). It's a good workout, great practice and, according to some of the senior students, incredibly good for your ukemi (in fact, some of the higher 'dans' often work out with him).

There is more than the technical aspects of techniques to be learned from the diversity of Hombu Dojo, though. Harmony is an integral part of Aikido, and, considering the different perceptions and viewpoints present at the dojo, the degree of harmony attained there is incredible. As a friend pointed out, we have at Hombu, for example, both Jews and Arabs from the Middle East; yet instead of the tension one might expect, the dojo is a place where they come and work together for a common goal. Even though it is a very busy dojo and many of the people don't speak the same language, there is a feeling of friendliness and comradery present at all times.

The thought I'd like to leave everybody with, however, is not how different or special Hombu Dojo is, but how similar it is to ACLA. The atmosphere of friendliness which I just mentioned does not significantly differ with that at ACLA. Likewise, there are many helpful and adept people in LA to answer questions and experiment with. In fact, it might actually be easier to do so at ACLA because everybody speaks the same language. Practice is very similar, and, once again, in America there's the advantage of it being in English.

I hope everybody appreciates the fine dojo we have (the interior, incidentally, is much more nicely decorated than the spartan Hombu) in ACLA. I hope practice is going well and is injury free. I look forward to working out with you all when I return to the States in August.

**TRAIN OBEDIENTLY AND STRENUOUSLY**

By Koichi Horita from The Aikido Vo. 25. No. 3. , 1988  
**Aikido World Headquarters.**

There are several points that should be kept in mind while training in Aikido, not only for beginners, but for experienced people as well.

First of all, it is important to have an obedient and modest attitude during practice. Having a sceptical or critical attitude will slow down the pace of your improvement. You should be very diligent about this.

In Aikido training, the practices are attended by a mix of people; beginners and experienced practitioners, young and old, men and women; all training together. And the method of teaching may differ, depending on the instructor. Even one individual instructor may change the method of this teaching at different times. The essence of the waza (techniques) is the same however. It is important to follow the way that it is being taught at the time. Beginners especially, often seem to become confused because the way of teaching varies among the different instructors. This is natural however, because the aim of Aikido is to be in harmony with nature and the universe and the techniques must therefore differ, depending on the nature of the different instructors, just as the length of armour for the leg differs according to the heights of each person.

The important thing is to make efforts to learn the instructor's teaching with a modest attitude. Don't be sceptical or critical -- just train hard. As a human being, you can never know what is good or bad through your own limited experiences or theories. You will gradually be able to see yourself through repeated submissive and strenuous practices.

As you continue training, there are times when you become confused -- as if you are facing a blank wall. Even in this kind of situation I believe that it is important to keep training. If you keep training you will someday break through the wall. Once you are on the other side of the wall, you will feel as if you want to train even more. It's as if you are going up very steep stairs, one by one. Each step appears like a wall, one after the other. Every time you conquer one, a new improvement is made. I think that it is important to believe this and keep training without being impatient.

Since "Aiki" means "Ai (love) Ki" it is also important to care about your partner. It is not only the "Tori" or thrower, but the Uke should also watch the movements of his partner closely. Both should place importance on the continuation of each movement and maintaining the proper spirit. Even if your partner is a beginner, it is important to maintain the correct mental attitude. In many instances, you can learn more in this kind of practice. . . .

Continued in the March Newsletter.