



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Nidai Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba's 26th annual memorial service

Happy Lunar New Year!

Akemashite Omedeto!

明けましておめでとう

Happy New Year!

In 1873, Japan adopted the Gregorian calendar and the year started while winter was technically still going. Previously, when Japan used the Lunar calendar, the year started sometime in February where we traditionally see spring starting.

Sometimes, I wonder if the “old” way is the right way? Thinking about this, I am reminded of the Japanese idiom *onkochishin* (温故知新) or “to discover new things by studying the past.” One concept which is on the minds of many Aikido practitioners is this idea of competition. O’Sensei advocated against competition in Aikido. Most people think that he meant organized competition like in the Olympics. However, what is also important to remember is that competition comes in many different forms as well.

One aspect of competition that I would like our dojo to focus on this year is the competition of hierarchy. What I specifically mean is how having a hierarchy sometimes creates competition.

In the past dojos were feudalistic which meant that they ran as a hierarchy and were asynchronous controlled environments. Traditionally, dojos are controlled by “seniors” or *senpai* (先輩) who enforce the standards on the “juniors” or *kohai* (後輩). Regardless of the era, the teacher and the seniors set the tone of the dojo. Whoever they are or whatever they allow brings about the culture of a dojo. If the teacher or seniors are too harsh, then the dojo will be too rough and militaristic. If the teacher or the seniors are too easy going, then the dojo will lack structure and the students will be weak.

In the past, a good *senpai* led with an iron fist or in a strict and cruel manner. A senior says and a junior does without question. On a certain level, the senior lords over the junior. In this environment there is an unspoken competition between seniors who are trying to maintain their superiority and the juniors who are trying to overcome the senior’s authority.

Today is a different day. Now, seniors and juniors are more like peers. In this scenario, a good *senpai* is responsible for the well being of those in their charge. The senior’s goal is not to lord over the junior but to help them become successful by guiding

them through the rigors and ranks of Aikido training.

Understanding this, I would like everyone this year to focus on being guides not guards.

A guide is someone who is there to help. A guide helps you to get where you want to go as quickly and efficiently as possible. First, they figure out where you are right in that moment. Next, they figure out where you want to go. Then, using their experience, they create a plan to help you get where you want to go as quickly and efficiently as possible.

A guard is quite the opposite. All a prison guard cares about is adherence to order. Anyone or anything which disrupts that order is met with shouts, threats of violence, or corporal punishment. The guard doesn’t care where you are or where you want to go. All a guard cares about is maintaining the structure where they sit at the top.

A traditional Aikido dojo is supposed to be a place where we engage in collaboration rather than competition. In Aikido, we all get there together. That is why we say *onegaishimasu* before practicing with our partner. *Onegaishimasu* translates to mean something like, “Please do me this favor.” By humanizing our opponent with *onegaishimasu*, they cease to be our opponent and become our

training partner. Our partner helps us by taking our ukemi but at the same time we help them by taking theirs. Because we trade off there is no real competition. The only competition that does exist is the ego in our hearts and that is why O’Sensei advocated for *masakatsu agatsu* or “the truest victory is the victory over the self.”

It is said that it is “a dog-eat-dog world” because the world is competitive and harsh. For the most part, this is true.

However, a dojo is supposed to be a respite from the outside world. What is different inside of the dojo is that we take care of each other rather than compete with each other. Understanding this, I want to be more of a guide than a prison guard. I want to learn how to care for others and not just throw them down with ill repute. O’Sensei said, “The Art of Peace begins with you.” Throughout his quote he references “you” meaning the person reading the quote. He

was talking to you because we are the people who wish to bring about change in the world. We do this by remembering O’Sensei’s teachings and by continually trying to make the world a better place. This change begins in the dojo where we care for one another – be a guide not a guard. •



Be a Guide



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

“The Art of Peace begins with you. Work on yourself and your appointed task in the Art of Peace. Everyone has a spirit that can be refined, a body that can be trained in some manner, a suitable path to follow. You are here to realize your inner divinity and manifest your innate enlightenment. Foster peace in your own life and then apply the Art to all that you encounter.” – Morihei Ueshiba.



The Aikido Center of Los Angeles wishes to welcome Agustin Manzano Sensei and his dojos to its Kyokai.

We look forward to many years of training and dedication to the proliferation of Aikido.

We will be celebrating the Chinese New Year, on February 10th, 2024, and this year, the astrological sign is the Wood Dragon. The dragon is the most powerful creature of the Chinese zodiac and appears every 12 years. It is always coupled with one of the 5 Elements. The last time we had the Wood Dragon was 60 years ago. It has been categorized as a protector, a god, and a supreme being.

The Wood element is one of the 5 Elements found in nature according to the Chinese classical texts “Wu Xing,” or *The 5 Elements, and The 5 Movements in Nature*. The first record of the 5 Elements dates back to the Warring States Period (476-221 BC). At the time, it was said that Heaven sent the 5 Elements, so that life could be sustained on Earth.

The Five Elements are: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water and they are creating a generating cycle in that exact order. Each one of the elements is linked to different phenomena and qualities in nature. Each element is associated with a color, a sound, an emotion, and a stage of development. For example, Wood corresponds to East, Fire to South, Earth to center, Metal to West and Water to North. There is also an association with the various stages of development shows that Wood corresponds to Birth, Fire to Growth, Earth to Transformation, Metal to Harvest and Water to Storage. Finally, there is a Five Element correspondence with the movements of natural phenomena: Wood represents expansion, outward movement in all directions, Metal represents contraction, inward movement, Water represents downward movement, Fire represents upward movement and Earth represents neutrality or stability. Life is organized within the sum of the perfect equilibrium and the balanced relationships between all the elements.

The generating sequence of the 5 Elements allows us to better understand the sequence of events in nature. For example, during spring there is birth, during the summer and in the late summer there is growth, during the fall there is harvest and during the winter there is storage.

The myth of the dragon can be traced back over thousands of years across cultures. In Asia, the legendary creature is revered, and it is known for its auspicious power. It is said that the dragon controls the sky and the heavens, and it protects against typhoons and other natural disasters.

The Dragon combined with the Wood Element gives it a specific character. It is a sign of a new beginning. The Wood Element has the quality of grounding and expanding so it can fortify the foundation of the Dragon and strengthen its power from its core.

Wood Dragon



by Alexandre Hillairet
Aikido Instructor, Ventura Aikido

The Aikidoist is like the dragon. Both are special and unique with great powers. Both have the choice to hurt or to be compassionate with their adversaries. This new year is going to teach the Dragon Warrior to be patient and reassess its training. Aikido is a martial art that is extremely powerful and dangerous, so its study demands commitment and sacrifices. It takes courage and strength to return to the fundamentals and make corrections if necessary. By focusing in this way, the Aikidoist is strengthening what it already knows – that is the true strength of the dragon.

For everything that we do in life, nothing is ever given to us, therefore we should always be analyzing our training and continually improving so that we can continue to grow in the right direction. Embrace the Wood Dragon qualities this year and you should have a very productive year. •



In your *ukemi*, give up a little bit. By giving up, I don't mean surrender. What I mean by giving up is to give up on the thought of winning and losing.

In a layman's thoughts on martial arts, they tend to think of winning and losing. They think of martial arts as a sport or a competition where someone has to win. True martial arts transcend winning and losing. O'Sensei understood this and Aikidoists should try to understand this as well.

When someone new to Aikido watches practice, the first thing they might think is, "Who wins?" It's obvious that the one who throws their partner down, or who is left standing, is the winner while the other one who is thrown or pinned is the loser.

Often, when we have this idea of winning and losing, we might think that by jamming our partner when we take *ukemi* we are winning. After all, we stopped their throw or pin. What we think is that they are weaker than us, therefore, we are the winner.

Ukemi (受身), directly translates to mean "receiving body." In this context, we are the body who receives the technique. However, correct training, the type of practice that is most beneficial to our progress, is dependent on how we receive the technique.

Resisting the technique might develop physical strength, but that is all it does. Resisting the technique or having stiff *ukemi* does not develop the main skills a student gets from going with the technique or "giving in" to the technique.

Some of the main basic benefits of giving in to the technique are as follows:

1) Developing our footwork: When we move with the technique and try to keep up with the movement, it forces our feet to move quickly and effectively.

2) Developing our connection: When moving with our partner's technique, we try to maintain our grip on our opponent and move accordingly as we develop flexibility in our joints. We practice staying close to our partner without separating from them.

3) Learning the basics of self defense: as our footwork, connection, and flexibility develop, we begin to learn how to position ourselves. We move in a way that protects our own centerline from our partner's centerline. Before our opponent "attacks" us with their throw or pin, we position ourselves in a way that we can safely be thrown or pinned. Our positioning saves us and controls the situation instead of escalating it.

4) Learning how to read our opponent's energy: as we develop our skill in following our partner's movement, we naturally start to feel their energy and learn how to receive it and align our movement with it.

Give Up a Little



by Ken Watanabe
Shihan

All of the basic skills developed in *ukemi* training are directly transferable to throwing or pinning. In fact, at the Aikikai Hombu Dojo, *ukemi* skill is one of the main prerequisites to becoming an instructor. Good *ukemi* is also a prerequisite to taking the *Shodan* or "first degree" black belt exam. The white belt ranks are where the students develop the basics of *ukemi*, not only the rolling portion of *ukemi*, but also how to move with the technique in a safe and dynamic manner.

Resisting the technique is just practicing how to be stiff. When we join the dojo, we are already good at resisting and being stiff. Furuya Sensei said that our *ukemi* should be light. From this light, highly mobile *ukemi*, our *ukemi* naturally begins to become stronger, but without the stiffness of resisting.

When we "give in" to the throw or pin, we are also able to experience how the technique is supposed to feel, and in our own practice, we try to duplicate that same feeling. Aikido practice transcends winning and losing. In correct Aikido practice, everyone's a winner. •



Aikido is known as the Art of Peace. For many who start the practice of Aikido, its philosophy of peace and its goal of minimizing harm to the attacker are significant reasons for someone to seek out Aikido. As martial artists, we are admonished and exhorted to strive to just practice and let the benefits come as our practice develops over time. Outside of our particular martial arts practice of Aikido, are there actions that we can take or mindsets that we can develop which will nurture the experience of peace?

I think there are. But before getting into that, I would like to make an introductory remark about what we mean by “peace.” The plain meaning of peace is “the absence of conflict or similarly, a state of tranquility.” Peace can mean many other things, but a useful way to think about peace is that peace has an inner aspect and an outer aspect. Inner peace is calmness of the mind and/or spirit; it is the cultivation of psychic and spiritual absence of conflict. Outer peace is the state of reducing or the experience of absence of interpersonal conflict — outer peace has many levels: there is the peace between two or more individuals; there is the peace of a community where individuals in a group context experience the absence of violence; and there is international peace where larger political groups exist in a state of harmony and the absence of political violence (otherwise known as war).

What can we do to develop peace at every level? Sometimes it seems very hard for us, as individuals, to effect world peace or peace among social communities. We can start by developing techniques of inner peace. And the following suggestions are just ones I have found useful and productive at reducing my own inner psychic conflict.

First, daily meditation. Meditation is similar to Aikido prac-

tice. We train our minds to become “still.” These techniques include: seated meditation, walking meditation, guided meditation, and breath focus. It probably doesn’t matter which method you choose, more importantly is that one develops a daily act of a kind of hygiene for our minds. Results can come from as little as a few minutes a day of practice.

Practicing gratitude. There are many ways to develop a state of thankfulness. We could make journal entries describing all the things or people we appreciate. Or we can pay it forward by showing kindness to other beings, including animals and humans. Starting small may help us to avoid the anxiety that some suffer when they feel that their goals are too lofty and there is no clear path to realization.

The Pursuit of Peace



by Bill D'Angelo
Kyokai President

Of course, there is Aikido. If we are not practicing now, we should start. If we are practicing, we should try to expand our practice to as many hours as our schedule will allow.

But what about interpersonal or political peace? Again, the path may seem so difficult to follow that many struggle with how to begin. Like anything else, it may be harder at first, but will improve over time. Practice by showing or giving one’s fellow humans (and animals): kindness, com-

passion, and appreciation.

During war, nations’ demonize their enemies as inhuman monsters to facilitate the act of war, which is material destruction and human killings. Do the reverse. Recognize in every human the mirror image of yourself. Treat others as you would wish to be treated. There is a reason why it’s known as the Golden Rule.

Above all, don’t get discouraged. Together we can all work to a more peaceful existence and international community - that is the goal of Aikido. •

On January 14, Hombu Dojo held their annual Kagami Biraki (鏡開き) celebration. Kagami Biraki is a traditional Japanese ceremony whose name literally means "breaking the mochi" and it is usually celebrated on January 11 of each year. The ceremony consists of breaking a *kagami* mochi that was previously offered to the Shinto deities at the altar. At Hombu Dojo, this day is a very special event as the World Headquarters promotes a large number of Aikido Practitioners from all over the world. This year at Kagami Biraki, I had the honor of receiving my 6th dan.

With this promotion, I have felt very flattered to receive so many congratulations. Personally, I have to say that in these 30 years of my Aikido training, I have had the privilege of having many people pass through my life and on the *tatami* who have contributed to me achieving this degree.

One such person is my Aikido teacher Rev. Ken-sho Furuya. I would have liked to share this promotion with Sensei but he died in 2007. I am sure that he would be very happy that I continue on this path after so many years after his death. Sensei has been and still is one of the most influential people in my life. I would have loved to share my gratitude with him for helping me reach this degree. With every day that passes, I have no doubt that without his guidance and inspiration I would not have reached this moment.

Another person who is responsible for me arriving and continuing with my work has been David Ito Sensei who has helped and inspired me with his words. Every day he continues to help me overcome all those obstacles and difficulties that have occurred, especially since Sensei's death.

I think my relationship with Ito Sensei has grown and matured a lot in these years and more and more it reminds me of the one I had with Sensei. Although the ease of instant communication was not like today, the issues we are talking about are, if not identical, very similar to those of 17 years ago like students, frustrations, projects, joys, sadnesses and desires, etc.

As I said, Ito Sensei and I speak regularly and as soon as I received the degree he wrote to me to congratulate me. In this conversation he asked me, "How are you?" and "Do you feel any different?" To tell you the truth, after receiving my 6th Dan and

with a touch of humor I answered him, "Well the truth is, I was a little disappointed because I didn't feel any special powers." Ito Sensei laughingly answered, "Well it's true, too bad you can't fly."

With all joking aside, this brief conversation reflects a little of what degrees are for me; they are nothing more than a responsibility tinged with a little bit of joy and pride. At the same time not only is it an opportunity for the dojo, the students and Aikido in general to grow, but also for me to follow in the steps of my teacher with the humility and respect that he taught me.

I don't believe that being 4th, 5th or 6th Dan has changed me too much. My feeling from the outside is that I have to try to have the same enthusiasm as I had when I started practicing. What I do think is that this promotion has given me a broader perspective of Aikido and its purpose and true value.

In my opinion, the degree is something useless, a piece of paper to hang on the wall that only feeds your ego. I believe that the real "super power" of this degree is that with it comes responsibility. Each degree at its different level has a responsibility whether it is technical, evolutionary, perseverance, or to help the spread of Aikido, etc. The true responsibility is being a role model and becoming someone worthy of this rank. As I told Ito Sensei, I don't think that receiving a degree gives me special powers, but maybe it does give me an opportunity to inspire my students to move forward and be the best people that they can be, despite my not being able to fly!•



Santiago Garcia Almaraz Promotion to 6th Dan

Congratulations

Special Powers



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

I think my relationship with Ito Sensei has grown and matured a lot in these years and more and more it reminds me of the one I had with Sensei. Although the ease of instant communication was not like today, the issues we are talking about are, if not identical, very similar to those of 17 years ago like students, frustrations, projects, joys, sadnesses and desires, etc.



The other day, I bought a new contraption. I always have to ask my students how it works and how to use it. I can never figure it out myself. I usually just open the box and try to use it without reading the instructions and this may be my problem.

Aikido training works the same way. We can watch the technique, imitate the movement and somehow catch on to the movement. If we do something enough, we can probably figure it out. It may not be the right way and it may not be the best way, but we can somehow get by. The other way is to listen to the instruction from a competent teacher or take the advice of others and go by their experience. Sometimes this is the easier way.

Usually, our training is a combination of both ways. Receiving instruction and practicing and practicing and receiving instruction.

However, this must always be balanced. It is no good to receive all instruction and do none of the practice. At the same time, practice without instruction will not lead to good results as well. This concept must be understood well by both the teacher and the student.

It is like knowing what ingredients go into making a cake but not knowing the amounts of each ingredient. The results can be disastrous. At the same time, even if you know what ingredients and the amounts of each, you must still know what is the best way to combine each ingredient and in what order. Training is much the same way.

Recently, we have been trying to revive the bamboo in the dojo garden. When I told my students that the bamboo needed a great

deal of water, their concept of a lot of water, my concept of a lot of water, and the bamboo's concept of how much water it needed were completely different. No wonder the bamboo was not doing so well.

Nature



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Understanding this balance must be advised by the teacher or someone with the proper experience. Experimenting with how much may be interesting, but in the meantime, the bamboo dies. Experimenting in practice is also good, but going off in the wrong direction can be disastrous as well.

Everything has its own nature. Bamboo requires so much water that we can't even imagine how much we must have to water it. Bamboo's nature is to thrive on water. However, the orchid is completely different, it thrives on less water. One (bamboo) – we must flood with water and enough is never enough and like some students demand tremendous amounts of attention and direction. The other (orchid) – we should not water at all and allow it to search for water itself in the dry soil, so that it becomes strong and flourishes.

Teaching a student is, of course, much more complex than baking a cake or watering the plants. Yet, both, to me, are about the same. You need the proper ingredients (instructions), and the proper amounts (of instruction) and done in the proper order (how to teach) of combining all of these ingredients together. Finally, this will all change according to the type of cake you are baking, the plants you are watering or the student you are trying to raise!•

Editor's note: *Furuya Sensei published this article in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on March 4, 2002.*

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

IMPORTANT DATES

February 17-18: Iaido Seminar with Didier Boyet and Ken Watanabe
 March 9th: Furuya Sensei Memorial Seminar
 March 9th: Furuya Sensei Memorial service 11:45 AM
 April 27th: O'Sensei Sensei Memorial service 11:45 AM
 May 27th: Dojo Closed Memorial Day
 June 21-22: Ito Sensei will be teaching at Northcoast Aikikai's 10th Anniversary in Willoughby Ohio
 July 4th: Dojo Closed 4th of July
 September 2nd: Dojo Closed Labor Day
 October 18-20: 50th Anniversary seminar
 October 19th: 50th Anniversary Party

Aikido Training Schedule

合気道 時間割

Saturdays

10:15-11:15 AM Advanced
 11:30 AM-12:30 PM Theory

Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular
 8:30-9:30 PM Fundamentals @Budokan

Sundays

9:00-10:00 AM Children's Class
 10:15-11:15 AM Regular
 11:30 AM-12:30 PM Fundamentals

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

Mondays

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals
 6:30-7:30 PM Regular

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Tuesdays

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals
 6:30-7:30 PM Weapons

NOTE: Visitors are welcome to observe our Fundamentals, or Regular Classes.

Iaido Training Schedule

居合道 時間割

Saturdays

9:00-10:00 AM Regular Class

Tuesdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class

Thursdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class



The Aiki Dojo

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The Aikido Center of Los Angeles is 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.

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.

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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 to his legitimate successors, Nidai Doshu, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, the present Doshu, Moriteru Ueshiba and Hombu Dojo-Cho, Mitsuteru Ueshiba.

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