



# The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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## Happy New Year!



## Live Meaningfully

The Japanese don't traditionally celebrate Christmas and so New Year's Eve and New Year's Day are the big holidays for them. Regardless of where we are, Januarys are typically about new beginnings. On New Year's Eve, many of us make solemn promises in hopes of changing ourselves into the people we want to be in the coming year. With the coronavirus, New Year's Eve and the coming year don't seem to inspire the same enthusiasm. The pandemic has been raging on for about nine months or so and nobody knows for certain when things will get back to "normal." As a teacher, when I get a chance to talk to my students, I always ask them, "What have you learned?" Most are busy complaining or lamenting about masks or politics. Others have really embraced this pandemic as an opportunity to change things in their lives. These conversations made me think that if Aikido could be distilled down into one concept it would be that Aikido training has the power to change.

In Aikido, we take something unpleasant (an attack) and change it (redirect it) into something else (a throw or pin) without the need to fight with it or resort to gratuitous violence. This was the genius of O'Sensei's enlightenment – changing violence with compassion. Today, we call it Aikido.



by David Ito  
Aikido Chief Instructor

今年もよろしくお願ひします  
*Kotoshi mo yoroshiku onegaishimasu*  
Wishing you a Happy New Year

subjective way to see something in a positive light, regardless of the situation or act. This is practiced in Aikido by first bowing, saying, "onegaishimasu" and then pausing for a brief moment. We do this at the beginning of each class and before starting every technique. Starting with an act of mindful gratefulness enables us to appreciate our partner's support and sacrifice because their attack brings us the opportunity to change. If we don't start mindfully, we run the risk of allowing the unpleasantness of life to seep onto the mat and we could end up acting like a bully or hurting someone.

True gratefulness requires mindfulness. Mindfulness means that we are in command of our actions and are aware of our thoughts, but we also realize that the two are not necessarily one in the same. It is said, "Every action begins with a thought," but, the question is, "Is that thought true or real?" The other day, I read an article in *Nature* titled *Acute social isolation evokes midbrain craving responses similar to hunger* which illuminated that in our midbrains, isolation and hunger act very similarly. Thus one could posit that when we are hungry, we might just be lonely and when we are lonely, we might just be hungry. This could be the reason for the dreaded Quarantine 15 (pounds) that everyone is complaining about.

*Continued on page 3...*





**Live Meaningfully** *continued from page 2...*

The possibility of a “mistake” is also a concept in Aikido training. We know that the person attacking us is suffering. We know that because we too, on a certain level, are suffering. They think that we are their enemy. However, is that person really attacking us? On the surface they think that we are the enemy, but in a deeper sense they are really just attacking themselves and venting themselves upon us. Understanding that this person is suffering and that they aren’t aware of the true “why” of their actions, we show them compassion instead of destroying them.

Aikido training teaches us to mindfully discern what is really going on and to separate the thought from the action. Gratefulness enables us to be mindful which enables us to live our lives more peacefully. In Zen and the tea ceremony, a common adage is *nichi nichi konichi* which usually translates as “Every day is a good day” but it can also mean “Live meaningfully.” We can live life more meaningfully if we change the way we “see” things.

How we react to the situation or attack that confronts us demonstrates where we are in our training. In *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell said, “In the Buddhist systems, in particular the ones from Tibet, the Buddhas appear in two aspects: there is the peaceful aspect and there’s the wrathful aspect of the deity. Now if you are clinging to your ego and its little world and hanging on and the deity wants to open you, the wrathful aspect comes in and it seems to you terrible. But, if you are open and open enough then that same deity would be experienced as bliss.” Thus, that which confronts us is merely a test which demon-

strates our level of development.

O’Sensei once wrote: “The Art of Peace 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.” Training in Aikido changes us and when we change, the world changes. Someone once said, “Like begets like.” Therefore, if we can be grateful for something, even if it is unpleasant, we can change its charge and thus change the outcome. If we are resentful, we run the risk of adopting its charge and succumbing to it. Hence, the secret to creating positive change is gratefulness. When we can be grateful, our world changes because as someone once said, “We don’t see the world as it is, we see the world as we are.”

Aikido can change us physically, mentally and spiritually because its training teaches us not only how to get into shape, but also how to change our perspective and when that happens, our world changes too. One way to say, “Happy New Year” in Japanese is, “Kotoshi mo yoroshiku onegaishimasu” which translates as “Please treat me well this year.” As we can see with this statement, we are asking for 2021 to be a good year. Aristotle said, “Well begun is half done.” Understanding this, can you look forward with anticipation and gratefulness and say, “onegaishimasu” to 2021? Start the year off right because if you can change the way you see the world, it will change for you. How will you change the world in 2021? Make this year the best year ever; it is up to you! •

日々是好日  
*Nichi nichi konichi*  
Live meaningfully



In Aikido we like to talk about flow and circular movement and blending and so on. The soft circular movement could be what attracts people to Aikido. However, despite its philosophy of non-violence and flowing movements, it's important to remember that Aikido is also a martial art. Even with its smooth flow, Aikido also has razor-sharp precision to it as well.

When we watch an expert demonstrate Aikido, it seems very free-flowing and gentle. The Aikidoist looks like they're doing any old thing they want against their opponent's attack and is throwing them down with ease. It seems so fake, but the first time I saw Aikido, I thought it looked fake, too!

Of course, when we get on the mat it's a different story. It doesn't feel very free flowing at all. In fact, it's the opposite! Our opponent is too hard, too strong, or too stiff and doesn't seem to want to move. On the other hand, it's easy to train so that our partner is completely compliant, going with our movements in a contrived manner. This way, we can do our "flow."

Many years into my Aikido, I realized that both flow and precision must happen at the same time. My free-flowing movement needs to be precise – my hands, feet, and body have to do certain things at the right time and finish in the right position. Yet, in my precision, my movement must possess this sense of move-

ment, energy, and freedom.

In Aikido's circular movements, although seemingly free and easy, there is a great deal of precision. There is this misconception that when our opponent attacks us, there are many things we can do to defend ourselves. In reality, when our opponent attacks us, our options are very limited. We can't just do any old thing or move any old way at any old time.

## Go With the Flow



by **Ken Watanabe**  
Technical Director

For example, in the *gyaku hanmi tenkan* exercise, it appears as if we are just turning, twirling or spinning in place when we move against our partner. In reality and in practice, we cannot just step carelessly. Our *tenkan* foot must step with the proper energy and stop in the proper position in relation to our opponent's power and line up with our opponent's attack. Where our foot lands determines what our next step in our technique will be and how effective it is.

This same *tenkan* footwork is used in many different Aikido techniques. To the uninitiated, it looks more like Julie Andrews pirouetting before launching into the Sound of Music's title sequence. However, as flowing and dynamic as the movement is, it must still be a movement with clarity, precision and energy.

*Continued on page 5...*



The age of the Samurai has expired.  
Vikings nowhere to be seen.  
The vanishing of Knights  
only to be reincarnated by reenactments.  
Where is the modern day warrior?  
They no longer carry armor,  
wield swords or shields.

Warriors are those  
who wear the armor of scrubs and N-95s.  
The lines imprinted on their faces,  
a representation of the lives  
they prevented from flatlining,  
an indication of the ruthless patients  
who lacked the patience to care.  
Those who live in the trenches of hospital beds  
more than they see their own beds.  
Those who know no difference  
between daylight and hospital lights.

Warriors are the mothers  
who work 3 jobs to support 3 kids.  
She uses her lunch breaks to give her mind a rest,  
leaving her stomach unrested.  
She feeds her children before herself,  
leaving herself the scraps and crumbs.  
She doesn't dare ask for help  
or she gets accused of asking for handouts.  
Because the last time she asked for a payout,  
she got shown the back of a hand,  
the welts in her eyes, the tears of shame.

Warriors are those  
who have armies of 36 students,  
whose own soldiers fight them every day,  
whose job is to command  
even when they don't have the support of their nation.  
Even when they hold no stars or badges  
for supporting the next generations on their shoulders  
for training future leaders and generals.  
A thankless position  
but those who hold it are most thankful.

The modern day warrior  
may not cover themselves in metal and steel,  
but they surround themselves in gratitude,  
disguised in everyday clothes.  
The souls of ancient warriors within them.

## Warrior

by Mimi Lam

### Go With the Flow *continued from page 4...*

When our opponent strikes or grabs us, we cannot move and flow anyway we please. The nature of the attack requires us to move precisely with our attacker's strength in order to move into the optimum position where we are protected and where our opponent's power and balance are neutralized. This puts us in the ideal position from where we can execute a technique against our attacker.

Weapons training in Aikido is an excellent way to see and practice both precision and flow. Thrusting with the *jo*, or "short staff," or cutting with the sword, both require movement and precision to be effective. Also, the nature of weapons training readily reveals any deficiencies in our own movement.

Sword training instills a sense of precision in our movement. The sword, with only its pointed tip and sharpened edge, can only thrust and cut when used in a very specific manner. Yet as precise as Japanese swordsmanship is, from this precision, the student must break away from the stiffness inherent in trying to be precise and learn to move freely.

*Jo* training instills a sense of dynamic flow. The *jo* only has two ends with which to thrust, yet its rounded circular circumference has many, one can say an infinite number of surfaces with

which to strike, parry, sweep, lead, or press, among many other *jo* movements. In practice, as the *jo* strikes, thrusts and parries, it should be constantly in motion. Yet, within the *jo*'s freedom of movement, the student must practice precision to give their *jo*'s free flowing movements meaning.

When we practice with the *jo* or the *bokken*, both must move precisely. We cannot cut, thrust or strike any old way. The nature of the martial arts, and weapons in particular, demand precision. In the simplest sense, precision to at least be able to hit the target. Yet, we cannot be stiff and slow when using our sword or staff. Without movement, without this sense of flow and continuous energy in our movement there will be no power or energy with which to move, strike, cut, or parry. When this happens, we will most likely get cut down or struck by our opponent.

A race car's engine has many parts that fit and are installed precisely. It is that precision that enables the engine to operate at high speeds without shaking itself apart. This is one of the most difficult aspects of the martial arts to realize. To bring power, precision and freedom to one's movement, we need to move with complete freedom but at the same time move with complete focus and precision. All that has to be done while making it all look effortless while at the same time giving it purpose, meaning, and effectiveness. •



In our day to day lives, most of us are not aware of how each little act ends up affecting the people around us. That it can cause a little damage to the order of things and the people around us. This what people mean when they say, “collateral damage.” Collateral damage can be thought of as the ripples one pebble makes when dropped into a serene pond.

As martial artists, we know that every little detail, the smallest movement, or the minutest action will affect the execution of the technique. These little details cause waves which affect us and everything around us. Some of these minutiae are indiscernible to the point that we are not aware of them.

In our daily lives, subtle changes can cause big changes. When we get up late in the morning, it makes us have to leave quickly for work or to catch the train. This lateness makes us drive faster or recklessly which puts not just me but other people at risk. When someone teaches class that is supposed to end at 8:00 and the teacher starts a new technique at 7:50 causing the class to end at 8:15, it may cause one of the students to be late to a prior commitment. This lackadaisicalness teaches the student that being late is acceptable. The same thing happens when we are late for training which impacts our ability to concentrate and it puts others at risk to be injured or myself to be injured because I didn't warm up well enough or was not paying attention. In the end our actions, although it may seem that they only affect us, will probably end up affecting a lot more people than we know. Does the pebble know how many ripples it creates?

When we only worry about ourselves or are absorbed in our problems or our world, we forget that we are part of other people's lives. Last year's pandemic illustrated that for us. Hopefully it taught us to be more careful with our behaviors and to be more responsible with respect to our ability to accidentally contaminate someone else when we don't do the simplest things like

wear a mask, wash our hands, or keep our distance. Our behavior can have devastating consequences.

Watanabe Sensei said, “Martial arts is supposed to bring order to chaos.” This year, 2021, I hope that we can be more aware of our actions and bring order to ourselves and others by being mindful

## Collateral Damage



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

of our actions. The chaos that our behaviors can create can be changed into “collateral benefits” by just thinking before we act, think or say things. In doing so, everything we do becomes something positive for others or “brings order to chaos.” What last year's pandemic has taught us is that every person's choices can make a difference – good or bad. We can choose to make people's lives easier just by being mindful of our choices. Last year was a hard year, but our practice this year requires us to be stronger, more diligent and work together.

Most people want the year and the pandemic to pass quickly, as if it does not count, just to get back to “normal” faster. However, the devastation and isolation of last year was unimaginable, but it has made me think and reflect and see things from other points of view that a year ago I thought were unthinkable. In my own case, I know that although the situation is not pleasant and that I miss the “old normal”, I know that I am very lucky because I am still here and I still have so much support from all my friends and family all over the world. I know that with people like all of you around me, I am not afraid because if we all work together we can still achieve great things as we act to bring order to chaos. I am thankful for all the support; it gives me the strength to carry on. Last year's chaos has shown me that the best company are those that are on the battlefield with me, in the Dojo and in my everyday life.

I wish everyone a happy and prosperous year that is full of health, perseverance and enjoyable work. •



When you look at the *tokonoma* at practice on *hatsu-geiko* or “The first practice of the year”, you will see that it is decorated in the traditional Japanese style for the New Year. Usually, there is a scroll with a sun representing the dawn or awakening of a new year or there is a scroll with a message welcoming in the New Year.

In the *tokonoma*, there is a *Okasane-mochi* or “pounded rice cakes” offering. The round discs of *mochi* represent the blessings of the earth, the *mikan* or “tangerine” represents the sky and the *konbu* or “seaweed” represents the sea. The *Nanten* which is also the logo and symbol of our dojo, means “southern heaven” and is also called Japanese bamboo. *Nanten* is actually a herb used from ancient times to cure ailments of the throat. Also, *Nanten* is a plant which, according to legend, can turn any evil into goodness, and correct any mistake or fault.

After the first practice of the year there is a celebration held afterwards called Kagami Biraki. Kagami Biraki means “Mirror Opening”, a rather unusual term, I think, and perhaps difficult to understand. Kagami Biraki refers to a congratulatory ceremony to officially begin the New Year. Many traditional dojos have Kagami Biraki parties or ceremonies as a happy occasion to get together with all of the students and friends in order to celebrate the beginning of the New Year together. Often, there is a special practice or demonstration or party.

*Kagami* or “mirror” has many meanings in Japanese culture beyond a device to reflect one’s image. Traditionally, the *kagami* mirror is the symbol of womanhood and every woman was usually presented with one when they are married.

However, the mirror as a symbol goes back far earlier than this in Japanese culture. The mirror was considered as a sacred symbol or device. Jimmu, the first emperor of Japan wore one around his neck for divine protection when he unified Japan in prehistoric history and this mirror became one of the “three sacred treasures” along with the sacred sword and *magatama* or “sacred jewel” and even today, they are symbols mandated by the Emperor of Japan.

Traditional Japanese mirrors are polished bronze, not glass as we know them today. Much of Japanese metallurgy was based on the skills to produce good mirrors.

This type of metal mirror was introduced into Japan sometime in the early 8th century from China. Priests traveling back and

forth from Japan to China for training and study brought back these rare “magic mirrors” made of bronze as sacred objects for the temple. These mirrors when held at a certain angle would reflect an image of the Buddhas in the light.

Both from the standard of Japan’s indigenous culture beginning with Emperor Jimmu and with the importation of Buddhism and Chinese culture, early on, the mirror has been an important object of Japanese culture.

The military chronicles of the 13th-15th centuries are known as “gunkimono” – military histories, but also known as “kagami-mono” or mirror chronicles. This name was alluded to in Chinese literature in which histories are referred to as “mirrors which reflect the past.”

In Zen Buddhism as well, the mirror is a symbol that refers to one’s “mind.” This allusion comes up often in classic historical literature on the martial arts from the 14th century onwards to the present. One such popular saying from Zen and often used in Japanese martial arts is “Kokoro wa meikoto no gotoku” or “make the mind like a bright mirror.”



## Kagami Biraki



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

In some Shinto ceremonies, the sacred mirror is revealed at the start of a ceremony to signify the “beginning or creation of the world.” It is from this tradition that the custom of “kagami-biraki” began as a celebration to start the new year.

At Hombu Dojo, for Kagami Biraki, a large “kagami-mochi” or rice cake made of pounded sweet rice is made and presented as an offering on New Year’s Day, is broken up and eaten in a warm sweet soup of red beans and shared by everyone. O’Sensei always gave a special demonstration which Doshu still follows, high level *Dan* ranks are presented, and there was a big celebration afterwards. This is one of the biggest celebrations held at Hombu Dojo throughout the year.

All these traditions represent the blessing and hope for a good year in the New Year. Let us make a New Year’s Resolution to practice Aikido devotedly holding dearly to O’Sensei’s and Doshu’s teachings. Let us refine and develop ourselves while helping each other and let us cultivate our “caring hearts.”

Please enjoy the beautiful *tokonoma* and *okasane mochi* on your first day of practice. •

**Editor’s note:** *Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on January 8, 2005.*

# UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

**Dojo Coronavirus update:**  
Due to the high incidences of COVID-19 cases, the dojo will maintaining a limited schedule and all classes will be outside. We have purchased 6' x 12' mats for everyone to use so that we can still do ukemi safely. Please maintain six feet social distancing and wear a mask at all times.

For more information about Mimi Lam's poetry or writings, please contact her at: lamm.mimi79@gmail.com

For more information on Maria Murakawa's watercolor art, please contact her at: marimostories.co@gmail.com

The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles (ACLA) admit students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender identification, national or ethnic origin or sexual orientation in administration of their educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.

## Aikido Training Schedule

合気道 時間割

### Saturdays

10:15-11:15 AM Regular Class  
11:30 AM-12:30 PM Regular Class

### Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

### Sundays

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

### Thursdays

No Class

### Mondays

No Class

### Fridays

No Class

### Tuesdays

No Class

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

\*Last Saturday of the month is Intensive Seminar by Invitation only.

## Iaido Training Schedule

居合道 時間割

### Saturdays

8:00-9:00 AM Regular Class

### Wednesdays

8:00-9:00 PM Regular Class



# The Aiki Dojo

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### The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

has been awarded Official *Konin* recognition by the Aikikai Foundation, Aikido World Headquarters.

Our dojos are committed to the study and practice of the teachings of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba and his legitimate successors, Nidai Doshu, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, the present Doshu, Moriteru Ueshiba and Hombu Dojo-Cho, Mitsuteru Ueshiba.

### Affiliated Dojos of the Aikido Center of Los Angeles



Aikido La Gomera Aikikai  
Kodokai Dojo



Aikido  
Salamanca Aikikai  
Kodokai Dojo



Aikido Valladolid Aikikai  
Kodokai Dojo



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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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