



# The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Happy New Year!

This year, I would like everyone to focus on ownership. Ownership means not only taking responsibility for something but, more importantly, it means taking responsibility for oneself. If each and every person takes responsibility for themselves and the dojo, then there is nothing we can't achieve.

In a leadership sense, ownership means "to be decisive, solve problems, delegating, abstaining from blame, taking responsibility and regular objective reflection on events and one's own actions." Some call this "self-ownership," which is also known as "individual sovereignty," and is "the concept of property in one's own person, expressed as the moral or natural right of a person to have bodily integrity and be the exclusive controller of one's own body and life."

The Soto Zen monk Shunryu Suzuki said, "The most important point is to accept yourself and stand on your two feet." To stand on one's own two feet means to take ownership over oneself. In martial arts sense, this means control or, more importantly, who gets to be in control.

When we say control, most people think of it in the sense of controlling others. Control means who or what has auspices over us. Martial artists are supposed to be in control of themselves mentally, physically, emotionally, and situationally.

In traditional training, it is said that there are no victims or heroes. A victim is a person who needs others to save them. In order to be a victim or have a victim mentality, we need to continually assign blame or find fault or reason why we are in this particular predicament. A hero is the person we are waiting for to come and save us. In both of these scenarios, we have given up ownership of our lives and we think that control exists outside of ourselves and thus are waiting to be acted upon.

First, we take ownership of our training. Aikido is a "traditional" Japanese martial art. In traditional training, it is said, that "the burden of learning is placed upon the student." This means that the student takes on the responsibility and accountability for their own development. The teacher in traditional training is the role model and the student does their best to follow them. This is best typified in the Chinese proverb: "Teachers open the doors, but you must enter by yourself." Ownership in this sense means that the student must be proactive rather than reactive and waiting to be taught. In traditional

training concept which typifies this is *nusumi keiko* (盗み稽古) or "steal the technique." To steal the technique means that the teacher teaches us "nothing," but we have to be able to see and take in "everything" they are not directly teaching us.

After we begin to gain auspices over ourselves, we learn to take ownership of our surroundings. We learn this by taking ownership of the dojo. I don't mean from a property standpoint but from a responsibility point of view. In a traditional dojo there is

no such thing as "It is not my job." Furuya Sensei used to say, "Everything in the dojo is your responsibility." In a traditional dojo, the students are responsible not only for the dojo's upkeep, but its welfare. Every student needs to take ownership of everything that happens in the dojo physically, socially, and structurally. For instance, if we see that something is dirty, we clean it. Or from another angle, we help others who are in need of assistance whether it be technical, cleaning, or friendship. Ideally, if we take care of the little things, then the big things will take care of themselves. That is why everything in the dojo is

our responsibility.

## Ownership



by David Ito  
Aikido Chief Instructor

*"Responsibility equals accountability equals ownership. And a sense of ownership is the most powerful weapon a team or organization can have."*

– Pat Summit, Legendary basketball coach

Later on, training bleeds over into our daily lives. Martial arts training and the dojo are supposed to be a microcosm of life. In training we learn to take ownership of ourselves. In the dojo, we learn to take ownership of our surroundings. When we can take ownership of our development and our dojo, we can successfully take ownership over ourselves.

The Buddhist monk Takuan Soho said, "Sever the edge between before and after." What Takuan is alluding to is that we cannot change the past and we cannot know the future and thus if we sever before and after, then

we only have control over this moment. Therefore, the only thing we do have control over is ourselves in this one moment.

Our lives are our own. Author,

Robert Greene said, "True genius, in strategy or anywhere, lies in self-control, self-mastery, presence of mind, fluidity of thought." No actually can controls us and no one is coming to rescue us. We have to be the hero in our own stories and take control of our lives and become the people and the Aikidoists that we want to become. No one can do it for us, and no one is coming to save us. Please work hard to make 2024 the year you take ownership of yourself. •





For a long time, I have been researching about the *do* (道) or “the path,” “the journey,” or “our purpose” of studying Aikido. I am not doubting my personal practice because I strongly value the overall benefits of Aikido, but I have been questioning what to study and how to express or verbalize the *do* to a potential student or a beginner who would attend a class.

This last November, I was attending Doshu’s class at the Hombu Dojo and I had a small realization about the *do*, and I felt deeply inspired about what I needed to do. The technique that Doshu was demonstrating was sankyo from morote-dori or ryotemochi and it was nothing special but observing the steps at that particular moment made me think. There are many ways to expose the sankyo but in this instance, he chose to enter, pass under his *uke*’s arm, and expose the sankyo and he performed two *omote* and then two *ura*. The point is we cannot do sankyo or any other technique if we do not follow the correct mechanical procedures. A mechanical procedure might guide me to one technique but not to another one. It would be a mistake to force a technique on a partner that was not properly executed from the beginning. It is not correct to use power to perform a technique, there is a natural progression. Ito Sensei often says that our initial movement should be like the wind blowing a sail and I agree with him. I am not there yet but I am working on it.

## The Way



by **Alexandre Hillairet**  
Aikido Instructor, Ventura Aikido

The studies of religions and spirituality have been part of my continuous studies in Oriental Medicine for the past twenty years and I have experienced journeys in the Ashram of Bangalore, India or Balinese temples with the local communities and priests to have full spiritual experiences, but at this stage of my

Aikido training, the journey should be purely technical or experienced with my body. This realization is not a regression in my practice, and it is quite the opposite, it is guiding me in the right direction.

Our society has evolved, and people are more interested in the now so the definition of the *do* of Aikido cannot be defined as a path or a journey because that takes too long, and it should be possibly disregarded to avoid any confusion at the beginning. The beginning discussion should focus on accomplishing small goals such as safety measures and strengthening the body. This might help new students overcome the fear of the long journey.

My personal goals for 2024 are to continue to explore, solidify, refine, and polish the fundamental techniques and continue to be curious and research to improve my skills as a student and as an instructor. As Antoine de Saint-Exupery said: “Attitude is a paintbrush. It colors everything.” Happy New Year!•

Movement makes the world go round”– literally. Movement equals energy. Movement creates energy. Moving forward - pun intended – this year try to practice creating movement in your own practice.

In Aikido and swordsmanship, our footwork is the foundation of technique. We don't start practicing the technique with speed and strength. Speed and strength are developed from proper technique and proper technique is driven by strong footwork. In Aikido, our footwork is what gives our center its stability, mobility, and energy.

When we start practicing Aikido, it is enough to simply practice moving our feet. Without stepping clearly in our footwork, we will never get from point A where we are, about to be attacked to point B where we want to be, in a safe position that is protected from the attack.

Military success is based on movement. Without movement, there is no way to get troops, supplies, and ordnance to the field of battle. Once there, we can move in order to put our opponent into a disadvantaged position while gaining a superior position for our own forces.

Moving our feet is just the beginning of training our basics. We practice stepping clearly so we can move our body as a whole in the correct direction, but it's more than just to where we step; it is also how we step that is important.

Practicing moving our feet is the first step to understanding how to transfer the energy in our footwork into our hips. Footwork is how we generate energy through our movement. When we step correctly, with the right energy, we use this same movement-based power whether we step forward to attack our opponent, move to avoid their attack, unbalance our attacker and move our opponent within the techniques, and finally throw or pin them.

The energy from our movement is both used and developed when we practice both attack and defense, both when we are the *uke*, the one receiving the technique from the *nage*, and when we are the *nage*, the one applying the technique to the uke.

In many Japanese arts like *Noh* dancing, tea ceremony, and of course, the martial arts, the technique of stepping when walking is called “suri-ashi.” In the *suri-ashi* step, our feet slide along the surface. This creates 1) the maximum connection with the ground. From the ground is where all the power in our technique originates, and 2) it forces us to maintain our balance, coordination, and our posture.



If our posture and balance are incorrect, it may be difficult to move the correct foot because all of our weight is on it! In order to free that foot, we will be forced to redistribute our balance and posture. If we don't have proper balance or posture and the proper footwork, we will be too late to avoid our opponent's attack and it will throw off our timing. Our balance and posture affect the effectiveness of our footwork. Practicing with the correct posture and maintaining our balance is an important part of our movement. Our center will not be able to issue power if we are off-balance and our legs and our hips aren't synchronized.

As we grow more comfortable moving with a balanced posture, it's also important how to practice how to generate power with our movement. To do this, we step with a stretching type of energy in our legs.

From the beginning, it's important to develop this skill. As many years as I've practiced Aikido and the sword, I still try my best to stretch my legs as much as possible. Without this stretching feeling in our legs and our inner thigh, we won't be able to 1) get where we want to go, and, 2) generate power in our center.

Without this stretching step, our footwork won't generate energy. Without this extension in our legs into the ground our footwork won't be able to generate the most

important movement in the Aikido technique – the circular torque from our hips and centerline.

## Movement



by Ken Watanabe  
Shihan

If the direction of our stance is not clear, the movement in our hips will not be precise. The direction in which our energy moves will not be clear either. The direction of our movement has to be clear. This lets us align our movement with our attacker's movement and bring their movement into our own movement, neutralizing the attack's power.

In an Aikido dojo, everyday is “leg day.” How we move our feet and how their movement is related to your hips and centerline is an important point to study and practice. Our center, the direction of our stance, and our footwork are all strongly connected. Our hips and body move with our step, whether we slide forward to *irimi*, turn and step back to *tenkan*, or step backward to *tenshin*.

Practicing to step with mobility, stability and energy is an important part of our martial arts training. Don't just think of only moving forward; think about how to step sideways, backward, pivot, and turn. Then try practicing how to connect your hips to your footwork. By developing the movement in your feet, your practice will develop along with it. In 2024, it should be a goal that everyone should focus on moving not only their bodies but moving their feet as well. •



The beginning of the New Year is a day of celebration of renewal, opportunity and the chance for positive change in our lives. Millions of celebrants commit to New Year's resolutions, commitments to do or refrain from doing something over the course of the coming new year. For many of us, the types of resolutions include commitments to eat more healthily, to lose weight, to get a better job and perhaps the most ubiquitous New Year's resolution of all, to go to the gym regularly. And for many of us, it doesn't take too long before we fail in our seemingly heartfelt commitments to change. Most of the New Year's resolutions that we make are centered on changing something about ourselves or our behavior with a goal to self-improvement. In our culture, we celebrate self-improvement. But what if there was a way, with the same amount of effort, to positively effect a larger group of people with a more long lasting impact?

The current world is overwhelmed with crisis and conflict. There are the two major wars currently being fought, one in Ukraine and another in Israel. And there are numerous other military and violent ethnic conflicts playing out that don't get the headline press coverage as the major wars. Thousands are being killed, displaced, left hungry – the specter of violence hangs over all of us in one way or another.

## Give Compassion



by **Bill D'Angelo**  
Kyokai President

There is a simple act which we can all do no matter where we are, how old we are or whom we know. Give compassion. What is

compassion? The word "compassion" is derived from the Latin roots "com" meaning "with" and "passion" meaning "suffering." Compassion is literally the act of suffering with or sharing the suffering. All humans suffer, this is one of the basic aspects of human existence. By showing compassion to both those individuals that we know personally and to others we don't know, we can lighten the load that our fellow humans suffer. The downstream benefits of showing compassion is that it can change the world in small and large ways at the simultaneously.

Compassion is an act we can commit to do at the particular level of our current capability. Calling a friend in need. Volunteering at a food bank. Donating money to international charities. Getting educated about different cultures. Compassion is rooted in non-selfish acts. But we don't have to abandon our commitments to self-improvement to show compassion. Hopefully we will find, by showing compassion, the lasting satisfaction of improving the human condition. Compassion is the ultimate act of generosity. And we may find that it is our most important muscle, our heart, that grows the most from this New Year's resolution. •

Dear friends, colleagues, and family. Once again we find ourselves welcoming a new year, and setting our sights and hopes on starting the year brand new.

I know that going from one year to the next from a rational point of view is just spending one more day from December 31 to January 1. However, for many of us, we like to think that it is an opportunity to start something from scratch, set challenges for ourselves, and be excited about being able to start anew especially if last year did not go as we expected or hoped and now we want to do better.

This idea of a New Year gives us an opportunity to start something better or it simply marks the starting line for us to be something better than the last year.

Looking back on year, I consider that it has not been an easy year in many ways and I believe that it has been one of the hardest and most challenging that I have ever experienced so far.

I'm not saying it has been bad, not at all, rather it has been a hard year that was complicated personally and professionally. However, despite all those difficulties, I did my best to put up a good effort to challenge every setback that came my way. Many times things went well and other times some things did not go as expected. With age, we realize that working, making an effort, and being consistent is sometimes not enough and the truth is that now looking at all those battles in hindsight, some of things do not always turn out as we expected and some we realize weren't really that important either. However the outcome, it should not be a reason to be discouraged. We should be proud to have given our best or that we tried to help others by giving our best.

As martial artists, it is about perspective. We work hard, but we still experience defeat, things turn out badly and sometimes it is just plain confusing. When things untoward happen, we can believe that something is bad in our life like our classes are bad, business is bad, or our relationships are bad. At that moment, we think that it is the end of the world or something like that and it seems that there is no fix. However, when we move forward, it makes us overcome ourselves and fight against our fears and perhaps those situations of adversity or "failures" lead us to make decisions that we would never have made otherwise. The truth is that I don't like to use the word "failure" because I think that failure only happens when we give up and we no longer want to try anything else and stop trying. A true martial artist understands the value of perseverance, and having the ability to face adversity but also having the ability to not only accept one's circumstance but also appreciate it and the elements within it.

ciate it and the elements within it.

In Aikido, when we start practicing with our partner, we say "Onegaishimasu." *Onegaishimasu* (お願いします) means "please." The more polite term is *Yoroshiku Onegaishimasu* which by adding *yoroshiku* (夜露死苦) it means "please take care of me" or "please treat me favorably." Thus, on a certain level, we are asking adversity to take care of us which I think is a beautiful sentiment. Don't you?

It seems to me that this idea of accepting and asking is the essence of our daily practice and in turn should be the motto in our relationships with others. Whatever comes our way, we must accept it and treat it as a gift that is helping to polish us into the people that we hope to become.

Looking back on 2023, I recognize that without the support of our student body, support from our friends from Los Angeles who once again came to visit us for our 25th anniversary, and the support from our friends from Valladolid, it would have been impossible to make it through the year let alone celebrate our 25th anniversary.

The support of the people around me has been fundamental and it was difficult for me because I am one of those people who is usually quite independent and does not like to ask for help. This year I realized how necessary it was to not only ask but also accept assistance and that by receiving this help it made me feel very grateful. I especially want to thank Ito Sensei who has been helpful to me and to the dojo. His support gives me that boost of confidence especially when things were difficult. I appreciate it and thank you so much.

There will always be good times and bad times. None of us are immune. What makes the good times great and the bad times bearable is realizing that we are all in this together.

We often wish others happiness, wealth, or prosperity during New Years. In truth, all I wish for is that everyone be healthy and to continue taking care of each other. If you hear someone say, "Onegaishimasu" you know that you are in the right place with the right people. Please know that I will be by your side through the good and the bad. Please show me the same support and kindness that you have been continually showing me. *Yoroshiku Onegaishimasu!*

Thank you very much and happy 2024. •



## Onegaishimasu



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

Dear Sensei Furuya. I have a request, and am hoping when you have the time, to write about your understanding of the word “shugyo.” I have seen it used by many people and have heard definitions that leave me still confused. I have heard this defined as “austere training.” I am not sure what separates it from everyday training. I would love to hear what this word means to you. J.H

**Sensei’s Reply:** This is a very difficult question to ask, at the same time, it is very easy. I have thought about your question all day today and still do not know how to answer you in the best way which you can understand.

For now, I will just give you my present thoughts on this question and hope that I don’t confuse you any more.

Simply, *shugyo* (修行) means “training” or “practice.” However, more specifically, we like to say, that *shugyo* means “spiritual training.” But what does this mean?

In ancient times, a young warrior would go on a long journey called *musha shugyo* (武者修行) or “warrior training.” A warrior would go on a long journey across the country to find a teacher under which to train. Sometimes, they could find the right teacher right away, sometimes this took many years. Part of this is the reality of traveling. The hard nights and long days of walking here to there, meeting new people, experiencing the hardships of the road, no shelter, no food, getting caught in the rain, losing one’s way, getting robbed, spending nights in the cold, and on and on. This gave the young warrior the experiences of real life along with the lessons of their teacher. This type of training was not only to develop their skill as a swordsman, but to develop them as a mature, human being experienced in the realities of life.

In Buddhism, some priests would enter special periods of training in addition to their regular training. I know one teacher who did 100 days of fasting in complete silence without a word. The idea was to reach the highest level of spiritual awakening by subjecting the body to harsh practices or conditions. Long terms of meditation, fasting, going off into the mountains and living alone in solitude, reading the sacred texts, etc. all became methods of special training called *shugyo*.

Today, *shugyo* means regular physical practice taken to an intense level in order to transcend the body and reach a high state of spiritual awakening or awareness.

*Gyo* (行) is the important word here, this word is inspired from Buddhism meaning intense spiritual training. In addition, we have this term *bosatsu-gyo* (菩薩行) in Buddhism. In this case,

*gyo* means “a pledge or promise that one makes to themselves to fulfill a particular goal or purpose.” In *bosatsu-gyo*, which all priests must pledge to, means that a priest will forego complete enlightenment until they can save all sentient, living beings. In other words, it is a promise to save all living creatures in the world – this is the ultimate of spiritual practice in Buddhism.

In very, very ancient times, there was a legendary person of amazing powers known as En no Gyoja (役行者), or literally, “Master of Practice.” He is considered to be the founder of Ya-

mabushi (山伏) or “mountain warriors” who practice in the deep, cold, snowy mountains called Haguro (Black Feather Mountain) and Gassan (Moon Mountain) which are two very sacred mountains in the Dewa Province in northern Japan. The Yamabushi run through the mountains without stopping for miles and miles, some stand under waterfalls in meditation, they conduct sacred esoteric ceremonies with water and fire, and some fast and meditate and chanting sacred incantations are a part of their practice. There are even some who periodically hang by their feet off the cliff of a very high mountain! These mountain warriors practice many types of extreme disciplines in hopes to achieve super powers. This practice is also known as *gyo*, which is more specific to *shugyo*.



## Shugyo



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

When I was very young, my grandfather explained to me that *shugyo* was supposed to be *chinkonkishin* (鎮魂帰神) or “silent” practice, to practice with whatever hardships or obstacles or disappointments in the art and in life, without quitting or giving up, in silence, without any complaints. I have always used this as my definition of *shugyo* as it came from my dear grandfather.

*Shugyo* is supposed to be intense spiritual training, often at the expense of one’s body. It is also a pledge one makes to one’s self to achieve a special goal or to purify one’s self in body and soul. *Shugyo* also means “silent” practice – meaning to bear all hardships without complaint. Finally, *shugyo* comes from *bosatsu-gyo* or the vow to save all sentient beings. *Shugyo* is not for personal strength or to achieve personal or selfish goals, it is the realization and materialization of one’s highest goodness through spiritual awakening.

**Editor’s note:** Often people would ask Furuya Sensei questions and oftentimes his answers were very helpful. Sensei published this article in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog October 2, 2003.

# UPCOMING EVENTS

行事 .....

## IMPORTANT DATES

**January 6th:** Kagami Biraki - Dojo formally opens 10:15 AM  
**January 6th:** Kagami Biraki party 11:45 AM  
**January 14th:** 2nd Doshu memorial service 11:45 AM  
**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  
**June 20-21:** Ito Sensei is teaching at Northcoast Aikikai's 10th Anniversary in Willoughby Ohio  
**October 19-21:** 50th Anniversary seminar  
**October 20th:** 50th Anniversary Party

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 .....

<b>Saturdays</b>		<b>Wednesdays</b>	
10:15-11:15 AM	Advanced	6:30-7:30 PM	Regular
11:30 AM-12:30 PM	Theory	8:30-9:30 PM	Fundamentals @Budokan
<b>Sundays</b>		<b>Thursdays</b>	
9:00-10:00 AM	Children's Class	6:30-7:30 PM	Open
10:15-11:15 AM	Regular		
11:30 AM-12:30 PM	Fundamentals		
<b>Mondays</b>		<b>Fridays</b>	
5:15-6:15 PM	Fundamentals	6:30-7:30 PM	Regular Class
6:30-7:30 PM	Regular		
<b>Tuesdays</b>		<i>NOTE: Visitors are welcome to observe our Fundamentals, or Regular Classes.</i>	
5:15-6:15 PM	Fundamentals		
6:30-7:30 PM	Weapons		

## Iaido Training Schedule

居合道 時間割 .....

<b>Saturdays</b>	
9:00-10:00 AM	Regular Class
<b>Tuesdays</b>	
7:45-8:45 PM	Regular class
<b>Thursdays</b>	
7:45-8:45 PM	Regular class



# The Aiki Dojo

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公益財団法人 合気会 合気道本部道場

17-18 Wakamatsu-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, JAPAN

Contact: 03-3203-9236 | [Aikido@aikikai.or.jp](mailto:Aikido@aikikai.or.jp) | [www.aikikai.or.jp](http://www.aikikai.or.jp)

### The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

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

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

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### The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

羅府合気道学院古屋道場

1211 N. Main Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012

(323) 225-1424 | [Aikidocenterla@gmail.com](mailto:Aikidocenterla@gmail.com) | [Aikidocenterla.com](http://Aikidocenterla.com)

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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**2 minute aikido technique**