



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

2

To be Open

By David Ito

Ito Sensei explains what it means to be open in Aikido training.

4

Real Training?

by Ken Watanabe

Watanabe Sensei discusses realism in Aikido training.

7

“Good Enough”

by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Sensei writes about not allowing ourselves to accept mediocrity.



Furuya Sensei demonstrating Aikido at Japanese Village Plaza in the late 1990s.

The Summer of Change



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

Long ago there lived a famous sumo wrestler named Onami (大波) whose name means “Great Waves.” Onami was very strong and in training bouts, he even defeated his own teacher. However, he was so shy that beginners often beat him in public tournaments. Troubled, Onami decided to visit a wise Zen master at a local temple. The priest listened to Onami tell his story and said, “Your name means great waves, so please spend the night in the temple and imagine that you are a wave and not a wrestler who is afraid. Imagine yourself as a powerful wave sweeping over everything in its path.” The teacher left and Onami sat meditating and imaging himself as a wave. As he meditated, he couldn’t get the waves to rise bigger than a puddle, but as the night went on the waves became larger and larger. At one point he imagined the waves engulfing the temple. At dawn, he no longer saw waves but only a calm vast ocean. When the teacher returned he found Onami seated in meditation with a big smile. He said, “Now nothing can disturb you. Become the wave and you will never again be defeated.” Onami was never defeated again.

We often think that the best warriors are the ones like Onami who are the most indestructible or have the best technique. Being strong and technical is necessary because, on a certain level, all *budo* (武道) or “martial arts” are about *seme ai* (攻め合い) or

“A battle for dominance.” In this battle, we are locked in a constant cycle of defending our *seichusen* (正中線) or “centerline” while at the same time attacking and trying to overtake our opponent’s centerline. Therefore, to defend and attack requires some amount of physical strength or ability and so it is good to be strong.

However, also like Onami, strength and technique alone will only take us so far on our journey towards mastery because we are nothing without mental fortitude. For total mastery, after we have mastered the physical or external, then we will have to take a journey inward and this journey is scarier and more difficult than the exterior. William Butler Yates once said, “It takes more courage to examine the dark corners of your own soul than it does for a soldier to fight on a battlefield.” When we truly know ourselves inside and out then we can become truly undefeatable.


To be Open



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

Continued on page 3...

Listen

 **Aiki Dojo Podcast**

Follow

 @aikidocenterla
@teacher.aikido

Read

 **Aiki Dojo Message**
www.aikidocenterla.com/blog

Watch

 **2 minute aikido technique**



To be Open continued from page 2...

In swordsmanship, the highest expression of attainment is when a warrior adopts an “open” stance. To open one’s stance is akin to dropping one’s guard and by doing so it creates a *suki* (隙) or “opening” which makes us vulnerable to attack. Thus in order to purposefully open one’s self up for attack, we must be a person who has a tremendous amount of self-confidence. This self-confidence comes from having taken the journey inward and delving into the nature of our soul. Knowing ourselves enables us not to be swayed or dismayed when something untoward happens. This is the meaning of *ki no nagare* (氣の流れ) or “The flow of ki.” When our bodies and minds are strong then they can unite and when they unite our ki becomes like a wave that nothing and no one can stop. Thus, the best warriors are the ones who know themselves so intimately that they can actually invite in vulnerability. Carl Jung said, “Knowing your own darkness is the best method for dealing with the darkneses of other people.”

In the beginning, Aikido novices create openings by accident while experts do it on purpose. In Japanese to let one’s guard down is referred to as “ki wo yurusu” (氣を許す). *Yurusu* means to “permit” or “consent.” Thus, a person with a high level of development would purposefully open themselves up and allow

the opponent to see a supposed opening in hopes that they will mistake it for weakness.

The Greek poet Archilochus said, “We don’t rise to the level of our expectations; we fall to the level of our training.” True warriors are great not because they are impervious or indestructible. The best warriors have put in the training to harden their bodies and understand their minds. Knowing who we are and what we are capable of doing becomes true power because we are willing to not only show our strengths but also our weaknesses. Brené Brown said, “Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it’s having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome. Vulnerability is not weakness; it’s our greatest measure of courage.”

Once we can know ourselves from the inside-out then we can be like Onami. Nothing outside of ourselves will be able to disturb us and thus no one will be able to defeat us as well. Being undefeatable means having inner peace and the ability to not only “foster it” as O’Sensei said, but also “apply it to all that you encounter.” That is true mastery!•



As society opens up after over 15 months of “dormancy” and the lockdown restrictions are lifted, it’s a return to a sense of normalcy. Now that we are back open, we can actually physically hit and grab our partners, and we can throw and pin them. We can train for real again! But is it truly a return to real, authentic Aikido training?

During the lockdown, amid all of its restrictions on gatherings and social distancing, our training was profoundly affected. As a martial art, the Covid restrictions severely hindered our training-- or did they?

During the lockdown, the nature of Covid meant that we had to stay at least six feet apart and train outdoors. Our practice consisted of solo training, weapons training, and training featuring indirect contact with the *jo*, or long staff. The dojo offered classes on Zoom and it recorded home workouts for anyone who wanted to continue practicing at home. Was it ideal? Far from it, but it was still training. Was it real training? It was as real and authentic as the student’s desire and experience and knowledge of Aikido made it real and authentic. But, isn’t that all training?

Ultimately, training is training. Even half training correctly is better than no training at all. In correct training, there is no discrimination. Everything taught and practiced goes toward one thing: the mastery of Aikido. Whether they realize it or not, the students who continued to train under the past year’s less-than-ideal conditions have learned things they never would have learned in a normal training scenario.

Real Training?



by **Ken Watanabe**
Technical Director

“You can’t get much done in life if you only work on days when you feel good.” Maybe we’re tired, discouraged, or under the weather. Maybe we feel the classes are too small, maybe we feel the classes are too crowded or maybe the classes aren’t doing what it is we want. Regardless, it is easy to not train when it is not what we would think of as ideal.

In Zen there is a saying: Nothing goes the way you want it to. Zen also has another saying: every day is a good day. Both apply to our Aikido practice.

When it comes to our own training, nothing seems to go the way we want it to. In my case, I would like to be better at Aikido than my own skill level. If I can’t throw or pin someone, or take someone’s *ukemi*, then I have to concentrate on other aspects of the technique that I can use to help me improve my basics.

How do we work around a class that doesn’t challenge us enough? Maybe use this opportunity to help beginners. Maybe try to push ourselves aerobically. Maybe we refine our posture and balance. In any of these cases when things don’t seem to be going our way, part of the training is to accept it for what it is and use our experience and ingenuity to benefit our practice.

The best training doesn’t happen when we’re feeling our best; our best training happens on the days we don’t want to train. Basketball legend, Jerry West said,

Continued on page 5...



Real Training *continued from page 4...*

In training, every day is a good day, because regardless of current events: social distancing, wearing a mask, reduction of schedules, there is always a lesson to be learned and there will always be something to improve.

Yes, during the pandemic there was very little opportunity to throw or pin. However, there are many aspects to the techniques beyond throwing and pinning. Yet, in my own experience, because the pandemic severely hindered teaching, we had to develop a curriculum which was able to not only maintain but hopefully improve a student's Aikido ability. We had to concentrate practice in areas other than throwing or pinning that could benefit a student's ability to throw or pin.

The pandemic, as much of a hindrance as it was, actually helped me to shine a light on many aspects and concepts about the Aikido techniques that I would usually take for granted. The solo training and the "jo-kido" or "the Aikido techniques using a jo" forced me to look at the techniques in a more critical way. I had to ask myself, "Is this Aikido?" This situation forced us to work harder and find a different level than we were used to.

We tried our best to teach in a way which we hoped would benefit the students when they returned to normal training. Any technique we developed for classes had to be examined very carefully. The worst thing we could do was teach something that did not contribute to the student's progress. We were forced to think about Aikido differently while trying to maintain the integrity of Aikido. The practice had to make sense in an Aikido manner, and the basics had to be presented in whatever Covid-style Aikido techniques we taught.

In a way, the pandemic forced me to change the way I looked at Aikido, and it helped me grow as a teacher. Although the pan-

demical, with its limitations on practice, forced me to change the way I look at Aikido, the most comforting thing to me as a student was that it reinforced what I already knew about Aikido.

I am 100% sure that if we just closed down and I spent the last 15 months sitting around at home, I would never have learned any of the things I learned during the COVID limited training.

To some students, not being able to throw or pin someone else wasn't "real" training. Either it wasn't good enough or it wasn't what they wanted. The Zen saying from earlier, "Nothing goes the way you want it to" perfectly illustrates real training. How do we physically, mentally, or spiritually overcome the hurdles before us? By embracing "Every day is a good day" and how it applies to the practice of Aikido. Even at a limited capacity, we should be thankful for the opportunity; we are healthy enough to practice, we have the desire and the discipline to practice, and we trust those who are teaching us to guide us correctly. This is the best mental space for a student to be in.

As the lock down orders in California come to an end, I feel fortunate that I had the opportunity to train through these pandemic conditions. Was it ideal? Not at all, but the dojo survived, and adapted, and was there for anyone whose learning spirit wasn't hampered by the pandemic.

When I think of the students who continued training through the pandemic, I am not only thankful that they continued their training, but it is so satisfying to see so many of them improve despite the limitations forced upon our practice. It was satisfying not because they became stronger or faster, but because they persevered and trained and training transforms the student. Each one of us had to adapt, persevere, and deal with disappointment but hopefully the experience made the path to Aikido's mastery a little clearer for them. •

Recently, I was listening to an interview in which they talked about the education of children and how sometimes it was good for children to feel frustration, anger, and rage. The interview talked about how children need to learn how to manage and deal with these feelings when they don't get what they want. It also said that children need to know consequences and despite the consequences will not change their behavior no matter how much they are corrected or how much we love them.

During this interview, they introduced a term called "Tough love" and this particularly caught my attention and made me think of martial arts training. This expression within the world of psychology can be summed up as, "I make you suffer because I love you." I can identify with the "tough love" expression as a teacher and above all as a parent since there is many times that I have to make decisions that the students or my children will not like. These decisions are made in the best interest of the students and my children.

The phrase "Tough Love" itself is believed to have originated with Bill Milliken's book of the same title in 1968. Milliken describes tough love as, "I don't care how this makes you feel towards me. You can hate my guts, but I love you, and I'm doing it because I love you."

It is true that most teachers, parents and ultimately educators rely on this "mantra" to justify many of their decisions and the truth is that this path is not easy to do at all.

As a teacher, it is difficult to make certain decisions regarding my students since most of the time they believe that being reprimanded or being continually corrected can seem as though I dislike them but the truth is probably quite the opposite.

I remember that my teacher, Furuya Sensei, used to say, "As a student you should worry not that your teacher corrects you, but about the day your teacher stops correcting you or showing any kind of interest in you." Teachers correct students because they care. Not correcting you shows that they either don't care or have given up on you.

As a teacher, there are times when we have to let the student fall and allow them to experience defeat and/or failure. Sometimes we might even invite them to leave the dojo if their behavior is not what we expect. In doing this, we cross our fingers in hopes

that life becomes their teacher and shows them the lesson that you as a teacher could not teach them and that the lesson isn't too harsh.



Tough Love



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

tience which motivates us to intervene in the natural learning process and our fear which motivates us not to let the student get frustrated. This "help" hinders them on the day that they have to face a real problem and we aren't there to solve it for them. This constant intervening will lead to low self-esteem and cause them to continually give up when things get hard. One of Furuya Sensei's students, Dale Okuno, once said, "We say yes out of fear and no out of love."

Aikido, in the way I learned it, is quite simple: work, sweat, and patience. Little by little I learned and persevered through a lot of frustration. Often, I did not understand many things that were explained to me, but I trusted my teacher and although sometimes his methods seemed harsh or strict to me, time showed me that everything had a reason. Following that example, I try and pass on tough love to my students. I have to admit that it is difficult to maintain a balance between strictness, discipline, affection and sympathy, but I do it for the student's own good.

Tough love means doing what is good for students rather than what makes them feel good. As a teacher tough love is a sacrifice, but I know that in the end it is better for the student because it builds self-confidence, self-esteem, and problem-solving skills. This is the tried-and-true method of teaching in the martial arts and if we want to build a better dojo than it is the sacrifice that I am, reluctantly, willing to make. Hopefully, it will benefit the student, the dojo and maybe even the world. •

This is how the tough love that the teacher shows is sometimes not understood by the student, who then feels abandoned. For the teacher, deep down, it is the deepest expression of love because they are doing it for the benefit of the student. The teacher wishes them the best despite the pain or the resentment that could last forever.

Many times, as teachers, we insist on hovering over the student and continuously correcting, hoping that they improve. I, personally, do not think this is always positive, because the student's effort is less sincere when we are by their side, because they know that we are waiting to step in before they make even the smallest mistake. We help out of fear, which hinders their ability to solve their own problems.



Once, another well known Aikido teacher reprimanded me for scolding my students on the internet about their lack of care and focus. He said to me, “They are all probably doing good enough, why don’t you leave them alone” and on and on. He also said that because I “complain” too much, others might see me as, “self-indulgent.” It was interesting because that teacher has never seen my students, but he can still make such judgments about them. I haven’t seen his students either so I wonder what a “good enough” level they must be. I already know the high standards toward which I push my students. Without knowing my motives, I am sure that some resent me for it. However, I am certainly not doing it for my own good and for my own benefit.

Probably, most people in their lives are satisfied with “good enough.” In training and martial arts, “good enough” is considered a sin. “Good enough” is only an ego-centered, sloppy, convenient excuse that one uses for not living up to one’s potential, trying hard enough or as an excuse for not giving something a little more effort than what is seemingly required.

Humans, themselves, are a “work of art” or perhaps a work of art in progress. The essence of training is to finish, polish or help humans realize their complete work of art - in all of its beauty and glory and wonder. This is why humans struggle with themselves. We are like an unfinished mirror which needs to be polished more so that it can realize its full brightness and clarity. Without the hard effort of polishing it, the mirror will never shine bright and it will never fulfill its function as a mirror.

This last weekend, we had a dojo clean-up in preparation for Nisei Week and our annual Open House demonstration. Sadly, it was not well done, I am afraid to say. There was too much “going through the motions,” lack of attentiveness, and a lack of care and awareness. It is easy to go through the motions and “clean” a floor by quickly wiping a damp rag across it. This type

of wiping down is just the physical motion and some might wonder, “What is so wrong about that?” In the dojo and in practice, we must take “cleaning the floor” to an art. This elevation is something that we should bring to everything else in our life, even brushing our teeth. The problem is that we tend to discriminate too much in our heads. Some might think that cleaning is too “menial” of a job so they don’t put much attention to it. Some might think, “Why should I do that, I am too good for such a task!” This is how many think and this is why they cannot

do a very good job. By not even taking a lowly job of cleaning to the state of an art – one is not using their poten-

tial, creativity, energy or even their intellect. With this attention to detail, how can we think of ourselves as “too good” for something?

Any cleaning could be fine from the standpoint that everyone went through the motions and maybe we can all agree that it is “good enough.” However, if we make everything in Life, “good enough,” then it is probably not a “good enough” life at all.

A teacher expects perfection from their students. Obviously, it is easy for someone to say, “That’s impossible!” Sadly, with “good enough” we will never truly know what “impossible” or “perfection” really means. Perfection is a state of mind that is coupled with a caring heart and has nothing to do with money or going through the motions as we might think.

Everything in the dojo is a “work of art” and needs to be treated as such. Finally, cleaning the dojo is supposed to welcome O’Sensei’s spirit into our training. How can we welcome O’Sensei’s spirit into a dirty, unkempt dojo or a dojo which lacks heart and caring? O’Sensei would never settle on “good enough.” Neither should you. •

Editor’s note: *Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on August 1, 2005.*

“Good Enough”



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

Dojo Coronavirus update:
The dojo is now fully open for indoors training with contact.

- Your temperature will be checked upon entry.
- People with showing symptoms will not be allowed to train.
- Those that have been vaccinated don't have to wear a mask.
- Those that have not been vaccinated must still wear a mask.

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 6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class	Fridays 6:30-7:30 PM Regular 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 7:45-8:45 Regular Class
Saturdays 7:45-8:45 AM Regular class	



The Aiki Dojo

is the Official publication of the

Aikido Center of Los Angeles

Copyright © 2021 Aikido Center of Los Angeles.
All Rights Reserved. Published by the Aikido Center of Los Angeles. No portion of this publication may be copied or reproduced without written permission from the Publisher.

The names, symbols, logos, and photographs and all other intellectual property of the company, brands, and people appearing in this publication are the exclusive property of their respective owners and should not be interpreted as an endorsement of or by the Aikido Center of Los Angeles. Any legal and equitable rights in their intellectual property are exclusively reserved to those owners.

Aikikai Foundation



Aikido World Headquarters

AIKIKAI®

Aikikai Foundation, Aikido World Headquarters

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 | 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.

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



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 | 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.

Listen

Aiki Dojo Podcast

Read

Aiki Dojo Message
www.aikidocenterla.com/blog

Follow

@aikidocenterla
@teacher.aikido

Watch

2 minute aikido technique