



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

2

To be Civilized

By David Ito

Ito Sensei explains the rationale behind Aikido training.

4

The Future

by Santiago Almaraz

Almaraz Sensei discusses Aikido training for children.

7

Where There's Smoke

by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Sensei writes about the role of true understanding in the martial arts.



ほととぎす大竹藪をもる月夜
Hototogisu otake yabu wo moru tsukiyo
Moonlight slants through
The vast bamboo grove:
A hototogisu cries.

- Matsu Basho

Moving Into Summer



The other day I was watching a documentary on boxing in the United States. The documentarian followed three boxers and chronicled their journeys in the sport. One boxer was a younger amateur who just turned professional, another was a well-known amateur vying for an Olympic berth and the last one was a world champion. The interesting thing in the movie was how much emphasis was placed upon being “hungry.” The professionals were chided for being complacent and not being hungry enough while the amateur was lauded for his sacrifice which fueled his hunger. Many of the fighters and coaches discussed how this hunger fueled one’s motivation which increased their aggression and how boxing is the only sport in America which required aggression. At the end of documentary, the world champion loses his title because, as his coach mused, “He lost because he had become too civilized and too comfortable.”

I found this idea of being “too civilized” contrary to Aikido training. In Japanese traditional arts, especially Aikido, we are learning how to be more *bunmei* (文明) or to be “civilized.” Training teaches us poise, self-confidence, restraint and how to work as a team. This is contrary to most sports which praise individualism, aggression and winning at all cost.

To be Civilized



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

It is easy to think that because a samurai is a warrior and soldier that they are filled with aggression. It is true to some extent, but their aggression is supposed to be limited to the battlefield

and was always supposed to be kept in check. In ancient times, a samurai had to be ready and able to fight and kill at any time. In order to do this, a samurai had to have a warrior’s mindset, but this is different than a killer’s mentality. A killer has *sakki* (殺氣) or “bloodlust” and cares only about killing. Furuya Sensei often discussed how soldiers could accidentally become accustomed to killing and how killing others could become a bad habit.

What is different between a samurai and a killer is that a samurai has a warrior’s mindset and a warrior’s mindset is centered around self-discipline. O’Sensei said, “Aiki is not a technique to fight with or defeat an enemy. It is the way to reconcile the world and make human beings one family.” To reconcile is to find one’s place in society. A samurai will never be able to live in a civilized society with a killer’s mentality because at any point they could accidentally snap and kill everyone in the room. Being civilized enabled a samurai to learn more than just how to kill and take lives – they had to learn how to be more disciplined and thus more discerning.

Continued on page 3...



To be Civilized *continued from page 2...*

Charles Darwin said, “The art of making fire is probably the greatest discovery, excepting language, ever made by man.” From Darwin’s statement, we can infer that using fire and language marked the beginnings of human civilization. Fire symbolizes one’s passion and we call this *jiriki* (自力) or “self-power” in Japanese. In swordsmanship, when we raise the sword overhead, we assume the *jodan no kamae* (上段の構え) stance or “overhead stance,” but this is also known as the *hi no kamae* (火の構え) or “fire stance.” The use of the word fire in this sense refers to the courage and fortitude that one must have to take up the sword and cut someone down.

Jinrui dake ga hi no tsukaikata wo shitteiru

人類だけが火の使い方を知っている
Only man knows how to use fire.

There are actually two different types of fire that a student can develop in training. One is the “hunger” that they referred to in the boxing documentary which can be used to fuel one’s aggression, but like most fires that go unchecked it is unsustainable because it usually burns everything in sight. Legendary boxing coach Cus D’Amato said, “Emotions, particularly anger, are like fire. They can cook your food and keep you warm, or they can burn your house down.” The other type of fire is a disciplined fire which fuels one’s fighting spirit. This type of fire is sustainable and controllable and only burns what it needs to.

Furthering this line of thinking, someone said, “Only man knows how to use fire.” What they are implying is that the technology of fire is what makes humans superior to animals. Animals cannot develop and use the technology of fire and thus they can only have only a killer’s mindset. From the standpoint of swordsmanship, I would argue that it is not fire, but the human being’s ability to be discerning and channel their fire

which makes them superior.

Fire and language might be the beginnings of civilization, but the pinnacle of civilization is in our ability to choose to be *hi-bouryoku* (非暴力) or “nonviolent. Examining the kanji for *budo* (武道) we see that *bu* (武) or “military” is made up of the radicals for stop (止) and spear (戈). Although, our training may begin with the desire to destroy, it ends evolutionarily in *jiriki* where we let go of that desire and we do this symbolically when we put the sword down and choose non-violence. Sensei often said, “The highest teaching in the martial arts is non-violence.” Old Japanese masters used to say, “*shinmu fusatsu*” (真武不殺) or that “True *budo* does not kill.”

O’Sensei said, “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.” Thus, it’s not the fire, but the discernment which makes us civilized and thus makes us human. Humans get to choose what they want to do, when they want to do it and why to do it. A civilized warrior gets to choose how to use their fire – animals do not. •

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 2 minute aikido technique



When we started with Aikido classes for children more than 15 years ago, I did not think that it would be something that would be so enriching and yet so hard.

The truth is that I did not start with my children's classes at the same time as I started my adult classes because I have always found the children's classes to be an overwhelmingly big responsibility, and that is why it took me about 10 years to decide to start teaching children. For some, the children's Aikido classes may seem easy to do: a few falls, a couple of techniques, a few games and that's it. However, nothing is further from reality. To put together a class where they truly learn Aikido in all its expression, with its culture, philosophy, values and of course, its technique is incredibly complex.

I remember 20 years ago when I first met Sensei Furuya, he had an incredible children's class. Sometimes, I would stay to watch the instructors who were teaching so that I can learn more about the pedagogy of teaching these types of classes. Perhaps that is why I did not decide to teach children because I could see that

The Future



by Santiago Garcia Almaraz
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai

they required a lot of preparation and to be good demanded time and commitment.

Something caught my attention watching these classes. I noticed that the average age of the students was around 10 years old, but their behaviors and attitudes were that of adults - so incredible! How did Sensei get them to do that? It is a secret that I still try to understand in each class, and it makes teaching children even more important to me.

Children learn not only techniques but values that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. The learning starts from the moment when they open the door of the dojo to the moment that they leave through it. We are not only responsible for what happens on the tatami but also for all their behaviors during the time they are in the dojo. And yes, it is similar to what happens in adult classes but with children you have to be much more careful because it is not just the way we are doing things, but also in the way we are saying it.

Continued on page 5...



The Future *continued from page 4...*

As adults, children do not normally have the capacity of an adult for maturity, self-discipline, concentration, and perseverance. For them, doing the same technique over and over again usually does not work so you have to be able to explain it to them in different ways that only a child might understand. To capture a child's attention and keep them motivated day after day is difficult and we are also limited to the type of techniques we can teach them since their bodies are not yet developed and so some techniques might be difficult or risky and not suitable for children to practice.

However, the driving force and one of the main reasons why I decided to start teaching Aikido classes for children is because I want to share some of my experiences and passions for Aikido. I hope that some of them reach adulthood and keep on practicing but all I can hope for is that what they learn here will serve them somehow in the future. In the end, what is the purpose of the teacher but to pass on what they know.

During the pandemic, we mainly talked about how the coronavirus has influenced the elderly, but this year has been difficult for the children too.

In Spain, we have been fortunate to be able to practice to a greater or lesser extent with online classes and classes with limited contact and masks. I have to say that the experience has been a mixture of feelings of sadness and happiness when I watch the children practice separated, without contact, and with limitations with respect to the dynamics that should be there for a children's Aikido class. What brings me hope is the spirit and smiles of the children as they train. I have discovered that children have an incredible capacity as human beings and to adapt themselves to the situation and I watched as they adapted without great drama or trauma to all these new rules and norms.

In all the classes this year I do not remember having to use sanitizers or masks, taking temperatures, creating classes without contact or using the *jo*. I only remember the great lesson I received in how to accept the situation, adapt without getting upset or making excuses and moving forward despite the adversity. So, I can only thank the students for teaching me one more time – one more year. •

They say a dojo's training area is a sacred place, but what does that mean to us as students and teachers? Is it like the Vatican with all sorts of holy relics? Is it a place where you speak in hushed tones and flash photography is a no-no?

On the surface, yes; but spiritually it's more than that. We approach the training area with respect. It's pure, because there are no distractions from the outside. It's the place where we meet our teacher and the place where our teacher transmits the art to us. It's not holy ground, but its sanctity is in how we approach our training and our own attitudes toward our training. By its nature, this practice time is an important time.

Because the training area is considered a sacred place, we treat everything with care and with a sense of reverence because it is important to us. We reserve time in our daily schedules and make space to train in this sacred space for training and nothing else. Getting to the dojo and practicing, above all else, is the secret to mastery and passing down the art to the next generation of students who will pass it down to their own students.

Part of this sanctity is approaching our training with the feeling of life or death. As a society that approaches martial arts as entertainment, yes it sounds like overkill. As a white belt, I remember another student complained about Furuya Sensei saying that Aikido was a matter of life or death. He thought it was hyperbole.

From a superficial standpoint, he was right. How much life or death can we cram into an hour-long class? Was it life or death? At the time, no. There are no more battles fought using martial arts. Thunder Domes and underground death matches are the domain of action films. Getting winded and tired from punching at a heavy bag, or throwing people down is hardly life or death. Besides, how would any studio, school or dojo pay their rent if their student body is constantly getting maimed or killed? Life or death? That's economically unfeasible!

But when we train, what is our attitude supposed to be? When we practice, do we just plod along, or do we train with a sense of urgency? How much do we care when we make mistakes? Do we make a mental note of it, or do we just ignore it? How seriously do we approach our own training? In sports, if you make a mistake, so what. You don't score a point. However, a mistake in the martial arts could cost you your life.

Because of this, even the tiniest thing has meaning and an importance. It's like a corner that is constantly being overlooked during cleaning; the dirt accumulates in that corner. It stays dirty, but it will eventually damage the floor. In a way, any small thing, any tiny detail that is ignored will eventually grow until it becomes a bigger problem that must be dealt with.

Sure we make mistakes. The difference between life and death

and play time is our attitude toward our own training. Are we keeping our little corner clean? In traditional training, the teacher would get angry with the smallest mistake. Why did the sensei get so mad? It was no big deal. The one who made the mistake might think, "But did we die?" What a life-or-death mindset tries to teach us is to pay attention to even the smallest details. It encourages us to notice the tiniest things a normal person cannot and will not notice. Without this sense of urgency we could just say, "That's good enough." This place is where our own skill level eventually plateaus. Without this urgency we could think, "Our partner really isn't going to hit us," and then practice without meaning or purpose.

A teacher also has to approach training with a sense of life or death. When teaching students, we carefully consider their level, their ability, which techniques will help them get better and which techniques are a waste of time. What is taught in class is not approached casually. What is taught in class can either improve a student, waste their time or at worst harm them. A teacher has to realize that it often takes one errant thing to ensnare a student and confuse or stall their progress.

When we approach anything as seriously as life or death, regardless of what it is, it gives us the motivation to be the best we can be. When we imagine that the alternative is as serious as death, what else is there to do

but keep going? How much care do we put into whatever it is that we do? When we clean are we really cleaning to get it cleaner? When we practice are we really practicing to get better?

When we practice, how important is it to us to do something correctly? How important is it to us to treat our partner with respect? How important is this limited amount of time in class? How important is it to maintain the art's integrity or our own integrity?

When our attitude is respectful to the teacher, respect for the students, respect for our training space and respect for our own training, then the sacredness of the space arises on its own naturally. Typically, when our attitude is correct then our actions are correct. This sense of life or death is what sharpens our edge. This edge is what maintains the sanctity of a dojo's training area.

They say the devil is in the details and without a life-or-death attitude toward anything, would the details even matter? In the beginning, we go through the motions of practice and training, copying the method and the form. It may take years before we understand what training truly means.

It is difficult to realize why a dojo's space and training time is so sacred, which is the reason why the training is so sacred. Only when we practice correctly can we understand the meaning of sanctity and realize that the true sanctity is within ourselves. •



The Sacred



by Ken Watanabe
Technical Director

Some lessons take time before we understand them, sometimes they can take years – I know this from my own personal experiences. My Zen teacher, Bishop Yamashita used to say, “You can only understand it, when you understand it.” I had a lot of trouble understanding the bishop’s words and I kind of know what he means but, I occasionally have to fight with these words in my own head. How can we understand something until someone explains it to you? The bishop said, “No, one will understand it when they understand it.” It is true in many ways. As clearly as I try to explain the technique in class and give my students the opportunity to practice it over and over and over, they still struggle catching on. They do finally begin to understand when the light goes on in their own heads in their own time - no matter whatever I say or do!

During my younger days at Hombu Dojo, Doshu was very strict about practice. I am sure that he must have been much stricter toward the previous generation of students, but he was still very strict. Many times, when I was reprimanded or scolded, I had no idea what it was all about. I just had to stand there with my mouth shut. Sometimes I understood, many times, I did not. Many, many years later, it became much clearer to me. Now I realize that in matters regarding protocol, etiquette and mental awareness and being in the moment – Doshu was very strict. I was always corrected if I used the wrong or inappropriate word in my Japanese or when my manners were not absolutely correct. I remember just going next door to Doshu’s private residence, even to deliver a short message, I would always have to put on a suit and tie even if the chore took only a minute. If I was not awake in class and not paying attention, I would always get a whacked or given a strong word or two. At the time, it seemed like I was getting corrected for every tiny, little thing I did!

After the long days of practice, it was often very hard to sleep well as everything in my body seemed to be aching badly from head to foot. I slept in the corner of the mat on the 2nd floor at that time. Later, I moved into the Instructor’s Room. During the summer, it is common to burn “katori senko,” a kind of incense which keeps away the mosquitoes at night. It comes in a round coil and burns for an entire evening. I used to burn this incense in a “donburi” rice bowl by my head. One early morning, I woke up to the smell of something burning and I looked and to my great shock, this donburi rice bowl was flipped upside down and

several trails of smoke were streaming out from underneath. My hand must have bumped it in the night when I was asleep. What a shock! I immediately turned over the bowl and saw a big round black, smoky hole in the mat. I knew that this was my end at Hombu! Having done such a terrible thing, I started to cry! Suddenly I got a great idea and took out the mat and rushed up several flights of stairs to a small room on the roof where they kept some uniforms – this floor was lined with the same *tatami*. I grabbed a good one and raced downstairs to replace the offending mat and conceal my crime. Gads! The mat didn’t quite fit! All of the mats are slightly irregular in size - one inch too long, two inches too narrow, etc. I grabbed this mat and raced up the stairs again to get another mat. Raced down but this one didn’t fit either. Back up again and down again in a frantic race over and over – I still had to sweep the front of the dojo before the 6:30am class. Suddenly, Doshu opened the door and said, “What’s all this noise so early in the morning?” And I had to show him the big black hole in the mat and mentally preparing myself to do “seppuku.” He



Where There’s Smoke



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

looked at it for a second and said very calmly, “We will have it repaired when the *tatami* man comes again to fix all the other damaged mats, don’t worry about it and don’t be late for class.” Then he casually walked away. I was so shocked that it hardly bothered him at all. I now realize and think that real accidents and material things did not seem to bother him, not as much as being inattentive in class or not being in the moment.

Over the years, I never try to punish the crime, just a student’s mental attitude if a mistake is due to being inattentive or mental laziness, like Doshu. This rationale or methodology is often not clear to the student – just as it was not clear to me either at the time.

Some lessons take a lifetime to finally understand. As my Zen master also used to say, “Teaching a student is like shooting two arrows up into the sky and hoping that they will hit each other dead on!” It takes time to understand some lessons – sometimes a lot of time!

Editor’s note: *Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on November 10, 2003.*•

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

Dojo Coronavirus update:

Los Angeles County should be fully opening up on June 15th. We won't know what the guidelines are until then.

- Your temperature will be checked upon entry.
- People with showing symptoms will not be allowed to train.
- Masks will be required at all times.
- Double masking, KN95 masks and gloves are optional.
- Students are encouraged to social distance when possible.
- When possible, students should come dressed for class.
- Dressing rooms are limited to one person at a time.

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

合氣道 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



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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.

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Aikido
Salamanca Aikikai
Kodokai Dojo



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Kodokai Dojo



The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

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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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