



# The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

2

## The Path by David Ito

Ito Sensei elaborates on Aikido and suffering.

5

## Offense & Defense by Ken Watanabe

Watanabe Sensei discusses Aikido's offense and defense.

6

## Setbacks by Santiago Almaraz

Almaraz Sensei explains how losing is important.



*Volunteering at Little Tokyo Sparkle*

# WELCOME TO SUMMER!



Aikido can be a path to the end of our suffering.

In Buddhism, *samsara* is “the cycle of death and rebirth to which life in the material world is bound.” Because we are bound to the material world, we are locked into a cycle of birth, suffering, and death. Theoretically, according to Hindu and yoga traditions, the way to break free from the endless cycle of reincarnation and end our suffering is to achieve *moksha* (解脱) or “liberation from earthly desires and the woes of man,” or in other words, to achieve enlightenment.

Enlightenment is easier said than done. Fortunately, O’Sensei has done all the work for us and has created this path called Aikido. Practicing can help us get to the top of the mountain.

Aikido is O’Sensei’s enlightenment and was born out of his assiduous studies and physical training. Aikido has two components: philosophical and physical.

From O’Sensei’s study of not only Japanese philosophy, but many other types of philosophies and religions, he came to realize three things: the truth of suffering, oneness, and *ahimsa* or “non-violence.”

On a podcast about his book, *Hero on a Mission: A Path to a Meaningful Life*, Author Donald Miller said, “Villains and heroes actually have the exact same back story. The villain’s story and the back story of the hero are pain. The difference between

the villain and hero is one thing: how they respond to pain. The villain says, ‘the world hurt me, I am going to hurt it back.’ The hero says, ‘the world hurt me, I am not going to let this happen to others.’ It is just literally how you react to pain that causes you to be the villain or the hero.” Understanding Miller’s assertion, the truth about suffering is that every person, no matter who they are, is suffering and some of those people who are suffering are acting out their suffering on others.

## The Path



by David Ito  
Aikido Chief Instructor

Oneness teaches us about the interconnectedness of all beings. In Chinese medicine, they say that there is just one *ki* (氣) in the universe and everything is just different gradations of that one *ki*. However, as beings living in the material world, we experience the world as separate from ourselves. Think about it from the standpoint of how we see the person standing in front of us. If the person who stands before us is our “enemy” or “opponent” then that creates division in our minds, and we become instantly separated from them. On a certain level, they become an inanimate object that is no more than a tool for us to manipulate, pound, or destroy. If we see the person who is standing in front of us as our “partner,” then in our minds, they maintain their humanity and their humanity forces us to see their suffering because they are no different than us.

“To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering.”

– Friedrich Nietzsche

*Continued on page 3...*



*The Path continued from page 2...*

*Ahimsa* is the Eastern concept of non-violence. *Ahimsa* understands that we are all suffering and thus acting out our suffering with violence. This reaction to suffering comes from our ignorance. Ignorance in this sense doesn't mean stupidity but rather more in the Buddhist sense of making a mistake based upon not knowing any better. Non-violence from an Aikido point of view takes into account that a person attacking us is acting out their suffering because they don't know any better. Therefore, the act of non-violence doesn't mean "no violence" but rather the opposite of violence which is compassion. Violence is an intention. Movement or technique is just movement. When we couple a positive intention with a technique, it becomes Aikido. When the intention is to harm or is negative and coupled with a technique, it becomes violence. The crux of non-violence is that if we are all one and if I suffer and they also suffer, then we are one and the same. And, if we are in fact the same and we don't want to be destroyed when we make a mistake, then we shouldn't destroy others when they make a mistake either.

From the physical standpoint of Aikido technique, O'Sensei realized that these higher consciousness ideas could be too difficult to "understand" intellectually. The enlightenment or genius of O'Sensei is that he hid them inside the physical movements of Aikido so that our bodies or the movements could teach us instead.

Every time we blend with our partners or subdue them without inflicting major harm or injury, we are unknowingly physically practicing O'Sensei's understanding of non-violence. For instance, we can just break our partner's arm but instead we opt to throw them down or pin them. By taking the compassionate route, we are teaching ourselves compassion without knowing it and with every repetition of compassion, we in turn become more compassionate little by little.

In neuroscience, they have realized that our bodies teach our brains through movement. Kelly McGonigal, PhD said, "Your muscles are basically an endocrine organ that secrete [neurotrophic factor] hormones into our bloodstream. That affects every system of your body. Your muscles secrete chemicals and proteins when you exercise that are also really good for your brain health. And one of the first papers almost 10 years ago that published explaining that when you contract your muscles, they literally secrete these proteins into your bloodstream that make you resilient to stress and can protect you from depression. Scientist called them 'hope molecules.'" Since the movements of Aikido utilize the whole body, then these hope molecules are spreading to every one of our cells.

There is also a theory in neuroscience that every cell in your body changes over every seven to ten years. This coincides with the new age concept that we have a shift in consciousness every seven years. Therefore, with O'Sensei's philosophies and our muscles pumping hope molecules into every cell, we change our understanding of not only the world, but how we see it. Writer Anaïs Nin said, "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are." If this is true and the only thing which separates villains from heroes is how they deal with their suffering, then the world changes because we change the way we perceive it.

Psychiatrist Phil Stutz said, "People who accept that life is made up of pain, uncertainty, and constant work are better equipped and essentially happier than those who are constantly trying to avoid these things." Therefore, our suffering ends because our perspective changes. If the only thing which separates villains from heroes is how they deal with pain, then by using our pain and suffering for good doesn't change the circumstances but it changes the way we see it, not only in ourselves but in others as well. Aikido doesn't necessarily teach us how to remove suffering, but rather how to deal with suffering so as to not succumb to the suffering. •



Aikido is often described as a purely defensive martial art while other fighting systems like Karate or swordsmanship are considered offensive style martial arts. Some think that Aikido only defends while other martial arts attack – but is this true? In short, no, but a “no” statement is far too simplistic of an answer. Aikido is a complete martial art and so it has both defensive and offensive capabilities.

All martial arts techniques are supposed to have elements of both offense and defense. Offensive techniques like striking, cutting, or stabbing have a defensive element, while defensive techniques, like blocking, parrying, or dodging an attack have an offensive element. For instance, a Viking wielding both a sword and a shield has offensive and defensive capabilities, together. Another example would be a long-range weapon such as a spear or a bow and arrow which have distance as their defensive element.

The reason why an attack always needs a defensive element is because as soon as the attack begins, our movement creates an opening. We are exposed to our opponent’s attack as we attack. Martial artists know this and that is why they don’t simply charge in blindly, attacking as hard and as fast as they can.

For example, when we use the Japanese sword, we always start from our *kamae*, or “stance.” This is the posture from which we attack and defend. The way we hold the sword defends our forearms, throat, and head from our opponent’s attack. A correct *kamae* should be impenetrable to attack not only physically, but

also mentally. Mentally, we focus forward through the sword and press our opponent back and attack them. It’s almost like creating an invisible force field with the intention of our *kamae* and our mental focus. As we project forward, we hold the sword so that we control the centerline. Controlling the centerline is an offensive as well as a defensive tactic in swordsmanship. Many striking arts like Karate or Kung-fu also use this concept.

## Offense & Defense



by Ken Watanabe  
Technical Director

At the same time that our *kamae* protects us, it is not a static stance; the energy and focus in our stance, along with our balance, mental focus, and posture, allow us to attack when the opponent’s defense waivers or is broken.

When we cut with the sword, we raise it above our heads so we can bring it back down upon our target. However, as soon as the sword tip moves up, we are open to attack because our sword has left its protective position. In our attack, we defend our throat from being stabbed by pressing forward with the sword as we begin to move forward, and minimize the time our sword stays above our head by cutting at the very last moment. If our cut is too slow or if we attack when our opponent is ready for it, then we will get cut or stabbed. Thus, the old saying is true, “The best defense is a good offense.”

However, what does that mean for Aikido? In Aikido we don’t attack our opponent. In practice, our partner grabs us or strikes us and all we do is defend ourselves. It feels like all we do is wait for them to attack.

*Continued on page 5...*

### Offense & Defense *continued from page 4...*

In the beginning of our training, we often start practice from a static position. This is to train our movement and get used to the proper spacing. In more advanced practice, the attacks are stronger and more dynamic. We don't wait for the attack, but begin to develop our timing and spacing. Whether our training is beginning or advanced, it's very important to practice seeing both the offensive and defensive aspects of Aikido.

We can see both offensive and defensive aspects to Aikido movement. In *irimi*, we evade the attack by moving in strongly, off the line of attack, as if we were attacking. As we move in, our *hanmi*, or half body stance further turns sideways into a more *hitoemi* (一重身) posture. This *hitoemi* posture causes the attack to miss us. Like a sheet of paper turned sideways, we "disappear" and avoid being hit. While moving in with the mental focus of attacking, at the moment our strike makes contact, the attack misses.



When we move forward into *tenkan*, we are still moving *irimi* with the mindset of striking our opponents. However, at the moment our *irimi* with mental strike makes contact, we turn and align ourselves with our opponent. This alignment draws their power forward, breaks their balance, and brings their movement into our own circular movement.

When we move backward or *tenshin*, it looks like a defensive movement. However, within that movement, we are moving backwards off the line of attack and maneuvering out of the range of the attack. Also, as we fade back, we simultaneously draw out the opponent's power, neutralize it, and bring them within the range of our attack. At the same time, we are physically moving backwards, but mentally we are focusing forwards and attacking mentally.

If done correctly, all of these movements: *irimi*, *tenkan*, and *tenshin* should 1) neutralize the attack, 2) protect ourselves and establish a superior position, 3) break our opponent's balance, and 4) set us up to attack or create our own technique. In short, I can attack them, but I make it difficult for them to attack me.

Once we neutralize our opponent's attack and nullify their strength, we draw in our opponent and align with their movement and energy. Once we establish this connection with our alignment, we bring their movement into our own movement, taking over their movement, and then throw or pin them. As we practice and study these movements, we begin to see how these movements protect us by exploiting and creating openings in our opponent's attack. Again, I can attack them, but I make it

difficult for them to attack me which is the epitome of a good martial arts technique.

The techniques in Aikido rely heavily on timing because in all of these initial movements, we are seemingly allowing our opponents to strike us. Therefore, the timing has to be perfect. If we wait, we will always be late; if we can control the timing and strike simultaneously, we know exactly when to cause their attack to miss us and set us up to attack them.

These hidden offensive aspects to the Aikido technique are very important to develop in practice. At its most basic level, when we take *ukemi*, we are practicing this same offense/defense mindset when we are thrown or pinned by our partner. It's important to practice developing our footwork so we can make an effective attack but also we use that same footwork to develop strong and effective technique.

Within Aikido practice, we unconsciously trade roles of attacker and defender. The *uke*, the one who is thrown or pinned, attacks; the *nage*, the one who throws or pins the *uke*, defends. However, at the moment of contact the roles are reversed. The *uke*, the one who attacks, now has to go on the defensive or else risk being hurt. The *uke* practices developing their flexibility and connection as they move with the technique in a way that defends themselves from the throw or pin.

The *nage*, the one who was formally on the defensive, neutralizes the attack and turns the tables and now they are attacking the unbalanced *uke* with a throw or pin. However, at the same time, they are moving in a way that protects themselves from any secondary attack or other attacks from multiple attackers. Within any conflict, the offensive and defensive aspects of practice constantly flow back and forth. Both *uke* and *nage* should be practicing so that they can transition between both offensive and defensive roles.

Training in this way, Aikido techniques are not only defensive, but contain a strong offensive component as well. Offensive techniques like *atemi waza* can easily be created using *kokyu dosa* or *kokyu* movements, that is, Aikido's timing, spacing, connection, and movement, which neutralizes the attacker's attack and power.

When we begin to practice Aikido with the idea that the movements have both offense and defense happening at the same time, we can begin to appreciate the effectiveness of Aikido as both a martial art and as a training method. In short, Aikido is both offensive and defensive. •



We are entering the second part of the year and I have to confess that this first half year of 2023 has not been easy. I have experienced many changes and unforeseen events on both a personal and professional level that have made this first half of this year a little more of an uphill challenge than I expected.

Whenever things do not go along the “paved” path of life, I take refuge in my martial arts practice and in the words of my teacher to find that inspiration and motivation that I need to continue one more step.

In life, everyone has their own way of approaching these difficult moments. For me, I find it most inspiring to re-read Furuya Sensei’s book *Kodo: Ancient Ways*. One of things which I like in the book is that Sensei put many quotes in the margins. I find them very interesting and they force me to reflect inward to help me to make sense of these difficult moments in which everything seems to be against you.

One of these quotes that comes to mind from Kodo is from Sawaki Kodo Roshi who wrote “winning is suffering, loss is enlightenment.”

The truth is that I have to confess that at the beginning I could not really understand the meaning of this quote because I usually could not find anything positive or beneficial about losing something. Usually, when we are discouraged or lose something important, the normal thing is not to focus on it as something positive but quite the opposite, and so the truth is that I find this quote hard to understand!

With the passage of time, I came to understand that being sick, tired, exhausted, angry, hurt, or irritated were actually those losses that Sawaki Kodo was referring to. These losses of our

stability and comfort are a benefit and crucial to emotional balance. I am not saying that we have to enjoy suffering. I am also not saying that enjoying our lives and being happy or being healthy is a bad thing, far from it. What Sawaki Kodo is referring to is that both aspects are an inseparable part of life.

Sawaki Kodo’s teaching highlights that with “loss” there is a change in attitude. When we face those situations that cause us pain, frustration, or anger, we learn how to handle and accept them. Obviously, it is clear that it is difficult, and it is normal for people to get angry, isolate themselves, get frustrated, cry or get depressed when something untoward happens to them. However, in this process of loss, the difficulty that we face is part of the process of improvement – part of the process of enlightenment.

## Setbacks



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

“Winning is suffering, loss is enlightenment.”

– Sawaki Kodo Roshi

For me, controlling my moods is similar to how we should act in response to the weather every morning. Some days it rains, other days it is cold and sometimes there is a strong wind while other times it’s sunny. Most of us would like the weather to be good or at least pleasant every day, especially if we are going to have a picnic in the countryside or go to the beach. There is nothing more unpleasant than a rainy and cold day when you are trying to picnic. Every day when we raise the blinds, we have to decide what clothes to wear according to the weather and get going with our day without getting bogged down in why the sun doesn’t rise, especially when we have everything ready to go to the beach!

*Continued on page 7...*



*Setbacks continued from page 6...*

I suppose that learning to accept things is a part of time and aging. When we look out, we can be less dramatic about the weather and so should our attitude be with adversities. We know that the world changes and what is black today will be gray tomorrow, and the day after that it will probably be white. We accept that this is so, not with trepidation, but just as being a part of our lives.

In Aikido it should be the same way. In class, we learn to accept change and training teaches us that adaptation is constant from the first day and for many many years to come.

At the beginning everything is complex and difficult to understand. We spend the first months and years trying to keep up with the classes. Things become more and more complicated and our bodies feel clumsy. During that time, every day is far from being great. Throughout our training, there are many bad and frustrating days in which it seems that we understand less and feel that we have not learned anything! Strangely, over time, we discover that the bad days are the ones that bring us more benefit than the good days.

I think that the earlier years are easier than later years in one's training. This is because in the early years we normally accept things because we have a better attitude. We know that we still have a lot to learn and so that understanding consoles us because we think that in time the feeling of "not learning" will cease and we think that things will get easier as we advance.

From my point of view, the ability to "lose" or to accept errors is more difficult to combat from about 3rd Dan onwards. At this level the teacher gives corrections that are more technical and deeper, and the corrections are also much more difficult to accept and even more difficult to change at this level because we have become accustomed to doing it a certain way. Our rank justifies to us why we should be doing it our way and that we do not need any advice or correction.

That's why I think it's more difficult in these ranks to accept the changes, listen to our teacher, lower our heads, and try to work on the advice they have given us. These days of change, of frustration, are hard because they make us rethink many things like: "I don't know what I'm doing here," "the teacher is ungrateful," "he or she hates me," or "maybe I should try another dojo where they value me more."

I think that we should look at barriers as a step that will enable us to climb to greater heights. In the end, there will always be barriers to overcome. However, those obstacles enable us to continue to grow. In order to grow, we have to leave behind all of these attitudes, gestures, or negative feelings. Therefore, it is just as Sawaki Kodo said, that we have to leave behind or "lose" things to reach enlightenment.

So remember in those moments when things are not going as you wish, take out your umbrella and put on your raincoat and go out into the street, and continue on the path because surely the next day the sun will rise again. •

# UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

## Dojo Coronavirus update:

Currently, the City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles has lifted the face mask mandate for all persons vaccinated or not. Anyone who still wants to wear a face covering in class is welcome to do so. There is also no vaccination requirement to attend classes.

### IMPORTANT DATES

- June 26th:** Senior's Intensive Seminar
- July 4th:** Closed 4th of July
- July 8-9:** Zenshuji Obon volunteering
- July 4th:** Closed 4th of July
- July 21-23:** Dojo Camping trip
- August 13th:** Watanabe Shihan celebration
- July 8-9:** Zenshuji Obon volunteering
- October:** Dates TBA - Spain 25th anniversary seminar

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 Advanced  
11:30 AM-12:30 PM Theory

### Wednesdays

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

### Sundays

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

### Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

### Mondays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular

### Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

### Tuesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Weapons

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

## Iaido Training Schedule

居合道 時間割

### Saturdays

8:00-9:00 AM Regular Class

### Tuesdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class

### Thursdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class



# The Aiki Dojo

is the Official publication of the

**Aikido Center of Los Angeles**

Copyright © 2023 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

### Follow

@aikidocenterla  
@teacher.aikido

### Read

Aiki Dojo Message

### Watch

2 minute aikido technique