



# The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

2

## Sensei's Style

By David Ito

Ito Sensei discusses  
Furuya Sensei's style.

4

## Bad Mood

by Santiago Almaraz

Almaraz Sensei writes about strict  
teachers.

11

## Preconceived Notions

by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Sensei warns us against having  
preconceived notions in our lives.



## Rev. Kensho Furuya Memorial Issue

*“Spiritual discipline is like a great mirror, you first must have enough courage to look into it deeply and see what you will see!”*

– Rev. Kensho Furuya



14 years ago, when Furuya Sensei passed away, he had been involved in the martial arts for over 50 years. In 1958, Sensei got his first *shodan* or first-degree black belt in Kendo at the age of 10 and his *shodan* in Aikido in 1963. Throughout Sensei's career in Aikido, he had the fortunate opportunity to study with some of the most prolific teachers in Aikido history. In the early 1960s, Sensei studied with Koichi Tohei while he was a student at both Pasadena Aikikai and Los Angeles Aikikai. In 1967, Sensei got the opportunity to study with Mitsunari Kanai Sensei while attending Harvard University on a Carnegie scholarship. In 1969, Sensei travelled to Japan and studied at Hombu Dojo directly under Nidai Doshu, Kisshomaru Ueshiba. During his time in Japan, he was also able to attend classes taught by Kisaburo Osawa sensei, Seigo Yamaguchi sensei and Morihiro Saito sensei to name just a few. In the 1970s, Sensei also spent time studying or assisting Yoshimitsu Yamada Sensei, Akira Tohei sensei and Kazuo Chiba sensei. When Sensei was just a teenager, he also studied Iaido under the famous swordsman Torao “Tiger” Mori.

## Sensei's Style



by David Ito  
Aikido Chief Instructor

A few years ago, a student asked me, “What was Furuya Sensei's Aikido style?” No one had ever asked me that question and I actually had never thought about it either. Truth

be told, I couldn't come up with an answer to explain his style of Aikido. I even spent time talking with Watanabe Sensei about it and he too could not come up with a definitive answer. Watanabe Sensei said, “Sensei would not have liked that question as he felt that in order to have a style, one would have to put their own spin on Aikido.” Thus, we were both perplexed, but not because Sensei was a bad teacher. On the contrary Sensei was an exceptional teacher that seemed to be good at both demonstrating and teaching Aikido.

Many famous Aikido teachers have a personal style which I'd imagine is their interpretation of what or how Aikido should be like. There is nothing wrong with this and it is actually quite natural from a human nature standpoint.

*Continued on page 3...*

*“For every hour of practice, you achieve one hour.  
For every hour of missed practice, deduct three hours of achievement.”*

– Rev. Kensho Furuya



**Sensei's Style** *continued from page 2...*

After being posed with this question, I spent a lot of time thinking about Sensei's style. I thought about the techniques that he demonstrated and about the way he taught them, but I couldn't come up with a definitive style.

A couple of years ago, I travelled to Cuba and was having a discussion about what it was like to be Sensei's student. I was talking about how Sensei's mere presence on the mat made us train harder. Then it dawned on me. Sensei's "style" isn't a physical style at all. Sensei's style is that his Aikido is done with a sense of seriousness.

After all, what is style? Style is defined as, "A manner of doing something." The manner in which Sensei does Aikido is with a serious attitude. In Japanese the word for serious is *majime* (真面目) and to have a serious attitude about something is *majime-kusaru* (真面目腐る). How we go about doing something is more important than achieving that thing. Sensei wanted us to be serious about our lives, our training and Aikido. To Sensei, Aikido wasn't a sport or even a martial art; it was a *do* (道) or Way of life. Someone once quipped, "How you do anything is how you do everything." The same person we are in the dojo should be the same person we are in our daily lives. If we approach our Aikido training seriously, we are bound to get good. Likewise, if we are serious about our endeavors outside the dojo then more than likely we will be successful.

The one teacher Sensei claimed as his own was Nidai Doshu, Kisshomaru Ueshiba. Sensei always said that, "2nd Doshu's Aikido was perfect. It was just pure Aikido that was good without the need for flashiness." As an adult, Sensei was frequently featured on television and in martial arts magazines for his expertise in the martial arts and for his knowledge of Japanese history and culture. When Sensei died, he was an ordained Zen priest and he had attained the rank of sixth degree black belt in Aikido and sixth degree black belt Kiyoshi in Iaido. His accolades and having studied with such great teachers could have created a lot of ego and naturally a "style" of Aikido. However, Sensei often said that he "Just wanted to be like second Doshu and only do good Aikido."

Having one's own physical style isn't wrong. However, I realize now that Sensei was right in not wanting to create his own physical style of Aikido. The reason why is because physical styles can fade or become misconstrued which can end up only confusing students or hurting Aikido. Largely, what remains after the physical skills are gone is more important than the skills themselves. O'Sensei wanted to create a martial art that didn't advocate hurting or killing others because as Sensei said, "Hurting others is a bad habit." Habits are based on our lifestyle and like style it is a product of our mindset.

For me, the greatest gift that Sensei ever gave me was that he modeled how to be serious about things that I cared about. With each passing year, Sensei becomes more of a storybook figure than a person who lived. If all he left us was a physical style then his memory would have been forgotten already, but because he gave us a mindset, his memory lives on. •



*“There is an old saying: ‘Do not fire until you see the whites of their eyes!’ I would like to say, ‘Do not teach, until you see the fire in their eyes!’”*

– Rev. Kensho Furuya



Many times, as students, we complain that our teachers are in a bad mood, or are strict, or have too strong of a temperament. In some cases, they are a bit despotic or edgy, and they can accidentally disrespect us or humiliate us in front of others with their words. The sad thing is that many times there are teachers who act like this who, without any desire to educate or instruct their students, treat them not as students but more like a servant who is at their service.

The truth is that I was lucky, because when I met Furuya Sensei, my first impression was not that he was someone difficult to deal with or who had a bad temper or would abuse me; but he was strict. It is true that when a teacher is demanding and sets high standards, the pressure they exert on their students can be misinterpreted and some may think that the teacher is bad, crazy or does not like us.

Sensei was not mean, unreasonable or disrespectful, but he was demanding and expected full attention from each of us during class and I am sure that for some students that may seem easy but in reality, it is not.

For me, my feeling in the classes was one of constant effort. I remember sometimes I sweated more listening and trying not to

forget his explanations than I did practicing them! There was a lot of stress generated from trying to remember each and every one of his details for each technique. However, that tension made me focus on each gesture or movement that Sensei executed and although I made an effort, I was unable to retain or understand most of it, maybe because of the language barrier. I

had to rely on my training partner to watch and copy what they did, but that only helped a little because Sensei's critique was aimed at me and not at

them. We all tried our best and practiced as earnestly as we could, and we all knew that Sensei was watching us like a hawk. I was always trying not to sweat and just trying to do my best hoping that he would not comment on my mistakes, which by the way was obviously impossible!

When training with Sensei, the truth is that I never felt fear, disrespect or humiliation even though at times it must have been obvious that I didn't understand what he was saying. Sometimes, Sensei would get upset when I did not understand, but as time passed and the years started to add up, I began to understand many things about his attitude, his character and his relationship with his students.

## Bad Mood



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

Sensei would get upset when I did not understand, but as time passed and the years started to add up, I began to understand many things about his attitude, his character and his relationship with his students.

*Continued on page 5...*

*“In a sport, pleasure or in real life, it is permissible to miss the target and never hit the bull’s eye. In our Aikido training, it is NOT. This is the difference between a sport and true martial art. And this is why Aikido is so important and essential to us in real life.”*

– Rev. Kensho Furuya



## Untitled

Do the days and nights pass so quickly as I think?

Or is my mind so tired and weary from this long journey?

Do my dreams become so long and real?

Or have I become all my memories of a past age?

Where has all my energy gone?

It does not return like the blossoms in Spring.

Where has all my happiness gone?

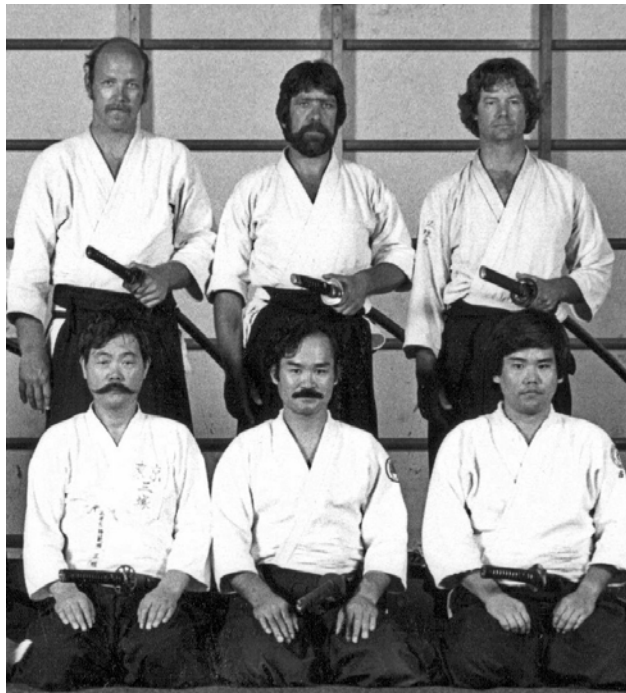
I look for it in the eyes of my students.

*Editor’s note: Furuya Sensei published this poem to his Daily Message blog on January 14, 2003.*

## Bad Mood *continued from page 4...*

Today, on the other hand, I do not see that same drive or feeling in my students that I had with my teacher. Some students seem to only limit themselves to attending classes and “passing” class time with minimal amount of effort. Some students misunderstand my strictness and mistake it for being a bad mood. What they don’t understand, which I did not either, is that I am only strict on them for their own good.

Sensei was serious about teaching. He knew what he wanted out of each student in each class, and he expected nothing less. If we were inattentive or lazy then we would probably have gotten a reprimand. If we did not make a good effort to understand or weren’t working hard with all our being or all our senses, Sensei



would get mad. If we were late or our etiquette was messy or sloppy, then we would probably get a reprimand. So, was Sensei difficult? Well, I don’t believe so any more than any other person who is serious about their craft. As a student, I don’t think it was my job to make him happy as much as it was my job to forge mind, body and soul for any adversity or obstacle that would come later in my life.

It seems like every day I think about Sensei and the things he was trying to teach me. I know he was strict and sometimes it seemed that he was in a bad mood, but I know now that he was only being strict on me for my benefit.

Thank you, Sensei, I miss you so very much. •



*“An individual’s value is in direct ratio to the value that they see in everyone around them. To try and stand above others means that you have disconnected yourself from others and you have become that much smaller not bigger and not greater.”*

– Rev. Kensho Furuya



Whether he was being humble or pragmatic, Furuya Sensei always regarded himself as a second-rate teacher. Coming from his own lineage of teachers, I can see why he would think that. Sensei studied Aikido under Nidai Doshu, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, and Zen under Bishop Kenko Yamashita. When one compares themselves to the caliber of teachers under which he trained, I’d think the same thing!

Sensei told us that he wasn’t training us for himself, but for our next teacher; for a teacher who was better than himself. At the same time, of course, there was also his pride as a teacher. A teacher, as skilled as they may be, is only as good as the students they produce. A teacher’s reputation is often gleaned from the students under their tutelage.

The Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, was not called “O’Sensei” because he was a great martial artist. “O’Sensei” does not mean “strongest guy ever.” O’Sensei translates to “great teacher.” The probability of transmitting a school of martial arts from one generation to the next generation of students is usually bleak. A teacher can hope to pass on their art to one student, maybe two at the most. When we compare those odds to the founder of Aikido, he was able to pass it on to several students who became great martial artists and teachers in their

## Stepping Stone



by Ken Watanabe  
Technical Director

doesn’t teach for their own fame and reputation. They do not teach for their own ego. Everything is for the benefit of the student. Everything is for the future of art. Fame and reputation-- they are simply natural by-products of good teaching. The teacher teaches so the student has the tools with which to graduate to the higher level of teaching.

They say the teacher is but a stepping stone for a student. The teacher is not the end all be all of a school or style; the teacher teaches to pass on the teachings to the student who hopefully has the skills with which to pass on the art to their own students.

Sensei always emphasized the *kihon-waza* or “basic techniques.” He wanted to pass down skills enabling his students’ Aikido to grow organically. Sensei’s classes were not advanced, yet the level with which he taught the basic techniques were advanced. Sensei could have taught us any way he wished, but instead chose to teach in a way that benefitted the growth of the students. It wasn’t about how many techniques we knew, but how well we practiced the techniques.

*Continued on page 7...*



“We all think we are good and never do anything wrong. This is slightly incorrect thinking. We all possess the essential nature of goodness, but goodness must be refined and cultivated and finally materialized into ‘good thought’ and ‘good action.’ When we finally master this, maybe we can say, ‘I am good!’ Like a tiny seed, we will never see the pretty blossom without a lot of caring cultivation, proper nourishment, time and patience.”

– Rev. Kensho Furuya

### **Stepping Stone** *Continued from page 6...*

A person can dig many holes in the ground searching for the answer or they can dig in the correct spot, but even knowing where the right spot is sometimes can be not enough. Finding the right spot was one thing, but how deep would one dig to find what they were looking for? And once found would they see the value in it?

Discipline and following the instructions properly were important, but thinking critically and logically were also equally important. They say the teacher is not your friend. The teacher is your opponent. Your job as the student is to surpass your teacher. Even as your teacher guides you in the right direction, they will not walk it for you.

With Sensei, asking a question hoping for an easy solution was to risk triggering the giant rolling boulder at the beginning of “Raiders of the Lost Ark”. Asking something trivial and haphaz-

ardly thought out was akin to getting your face close to the blazing sun just to get your cigarette lit.

Sensei was a fountain of knowledge in almost every aspect of Japanese culture that involved the samurai, which, of course, encompassed almost all of traditional Japanese culture. Yet, acquiring that knowledge comes at the student’s peril. Like all great teachers, he was both a gatekeeper of the art who pushed us to realize our own potential as well as a stepping stone to the mastery of its nuances.

The longer I practice and teach Aikido, the more I realize how much comfort and convenience Sensei sacrificed to teach his students. Sensei understood that the key to Aikido’s survival depended on both the lessons and wisdom from its past, but also ensuring that those same teachings continue into its future. Even though he was self-deprecating toward his stature as a second-rate teacher, unfairly comparing himself to his past masters, he was a true stepping stone for his students. •

*“The courage of the weak is more precious than the advantage of the strong. Those who play too much with power will be destroyed by that same power. This is what I think is the meaning of ‘the weak shall inherit the earth.’”*

– Rev. Kensho Furuya



## When the Student is ready, the Teacher Will Appear

by **Mohammed Anwar** Aikido Shodan

In the early days at the memorable old location of our dojo, I had already taken a few classes before without actually taking one taught by Furuya Sensei himself. Taking a class with Sensei was an experience that would later be even more humbling than my initial return to the martial arts world as a whole. Most of the classes being taught by senior students felt a bit tedious and a lot of what I was practicing seemed to be such smaller pieces of the techniques that they were supposed to be a part of. In the more advanced classes, still taught by the senior instructors, I would quickly learn that the complexities of the techniques were a lot to put together into a dynamic practice, and it was entirely too easy to misstep or freeze up once it was time to perform the full technique, let alone to safely receive them as an *uke*. Even then I'm being too generous with myself; a good chunk of the time it was simply too much to remember in the heat of the moment and I would simply get lost in the middle of the full technique.

After I had an idea of how an entire technique was performed, then came the new hurdles with such nuanced differences in the way we were asked to do them or the finer details of how to perform them correctly. Once Sensei had at last come down to teach a class I was in, these things were compounded with the advanced students now being wound up and the class moving at such a pace that I could hardly catch my breath. There was a long

way to go in every aspect of my training and the way it was elevated when Sensei was teaching made me somewhat

intimidated by the thought of him coming down the stairs to instruct. I wasn't quite sure when he was going to be coming down

to teach the advanced class and I always felt that I was in over my head when he was present. Further down the line, Sensei would teach slower paced classes of a more informative nature. But, then after that, another class that was punishingly strict. At that point, not only did I not know when he was going to be teaching a class, I didn't have any idea what to expect when he did show up. The environment was one that was unpredictable but also one that had great potential for learning.

Overall, the experience could be likened to a grade school math student being taught by a calculus professor. Certainly, the professor *could* help you with your arithmetic, but they're watching you make these low-level mistakes repeatedly while they've got an advanced notation in their mind that they could only really discuss with a handful of long-time students with decades of experience. I had quickly discovered that the good stuff that Sensei might have had for us required us to be on a certain level to properly study it. I would, however, later discover that Sensei had been watching every class that he didn't teach from his office upstairs, keeping an eye on our development and considering when the time was right to appear before us. •





As I think back to what I could write regarding my late teacher Reverend Kensho Furuya Sensei, immediately this word came to mind – devotion. The dojo was built by his hands, carved out in a loft in the far end of Little Tokyo. At that time, over 40 years ago when the dojo was built, that neighborhood was really bad, filled with homeless people, prostitutes and drug users. Tucked away in an alley, the whole dojo was lovingly handcrafted by Sensei, from the small garden path which led to the entrance, to the various artifacts lining the dojo interior, to even the wooden beams lining the walls. It was the perfect haven in which to practice Aikido.

And practice it certainly was. From the moment upon entering the dojo, there were, for much of the time, two huge dogs guarding the entrance, and if you managed to get beyond them, there was a definite sense of seriousness and formality in the air. The training was serious, as serious as Sensei who devoted his whole life to Aikido, to the teachings of all the teachers before him, to the school, and to his students. This adherence to the Way made its way from the top down – through Sensei, to the *uchi-deshi*, to the black belts, to the senior students and to the newbies like me. Being a white belt just starting out back then, much of my training was marveling at how Sensei easily and gracefully moved when demonstrating techniques during class. The dojo was so still and peaceful during those

## Devotion



by Maria Murakawa  
Aikido 4th Dan

moments, with only the faint brushing of Sensei's feet gliding along the mat and his *uke* being thrown with perfect timing. When it was time to practice, I remember fumbling through what he had just so easily demonstrated with my practice partner, who would usually be a senior student, also clumsily finding their way around.

Practicing with the students who were already living or training in the Way gave me a direct experience of Sensei's teaching. Because they were devoted, I was able to learn and grow and find that devotion for myself. I felt truly alive during these times, as every class was a combination of a microcosm of life – exhilaration, disappointment, insight, pain, wonder, and fatigue. And this I realize could not have happened without the fellow students who were walking on the same path as Sensei and me. Most of all it taught me resilience, to keep training, to see how far I could go, and how much I could care for others, as Sensei also cared in his own way for his students.

Although it's been 14 years since he has passed, his perseverance is still an inspiration to me and others today. Especially during these times when one can easily lose hope, I remember how steadfast Sensei's commitment was to the dojo, and how remembering Sensei brings to mind what devotion truly is for me. •



# The Aiki Dojo

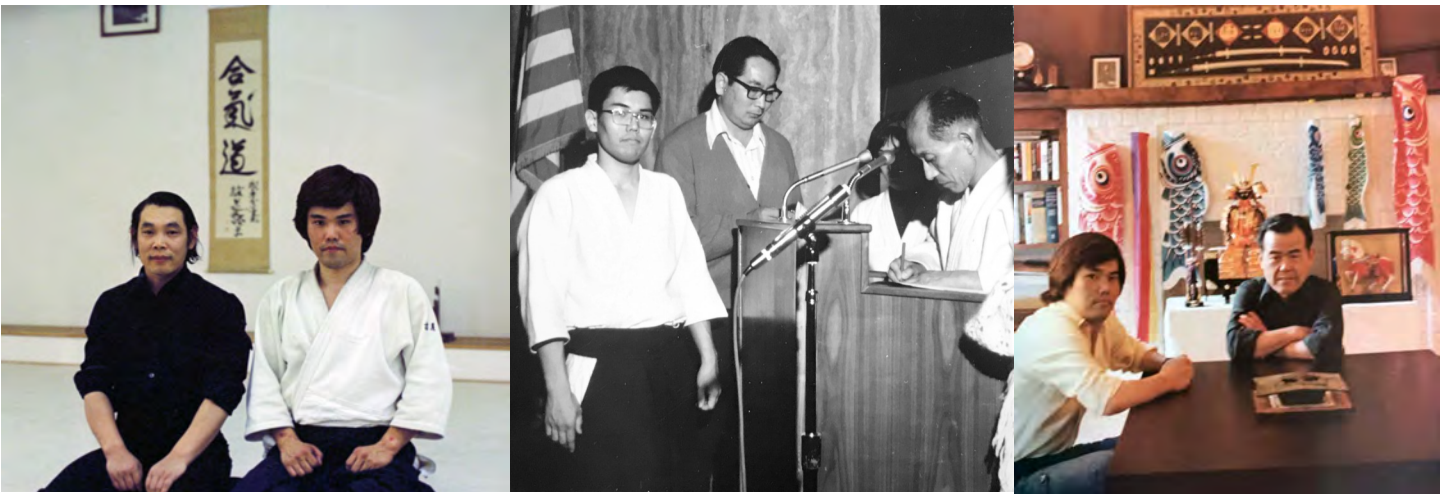
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How do I remember Furuya Sensei? I joined the Aikido Center of Los Angeles in 1994 when I started law school at the University of Southern California. Furuya Sensei was a stern, imposing figure who demonstrated power and grace in his technique, which he combined with a deep learning in history, art, religion and philosophy. He was not easy to approach, and most of my learning was done from afar. Sensei could be full of humor one moment and quick to anger the next, but I never felt that he was anything less than generous.

I have a few clear memories that come up — they are off-the-mat memories. Many years after I had started practicing at the dojo, I was having a difficult time in my personal life. I tried to confide in Sensei, hoping that some of his wisdom would help me resolve my problems or lighten my dark mood. Instead, as I began to tell him about my issues, he cut me short and said to me, “Just read Shobogenzo” — a collection of writings by Dogen Zenji, the founder of Soto Zen. At first, I felt a bit hurt that he was so abrupt and unhelpful. Sensei offered no other advice or solace, nor did he ask me later how I was. Ironically, I did read the Shobogenzo, and it actually did help me a lot. A long time after, I realized that Sensei’s brusque response to my plea for attention and help, though it felt harsh and even a bit

mean at the time, was actually quite helpful. His response was like a shock to my system, kind of like the spark when starting a car, that I wasn’t expecting but which helped me to help myself. For me, that is what a teacher is supposed to do.

Sometime later, I began having meals with Sensei and spending time with him. I always enjoyed our meals and found his conversations very interesting. The other memory that comes to mind is from right before he passed away. We were having lunch on Larchmont street in Los Angeles. It was one of those “perfect days.” The sun was out, the air was warm, he was in a good mood and it was an altogether beautiful day. There was a farmer’s market that day and we

## Remembering Sensei

by **William D’Angelo** Aikido 4th Dan

walked up and down the market looking at all the food and wares after lunch, talking about very little. He looked at the fruit and vegetables, in what seemed at the time to be almost an off-handed manner, as if he were looking for something in particular. In the end, he picked just a few items and a pie to take home but nothing remarkable. We drove back to the dojo in the late afternoon still barely talking but it was just one of those days that are perfect precisely because they are just so ordinary. I cherish that day and that memory with Sensei. I miss him all the time. •





Have you ever noticed that most things turn out not to be as we expect? We may talk to someone on the telephone or hear someone's voice on the radio and think that we may know what they look like after a while when we get to know them, but when we finally meet them, face to face, they are usually quite different or appear different from what we imagined. Sometimes, we may go to a restaurant and order a dish and despite the description on the menu, it is slightly different from what we expected or imagined. I think this happens quite often in our lives, almost every day. I think, more often than not, our expectations are wrong. It is not very wise to rely on our preconceived notions, yet, most of what we do and think are based on exactly these same expectations and imaginings.

This happens often in our training. When a new student joins a dojo, they are sometimes disappointed if the training is not as they expected or does not meet their preconceived notions of what training should be like. Sometimes, during class, a student sees the instruction, but is usually more focused on their pre-conceived or prior understanding of the technique than what the teacher may be teaching at that moment. Who knows? It could be something completely different from the previous lesson.

Teachers also suffer from the same notions. A student may join the dojo and appear like someone who will really catch on fast, but, in reality, it is not so. Some students come into training and appear like they will have a hard time learning the techniques but actually catch on very quickly contrary to the teacher's expectations. The teacher must approach each student with a clear, unblemished attitude without expectations or judgments.

I think, most of the time, our preconceived notions or expectations are wrong because they are generally centered on "what we want," and not "what it really is." It is better not to rely on such ideas and pursue everything with a clear mind. Even if we think we know it backwards and forwards, it is still better to approach

it with a clear mind, free of preconceptions or notions. This is very hard to do because we always want everything "our own way." Wanting everything our own way all of the time is, of course, a mistake from the very beginning.

I received a very beautiful letter the other day from someone I don't even know. Reading my Daily Messages forum, the person asked for some advice about training and I responded as I usually do. This was about a year ago. This letter said that they were very upset with my answer but tried to take my advice anyways and as difficult as it was they eventually understood what I was trying to say and everything turned out very well. Of course, I don't have all of the answers but I am glad that I could help out this person.

I took this person to the very edge of the problem so that they would have to see the problem very clearly for what it was. Sometimes, we

## Preconceived Notions



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

cannot see everything clearly until we go to the very edge of the cliff and the beautiful landscape appears. I often try to take my students to the very edge. Not easy! Much of the time, students misunderstand and become upset with me but this is the risk I take as a teacher. Some will try, some will not. It is not a matter of "my orders," or "teacher's demands," it is really a matter of one's faith in one's self. The teacher can only shine a tiny little light at the end of the tunnel; the one who must go through the long dark tunnel is you yourself.

By the way, I want to thank some of my students for all their work and efforts in keeping the dojo moving smoothly along. We forget to be grateful sometimes so I want to make sure everyone knows my feelings once in a while. Don't forget to show your gratitude to the people important in your life. Taking things for granted is another expectation or preconceived notion, we were just talking about. •

*Editor's note: Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on May 10, 2002.*

*“You can make many friends in life, but if you can make one real, from the heart, true-blue friend, I think that you are fortunate. You may love many people in life, but if you can find one true-blue forever love in your life, you are lucky. You can have many teachers in your life, but if you can find one true-blue true teacher in your life, you are blessed.”*

– Rev. Kensho Furuya

The time between when something happens, or someone is alive and the event or the person is completely forgotten is referred to as *saeculum* by the Etruscans. Essentially, *saeculum* is the amount of time until something becomes forgotten.

When people are alive, they are three-dimensional beings, but when they pass away, they tend to become two-dimensional.

When we are alive, we have the ability to interact with others and thus we can be “felt” by them

even if we are not in the same area, state or country. This “feeling” is what gives us our three-dimensional shape. When we pass away, we lose our ability to interact and therefore lose our ability to exist three-dimensionally; in a sense, we lose our ability to be felt. People also become two-dimensional because our memories of them are forgotten, and they can only be remembered in pictures which tend to be put in boxes and lost or forgotten. Thus, when our bodies are gone and our spirits or souls have lost their feeling, then we are forgotten.

Our friend and fellow Aikido student, Steven Shaw, passed away two years ago which was three days and 12 years after Furuya Sensei passed away. I knew Steven for about 20 or 21 years, but to tell you the honest truth, I can’t quite remember if he joined the dojo in 1997, 1998 or 1999.

Steven was an interesting person to me because he was an individual and remained that way the entire time I knew him. Individualism is an anomaly in traditional training. The Japanese have a saying, “*deru kugi wa utareru*” (出る釘は打たれる) or “The nail that sticks out gets hammered down.” The reason why he was an anomaly was because Sensei didn’t usually like people like him. Steven was always someone who retained his individuality despite training in an environment which was very Japanese and tended to be very conforming. Steven was devoted and had a lot of self-discipline, but he was also someone who was his own man and I admired that about him. What I mean by that is that in a strict environment, everyone tends to be a bit too serious, myself included. Steven was the person who always tried to bring levity, even if it was sometimes at the wrong time, to our strict and disciplined training. For instance, whenever Sensei would be mad and yelling at us, he would ask some ridiculous rhetorical question like, “Do you think you’re a samurai?” We would all sit there stoically and being as quiet as possible trying not to incur his wrath. The only person who would ever dare answer Sensei out loud would be Steven and he always did it with his usual big smile. It would make Sensei even madder when Steven answered but I also think that it endeared Steven to him because he had the courage to answer.

My favorite memory of Steven’s attempt at levity came during a luncheon after the first memorial service for 2nd Doshu passing in 1999. The food had been served but nobody was eating, and the mood was somber and uncomfortably silent. Sensei ordered Steven to stand up and tell his story about how he came to live in Los Angeles and why he joined our dojo. This was a story that

Steven had told a few times before and I am not even sure if it is true. Steven’s acting

training enabled him to deftly weave a story that got everyone to lean in and pay attention. To paraphrase, Steven originally came to Los Angeles with the hopes of being Annikan Skywalker in the next installment of the Star Wars series. To prepare himself, he was practicing with a sword in the park.

As he practiced, a homeless guy happened upon him and began to scold him. Supposedly, the homeless guy said, “You look like you don’t know what you are doing.” The sagely homeless guy then told him about Sensei and about how he should go to the dojo and study under a “real” teacher. Allegedly, Steven would see this homeless guy from time to time and this sage-like guy would give him a scowled nod that looked like one a parent would give to a child when they were acting out. Steven told the story with such passion and self-deprecating humor that he had the whole room engaged and laughing. Even Sensei smirked and shook his head feigning disbelief. After he sat down, the mood lightened, and everyone felt better and had a good time.

Steven was also very devoted to his family. He often talked to me about how much he loved being married and how he loved being a father. Family life really made him happy. During Steven’s last visit to Los Angeles, I picked him up from the hotel and he came down with a huge smile on his face. When I asked him about it, he told me how happy he was that he had just face-timed with his daughter and how she showed him a piece of art that she had created. He said, “Man that was so cool, I love that.” He seemed to beam with pride with his larger-than-life smile.

Since Steven passed away, I have tried to include something about him in Sensei’s memorial issue. For me, Steven represents not only that time is not on our side and that we should savor each moment, but his memory also reminds me not to be so serious. When most of us look at Steven’s face, he is just another guy in a picture. However, I feel like if I write a little something about him then perhaps people would get a feeling for him, that he becomes more than just a face in a picture, and his *saeculum* would be a little bit longer. Like each of us, Steven is more than just a face in a picture. We all will live, love and leave this Earth far too soon. Like with Steven, don’t just look at the picture, don’t lose that feeling. • – David Ito

## Don’t Lose That Feeling



**Steven Shaw 1974-2019**