



# The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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## Aikido Training in the Time of COVID

## How To Relax by David Ito Aikido Chief Instructor

Last year, 83% of US workers have reported having work-related stress and 77% of all doctor visits are stress related. Chronic stress can be thought of as the number one enemy to good health as it is linked to almost every one of the top 10 leading causes of death. The question is, "How does stress affect our overall health?" When we experience stress it directly affects the autonomic nervous system (ANS), which controls our sympathetic nervous system (SNS), which controls our flight or fight mechanism and our parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), which controls relaxation and digestion. Simply put, when we experience stress, our ANS activates our flight or fight response (SNS) and our endocrine system secretes adrenaline and cortisol into our system which causes our hearts to beat faster, our breathing to increase, the blood vessels in our limbs to dilate to receive more blood, and our blood sugar levels to rise. It also turns off non-essential processes like digestion and decreases blood flow to other non-essential organs. Another thing SNS activation does is it slightly rotates our upper cervical vertebrae, which cuts off blood and cerebral spinal fluid to our brains, which disables us from using our pre-frontal cortex so that we can't think and can only react (fight or flight).

Within the auspices of our ANS is our vagus nerve or cranial nerve 10. The vagus nerve is the longest nerve in the body. It originates in the brain, exits the skull at the base of the brain stem, travels down the neck and then innervates into the lungs, stomach, spleen, heart and many other organs. The vagus nerve plays a major role in the PNS function of relaxation which balances out the fight or flight function of the SNS.

The vagus nerve can be impaired mechanically as our shoulders rise and our necks get tight in response to stress because the vagus nerve exits the skull to the rear of the head. It can also be inhibited hormonally with the secretion of stress hormones.

Understanding our nervous system's role in stress and its impact on the vagus nerve, it is easy to see how stress can be an underlying cause of diseases like diabetes, heart disease, cancer or many other diseases. It can also be the cause of chronic pain, digestive problems, sleep problems, anxiety, depression, frequent colds and flus, or any other symptoms that we may be suffering from.

If we are chronically stressed out, how do we bring our nervous system back from the abyss of the SNS to the tranquility of the PNS? The answer is with breathing.

Studies have shown that deep and slow abdominal breathing with exhales that are at least twice as long as inhales will cause the PNS to engage and the vagus nerve to reactivate. This reactivation causes a secretion of acetylcholine, which will relax our nervous system and slow our heart rates down.

This is the same pattern PNS activation is happening while we are practicing Aikido. The movements are rhythmic and meditative which enables us to control our breathing which in turn slows down our heart rates. The goal of human beings should be to live healthy and happy lives. This can only be achieved when manage our stress well so that our nervous system can be relaxed and this only happens when we actively engage in breathing.

The best way to activate your vagus nerve is with a simple 4-7-8 breathing exercise adapted to Stanley Rosenberg's Polyvagal breathing method:



Lie on your back.  
Interlock your fingers behind your head. Close your eyes.



Breathe in through your nose to a count of 4.  
Hold without straining to a count of 7.  
Breathe out through your nose or mouth for a count of 8.  
Repeat 5 times.  
Open your eyes.



Look RIGHT with only your eyes and do the 4-7-8 breathing.  
Keep breathing until you sigh, yawn, or swallow.



Look to the LEFT with only your eyes and do the 4-7-8 breathing.  
Keep breathing until you sigh, yawn, or swallow.

Do this eyes, arms and breathing method whenever you feel stressed or want to relax.



## How To Make Sunomono

by Frances Yokoto Aikido 1st Kyu

Sunomono is a simple yet versatile side accompaniment to a Japanese meal. It literally means “vinegar thing” or “of vinegar”. Served chilled, the acidity of the vinegar, saltiness of the brine, and the sweetness of the sugar serve as a great contrast to simple grilled meats and fish. Also served with warm, delicately sweet and sticky Japanese rice, the texture and flavor combinations come together for a perfect pairing.

### Brine the Vegetables:

Cucumber has a high water content, so after slicing, you’ll want to draw out some of the water by soaking your vegetables in a slightly salty water bath (brine). Use the water to salt proportion above. Be sure to use cold water, not hot, otherwise you’ll risk breaking down the connective fibers of the vegetables themselves. If you’re adding other fresh ingredients like carrots or daikon, you can add them to this brine mixture as well. Depending on how thin you sliced your cucumbers (I, personally, like mine fairly thin, but not so thin that I completely lose the crisp texture), allow them to sit in the brine for at least 15 minutes or more. Drain the cucumbers, then rinse well, and gently squeeze out the water while being very careful not to disrupt the integrity of them.

### Season the Sunomono:

In the process of seasoning, I’m a firm believer of doing everything to taste, so in the following step, don’t be afraid to add a little less sugar or a little more vinegar. You can also play with absence of heat in this dish and try adding a tad bit of dried red chili or use rehydrated shiitake mushrooms for a little *umami*. In fact, should you use rehydrated shiitakes, I’d even recommend saving the water used for rehydration and using it in place of the water used for the brine.

### Combine and Marinate:

Add the rice wine vinegar and sugar to the drained cucumbers. Mix well, refrigerate until chilled, or let sit overnight. My recommendation is to start simple, then graduate to incorporating other ingredients. Remember, in food and cooking, less is oftentimes more. There are a number of variations to this dish, so play with it and have fun!•

### Ingredients:

1 pound Japanese cucumber unpeeled, sliced thin  
2 cups water, cold  
1 ¼ teaspoon salt  
½ cup rice wine vinegar  
1 ¼ tablespoon sugar

### Optional ingredients:

Persian cucumbers will work as well  
Sesame seeds, black or white  
Carrots, sliced thin, or shredded  
Wakame, rinsed well, drained, chopped  
Imitation crab, shredded  
Octopus, cooked, sliced  
Daikon, sliced thin, or shredded



## The Love For Aikido

In my early 20’s, I was in search of a sport or a hobby. I was stuck in between three different martial arts that I had received very minimal training in but was very fascinated by. I just couldn’t make up my mind between Capoeira, Krav maga or Aikido.

While conducting intense research in all three of these martial arts by not only training but also searching the internet and looking at YouTube videos, it just became harder and harder for me to decide. I turned to my Dad for advice and he said, “You should go for a defense that will help you throughout life.” I think he was implying that all females should learn some type of self-defense. He suggested that I go for Aikido. Long story short, I joined the dojo and I believe it has been one of the best decisions in my life. I have become very captivated by the art of Aikido and all its philosophies and techniques. The joint locks, the dexterity and the fast-paced movements really fascinate and intrigue me very much and I just can’t seem to get enough. Wherever I go, I find myself practicing the movements or thinking about the teachings. Whenever I get the chance, I slide my

by Jackie Estrada Aikido 3rd Kyu

feet or do some other movement that comes to mind. After so many years, I haven’t out grown it and still find myself doing it.

Aikido has helped me tremendously. Personally, I have always been shy and afraid and perhaps that came from the way I grew up. As a child coming from divorced parents, it created an unsettling life for me. I found myself spending a lot of time alone and I always felt that something was spiritually missing. I can honestly say that Aikido has opened my eyes to the darker areas of myself where I was afraid not only to look, but to step into. With Aikido training, I have learned to have courage and face my fears slowly, but surely.

I have grown so much love for the art of Aikido and I have incorporated Aikido into all aspects of my life. I’ve bled, been bruised and experienced so many intense challenges on the mat, but I have come so far in my training and gained so much understanding about myself that it is impossible for me to ever stop. I have found the love for Aikido.•



# What is Atemi?

by Santiago Garcia Almaraz Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai

An *atemi* (当身) or “body hit” is a strike or blow to any part of an opponent’s body. The development of *atemi-waza* or “hitting techniques” stems from the evolution of the Japanese martial arts, particularly in jujutsu, which can be traced back to the Sengoku period (1467-1615). Empty-hand techniques were created as a form of unarmed combat for samurai who might lose their weapon on the battlefield. Some of those empty-handed techniques are joint locks, throws and strikes. Essentially, they were techniques a samurai could use in a battle when they lost the advantage of distance that using a weapon created and were forced to rely only on their bare hands.

Although *atemi-waza* was originally a secondary empty-handed technique that could kill or harm an opponent, it really was more of a distraction technique. This was because most samurai wore armor which could weigh almost 30 kilograms and would protect very well against blows especially those to vital points. Hitting those protected areas of the opponent’s body, whether they were with fists, elbows or feet would have little or no effect. Therefore, *atemi-waza*’s objective was to stun, confuse, unbalance, or set up the opponent for a throw or take down. If they could be neutralized, confused, or controlled then another deadly weapon like a *yoroi doshi* or “armor piercing dagger” could be employed to kill them.

In Aikido’s earlier period, *atemi* was a large part of Aikido. At one point, O’Sensei studied Kito-ryu jujutsu which lists *atemi-*

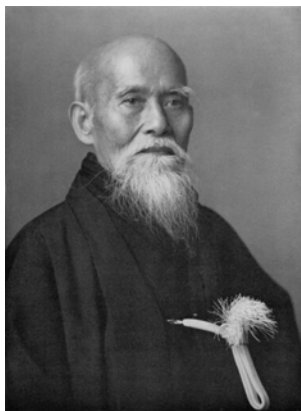
*waza* as one of its four pillars of training and many of the techniques practiced are designed to be done while wearing armor.

At a certain point, O’Sensei supposedly began to rely less on *atemi* and this could be due to his philosophy of nonviolence. I believe that *atemi* is still relevant but is often times misunderstood and even controversial. Due to this, the objective of this article is to create a better understanding of *atemi* and shed some light on *atemi-waza* and show that it is much more complex and sophisticated than just a way to cause harm.

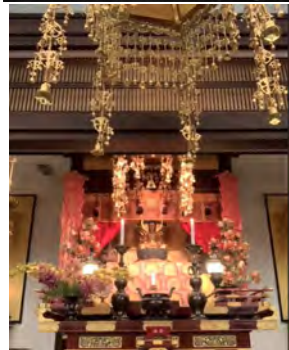
Furuya Sensei once wrote, “Atemi has more uses in Aikido technique than simply to strike an opponent. We use *atemi* to correct our spacing and to break the concentration and balance of our opponent to throw or pin the opponent more easily.”

An *atemi* can be hard or soft, aimed at a vital point or at a larger mass of the body. A blow can be delivered by the hands, fingers, knuckles, forearms, elbows, knees, feet or even one’s entire body. Generally, the type of strike and body part used depends upon the purpose.

Traditionally, an *atemi* is classified as: *tsuki*, *uchi*, or *ate*. Most of these are translated as “blow,” but sometimes the use of one name or another is not clear, which can be confusing and gives rise to different interpretations. For the sake of length, we will focus our understanding to these strikes.



## MORIHEI UESHIBA 52nd Meinichi Memorial Service



On April 26th, due to the Stay-in-Place order, the dojo held a memorial service for Morihei Ueshiba on Zoom. The service was officiated by Rev. Kojima from Zenshuji Soto Mission.

After the service, Kojima Sensei talked about wisdom and the pandemic. Here is a bit of his sermon.

This pandemic is our first experience, but humans have experienced something like this every 100 years like the Spanish flu. Other human beings in history have faced pandemics and have left us wisdom through their experiences to prevent diseases and that is why we are washing our hands, wearing gloves and using alcohol to sanitize.

The Buddha taught us that the key or solution for being at peace during these hard times is wisdom. How to cultivate our wisdom is difficult. If we read a book or study, we only get knowledge, but we can only get wisdom by succeeding or failing. Practical wisdom is needed to deepen our knowledge. The Buddha taught us that there are five ways to get wisdom. The first is *ofuse* or “donation,” but the original meaning was “giving or sharing.” Share with others what-

*Tsuki* is translated as “to lash out or pierce” and so there is a suggestion that it is done with a sharp or blunt instrument. Generally, *tsuki* is said to be a “direct hit” where the path between the starting point and the end is a straight line. When we attack with *tsuki* in armed combat, a person usually lunges or stabs at a vulnerable area of the opponent’s body with a weapon. In unarmed combat we replace those sharp instruments with our fingers or knuckles. Although the object with which we attack with *tsuki* changes, it does not change the “idea” of *tsuki*.

*Uchi* strikes on the other hand, has a more circular or pendular-like trajectory and it is usually an indirect hit. Because the *uchi*

ever you have – money, information, or even a smile. The second is *jikai* or “discipline or complying with the rules.” The rules are precepts which are fundamental rules for one’s self. In the way of Aikido and for your dojo, the rules are on the front of your newsletter: *michi no tame, yo no tame, hito no tame, Aikido* (道の為, 世の為, 人の為, 合気道). These are your principles or the rules of Aikido. Those words translate as: For the path, for the community, for the people. Those are the important rules for one’s self. The third is *ninniku* or “patience” especially in these hard times – this is important. The fourth is *shojin* or “pure effort.” Keep up your efforts. Now we are having a luxurious time where we don’t have to do anything but just stay home, but despite this luxury we should maintain our efforts. The fifth is meditation or calming one’s mind. In this situation, people’s mind are stressed because of the unknown future of the virus, finances or other unexpected things. But, we need to keep our minds calm. With meditation, forget about worry and just keeping our minds neutral. These five rules make or give us wisdom. This makes up the pyramid of Buddhist wisdom. I believe that O’Sensei’s teachings contain these wisdoms. •

strikes are more circular or indirect in nature, they are generally done with the edge of the hand, the base of the palm of the hand, etc. Within this category in Aikido we have the *shomenuchi* or “frontal” strike and *yokomenuchi* or a “side” strike.

*Ate* strikes are blows that are forcefully applied using bigger and wider surfaces such as elbows, head, knees, etc.

*Atemi* strikes are very interesting and understanding them is the key to unlocking their complexity and sophistication. Next month, we will continue our understanding of *atemi* and its use in Aikido. •

## How to Grip the Sword by Ken Watanabe laido Chief Instructor

A Japanese sword is designed to move and to be used in a certain way in order for it to perform efficiently and correctly. It is said that a swordsman trains to become one with his sword. This oneness begins at the grip. After all, this is where the sword connects to the swordsman. Gripping the Japanese sword is important and must be mastered until it becomes natural. The grip is so important that before going into battle, some samurai would secure the handle of their sword by tying it to their right hand. Holding the sword was so important that there are records of fallen warriors holding their swords so tightly that the fingers had to be pried off the handle in order to retrieve the bodies. It was thought that to lose one's sword or weapon meant certain death on the battlefield.

Without the proper grip we won't be able to properly cut with the sword, much less control it or hold on to it. The proper grip of a sword is not difficult, but to a beginner it can feel awkward or unnatural. It will take practice to keep one's grip from slipping to the side or allowing the heels of our palms to slip off the hilt as

we practice cutting with the sword. It's easy to grip the sword wrong and this is why we practice to make the proper grip our natural grip.

In swordsmanship, we must let go of our ego, no pun intended, in order to hold on to it properly and for the sword to become part of ourselves. Our grip is our connection to the sword. Our grip conforms to the sword's handle but doesn't control it. A big part of the training in swordsmanship is mindfulness. This means being aware of the state and position of our grip when we are practicing the various techniques with our sword. Therefore, the grip is constant.

In this day and age, we don't go into battle wielding a sword, but we should practice with that same kind of mindset and spirit. The first step to "becoming one with the sword" is having the correct grip. We should practice every day so that our hands become the hands of a swordsman. •

The following is a how-to on assuming the proper basic grip used in Japanese swordsmanship:



The grip is positioned as if the palms are facing each other. Point both arms out and fingers as the tip of a wedge.



Separate the hands so that the right hand blade is on top of the left and both wrists are tilting up with palms aligned as if the blades are cutting.



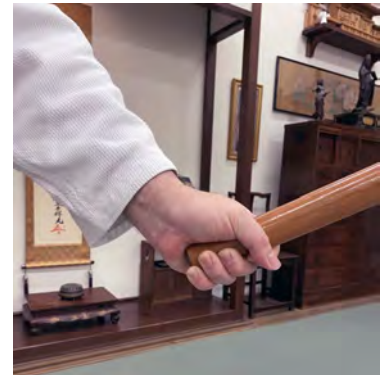
From this position, both arms stretched forward with the sword vertical, grip the handle.



The thumb and index finger on both hands form a "V" on the top of the sword handle. Grip on top



The right hand always grips not at but slightly below the *tsuba* or sword guard line on



The left hand is positioned so that half the width of your pinky finger hangs off the end of the pommel.

**Side note:** When gripping, grip with just enough power to control the sword. The traditional verbal instruction is, "Like holding an egg". 70% of the power goes into the left hand grip and 30% in the right hand. On both right and left grips, the most strength is with the pinky and ring fingers, while the middle and index fingers are relaxed.

# How To Master The Sword by Rev. Kensho Furuya

The key to mastering the sword is learning how to handle it. In ancient times, a katana or samurai sword was referred to as the “soul of the samurai,” and it is to this degree that they cared for their weapons. It seems that we have lost this precious spirit in this age. A *bokken* or wooden training sword is a tool for training which represents a sword whose original purpose was to destroy life or cause injury. So, because a *bokken* represents a sword which is a lethal weapon, it must be handled with great respect and with a strong sense of etiquette if for anything, out of the deep respect for the person who will be vanquished by it. Please handle them with great care and appreciation.

Just like our uniforms, our dojo, or our mats, the *bokken* is a tool for our “enlightenment” and must be cared for and handled carefully. In the old days, the *bokken* was our sword and it never left our side. One of the first things to *bokken* training is to become accustomed to and become good “friends” with our weapon.

Although the *bokken* is essentially a wooden stick, it is a practical substitute for a real sword and so one’s sword and *bokken* must be treated in exactly the same way. How we handle a *bokken* and how we take care of it is equally important as how we use it. We often forget this basic point in *bokken* training.

As a matter of fact, care, etiquette and use all go hand-in-hand and we can tell the level of skill of a practitioner just by how they handle their weapons – sometimes before they even begin to use it. Experts, of course, always handle their weapons “expertly,” and amateurs do not.

How we hold the *bokken*, how we draw it, and how we bow with it are all an aspect of how we handle the *bokken* and all must be executed with precise skill and expertise. If we are practicing with our *bokken*, we should learn how to handle it properly like a real sword.

The other day, I saw the *bokken* being used in a new exercise program. People were in tights and workout clothes and were swinging *bokkens* in front of a large mirror to the beat of a disco tune while the instructor bellowed out directions from a microphone. He loudly and proudly announced in the program that, “We get to learn how to use a sword and have the advantage of eliminating all of those troublesome rules of etiquette.” How sad this made me.

Both the proper use and handling of any weapon go together. As an example, a gun is not simply pointing and shooting, there is a proper way to handle it for one’s own safety and for the safety of others. There is a proper way to take care of the gun to ensure that it is always in good working order. All of these nuances go together and is part of handling a gun. Without the proper pro-

ocols, the gun can become a dangerous weapon and we can inadvertently hurt ourselves or others. Because it is a dangerous weapon, we need to take proper care of the it, so that we can be safe and it will be ready when we need it. The sword and *bokken* are the same.



When I see students carrying their *bokkens*, they do not carry it correctly. Of course, for everyone these days, it is just a wooden stick used for exercise. Some students merely swing the *bokken* pretending to do martial arts techniques, but it is only fantasy for the most part.

Our *bokken*, *jo*, and *tanto* should always be kept in a cloth bag to protect it. I prefer the bags from Iwata Shokai because it is the same brand O’Sensei used and the same one’s used by Hombu Dojo today. The trademark pair of crossed Japanese fans were given to Iwata Shokai to use by O’Sensei personally.

Every once in a while, our wooden weapons should be wiped clean with a damp cloth. It can also be polished by wiping it with a soft flannel cloth. In the old days, some people used to recommend wiping the wooden weapons with used damp Japanese green tea

leaves in a cloth. This was supposed to protect the wood and also give the weapon a good shine over time.

As a rule, one should never lend other people borrow their weapons. Our swords contain our souls and so every student should have their own do their best to obtain the best weapons they can afford. By tradition, we are the only people who should touch our weapons. Also, never touch another person’s weapons without their permission and it’s also an extreme breach of etiquette to step over or bump another person’s weapon. Never lean a weapon against a wall and never use the weapon as a crutch or cane. Our weapons are not toys or exercise equipment. When the sword is on a stand, it is always placed with the handle on the left or *sashi-omote* with the *kurikata* facing out.

To learn to care for our weapons is to truly learn how to use them. The open secret of all sword work is *suburi*. Although everyone knows this, most people don’t practice *suburi* as they should. The one who masters *suburi* and practices everyday will become the best – it’s that simple. Of course, *suburi* is hard, time consuming and very boring - indeed! Yet, it is still the time-tested and continually proven essence of all sword work. The sword or the *bokken* are our tools toward enlightenment. Learning how to master the sword is to learn how to care for it and this is the mind of a martial artist. Please do not treat the sword like a toy or a *bokken* like an exercise stick. •

**Editor’s note:** *Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on May 12, 2003.*

# UPCOMING EVENTS

行事 .....

By order of the Mayor of Los Angeles, the dojo will be closed until August 1st due to the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak.

All training, activities and events are hereby cancelled until further notice.

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, and national or ethnic origin 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

6:30-8:00 AM\* Intensive  
9:30-10:30 AM Advanced Class  
10:45-11:45 AM Regular Class

### Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 AM Morning Practice  
5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals  
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 Fundamentals  
12:45-1:45 PM Open Practice

### Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class  
7:45-8:45 PM Open Practice

### Mondays

6:30-7:30 AM Morning Practice  
6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

### Fridays

6:30-7:30 AM Morning Practice  
6:30-7:30 PM Fundamentals

### Tuesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Advanced 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

### Sundays

7:45-8:45 AM Regular Class



# The Aiki Dojo

is the Official publication of the  
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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.

### 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

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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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