



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Our eyes must see 20 feet in front,
our feet point toward our opponent,
our mind 50 moves ahead.

It is when we move back
that we must think forward the most.

Life is a constant machine of flashbacks.
Childhood regrets,
teenage angst,
adult struggles
all bleed to the present.

The past holds our concentration
on our backward step.

Shall we long for a different outcome
or learn from our mistakes?

Living in the past
is walking eyes closed.
Watching our eyelids
with cinematic astonishment.
The glistering what ifs
beckon us.

Only when we end this self-flagellation
can we face our opponent,
be on the offense,
strike relentless.



Moving Forward Past COVID



Women in Aikido

Why Women Should Do Aikido – A Woman's Perspective

When people, especially women, hear that I have been doing Aikido for 26 years, they often ask me if I could defend myself if I needed to or if Aikido is an effective form of self-defense. I often wonder if they are asking me this because I have done Aikido for many years or because I am a woman. This is tough to answer and I'm actually not sure. I would imagine that the answer is yes, but won't fully know until the situation presents itself. What I am sure of is that Aikido training has given me more body awareness, and self-knowledge which has brought about a certain amount of self-confidence. This confidence is not arrogance, but rather a sense of calmness. With the confidence that comes through training I am sure that it would aid me in negotiating a situation effectively if it were to present itself. Most of all, Aikido has shown me what commitment means not only to the art but to myself as well.

What does it mean to be committed to one's self? Traditionally, women are seen as caregivers and homemakers. This along with societal and financial expectations of also having a career and maintaining a youthful appearance can put a lot of pressure on women to fulfill a certain societal role, to strive for something outside of ourselves which we believe will make others happy which indirectly satisfies our desires for acceptance and love. What if instead of fulfilling these outside expectations, we looked inside and took time to examine who we really are as people and as human beings and



by Maria Murakawa
Aikido 4th Dan

"As we commit to ourselves, we commit to trusting the power that created us. We are aligning ourselves to the power of the universe, the great creator through whose power all dreams are possible."

– Julia Cameron

learned to give that love and attention that we focus on others on ourselves? What if we peeled back the labels of what it means to be a woman, daughter, wife, mother, career woman and looked for what could be found underneath it all?

Aikido teaches us to shed these preconceptions of what we should be or what we should be doing solely because we are women. Training helps us to shed light on our true selves and helps us to better understand ourselves. In knowing ourselves, we are more fully able to show up and be of service to the world, in our own way. In being more aligned with our individuality, we have the capacity to inspire and help others, not because it is our duty but because we are called to do so. Training teaches us to affirm ourselves and that our wellbeing matters. Committing to ourselves enables us to contribute more fully to ourselves and to the world. This is where Aikido can play a beneficial role in a woman's life, both as a martial art and as a path towards self-realization.

When an attack comes, we will know if in that moment if we are aligned with ourselves or not. We will also know right away if we are out of alignment because we will be unable to negotiate the attack and throw our opponent. Being out of alignment in this way gives us valuable insight into ourselves.



In Aikido, first we need to align all our body parts to our center—the place from which everything moves, and where anything becomes possible. If I’m moving my body and my center is lagging behind my legs or my arms, I can feel it. With this awareness, I can understand that misalignment is a reflection of my fear preventing me from showing up wholeheartedly in this world and that fear also comes from the voices in our heads. This phenomenon leads us to the fact that a lot of Aikido and self-defense is mental. For instance, if I listen to the voices in my head which judge my opponent as being too strong, I start to think “How will I, a weaker person, be able to throw this stronger person down?” With this mentality, the focus is too much on the other person, my perception of them is really based on my fears, and not about simply moving, and trusting that the movement itself will effectively meet the situation and neutralize the attack. Aikido teaches us to get out of our own way and trust the power that we have within us.

Only by being strong and centered, can we successfully align with another and neutralize the situation. This can be translated into real life where challenging moments can come in the form of our boss, spouse, kids, parents, etc. With training, we come to see how we or our minds relate to the world outside. With training, we learn how to be proactive in negotiating an attack and how to move forward and not react. Through training, we catch a glimpse of syncing into a power that seems greater than ourselves, but at the same time lies within us. In training, we come to see what we are truly capable of—what our potential is as a human being. We realize true gratitude and how

lucky we are to be able to use this body as a connection to that power which ultimately connects us to everything and everyone around us and with this realization, we realize that anything is possible. With the help of our teachers, our practice partners, and with our own perseverance and inquiry, we realize gratitude for others even if they are attacking us. Thus, the path of Aikido becomes our path to self-discovery. The path of self-discovery is a worthy investment because we are worthy. We take the time out for ourselves to train and learn how to protect ourselves and our loved ones, both physically and spiritually, by the very atmosphere that we create around us and we learn this through our training.

Aikido teaches us that there is a power within us and that if we are properly aligned to that power then we can create something that is far beyond our expectations. Through training, we come to know that we are more than a girlfriend, wife, mother, daughter, or any other label that society puts upon us as women. Through training we also realize our shortcomings and so we come to know what we need to work on. Most importantly, with training we come to realize our true power and with this power of self-knowledge and self, we learn what true power is. Aikido teaches us to embrace that which is in the heart of what and who we are and that which we are endlessly capable of achieving. With every year, I realize more and more how much potential I have and that is why I keep practicing Aikido. Does Aikido work? In more ways than one. I invite all women to invest in and empower themselves by trying Aikido, especially in the times we are living in now. Believe me, the lessons you will learn through training will be profound. •



In Aikido there is a lot of talk about balance and one's center. As it happens, like with many other Japanese concepts or definitions, the word "balance" in Aikido is difficult to explain only with words.

Many of the Japanese concepts that are named in our daily Aikido classes can only truly be understood during practice. This is because through the practice of the technique we can feel and learn to identify things like balance for ourselves. Without practice, most of these words just become figures of speech or allegorical metaphors that we don't really know what they mean.

But actually, in today's article I want to discuss another type of balance. This is of a different type of "balance" that is at another level, at a more personal and more internal level, which we must have in our daily lives and in our practice in relation to the world around us.

Many of us are responsible for the care and management of a school or dojo. We have had to put in a lot of effort to build our dojos so that they could have a strong and firm foundation of traditional values. For most of us, it is a constant struggle balancing between what we must do, what we should do, and what we finally end up doing.

Perhaps for many students who attend classes, even those assistants who help by teaching daily classes, this type of understand-

ing may seem difficult to understand. Their lives are different from the teachers and few can understand how much work it takes to build, maintain, and grow a dojo.

There are so many daily decisions that must be made to keep the dojo open let alone deciding what and how to teach class. Each teacher must try and strike a balance between having enough students to pay the bills but at the same time remaining faithful to one's principles and to the teachings of their teachers.

In my experience, I always look towards my own teachers and remember the harsh realities that they had to go through balancing between being a good martial artist with just the usual handful of faithful students and paying all the monthly bills. I know my own teacher constantly worried if he would be able to have enough monthly dues to be able to pay

all the expenses. Using my teachers as an example, I preserve and continue doing what you love because I have learned that this is true success in the martial arts or at least it is the success that I would like to achieve.

When I met my teacher, Furuya Sensei in the 1990's, he often spoke longingly about the past and about how things were done before the modern age of budo. We talked for hours about how little by little the essence of preserving ancient traditions have eroded in favor of making things easier for the student.

Balance



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



Now, 30 years later, I am the one who looks longingly at the time when my teacher spoke to me, taught me and communicated with me face to face. Now with all that technology has to offer in the way of videos, articles, guides, manuals, and other options that there are to learn the Art of Aikido, traditional teaching and training has to sometimes take a back seat.

All the technological advances are obviously necessary in these COVID time as things are changing and are more difficult to be face to face. In this modern world there are more possibilities at our disposal and many more tools are available for us to use in order to teach the martial arts. However, sometimes I have my doubts that most of these conveniences are positive for traditional martial arts.

I believe that now the teachers are changing, and we must end up being more flexible, more accessible, “easier” for the student in order to make the practice more comfortable and have to adapt more to the student’s needs in such things like schedules, work, and family. Is this bad? Well, I suppose that everything depends on each situation, but it is obvious that today there is an incredible possibility of reaching hundreds and even thousands of potential students. This is something that 10 years ago was quite difficult and even inconceivable 20 to 40 years ago. So, on one hand we can be thankful for the evolution of communication, the internet and social media networks. But is more quantity better or is a higher quality student better? We have to ask

ourselves what type of student is the type of student who is interested in videos, reads articles, tweets and watches your classes on Zoom. Well, it is hard to know. People say that I am from the “old school” because I prefer to train, fall, sweat, get up and come back the next day to do the same. However, I do recognize that it is difficult to be a “good” student in this day and age despite being given all the opportunities to be better.

Don’t get me wrong. Things, especially training, should evolve but I do believe that we should not lose the essence of what our teachers left us with as we only desire to be “seen” more and have more followers or likes. In our training and in teaching traditional martial arts we must know where our balance lies. In order to do this, we must be clear about our limits. This is true balance – knowing where the limits are between being faithful to the principles, to Aikido and to the legacy of our teachers but at the same time being able to pay the expenses of keeping the dojo open and available for future generations.

I can only speak for myself, but I would not like to wake up one day and look back and realize that I am at a point very far away from the path where my teacher started me. This is the challenge of every martial artist and teacher. We all must balance living and teaching in this modern technologically advanced world while still staying true to traditional or ancient values. Staying balanced is the opponent that we must face every day. Is it hard? Sure, but not impossible. •



The nature of something dictates its use. Ideally, its form that dictates its function and visa versa. In Japanese swordsmanship, the design of a katana, or Japanese sword, dictates how it is used and therefore its techniques. In training, by using the sword properly we try to discover its nature.

The Japanese sword has its own nature and that nature causes the sword to want to move in a certain and very specific way. When we learn to harmonize with the sword's nature, the sword moves and cuts effectively. On the other hand, when we fight against the sword's nature, the sword moves awkwardly and may even be dangerous to the one wielding the sword.

If used incorrectly or carelessly, the sword will not reveal its maximum cutting ability. In fact, it may bend, or even break. The sword is designed to be used in only a specific way, and its precise nature demands care and precise movement.

Chinese philosopher, Mencius asked this question "When carving the handle of an axe, where do you look?" The answer is "the hand." By studying the hand we can understand the form and shape the axe handle should take. In Eastern thinking, all form has this kind of reasoning and logic behind it.

Like the relationship between the axe handle and the user's hand, the shape of the sword and its function determines how the blade will move or so it can cut effectively. We cannot just "think" we know the sword, we must also train to understand the sword on a physical level as well. This is what we are trying to understand in practice. When we look at a Japanese sword, the way it is designed dictates the most effective way to move the sword so it can operate in the most efficient and correct manner.

In Japanese, there is a phrase, "koto no narikiru" which translates to "become the thing."

In sword practice, we say, "Become one with the sword." What this means is that we intently practice so that our movements become in harmony with the nature of the sword or its "swordness." This harmony allows the sword to "do its thing." Based on the design of the sword, the correct path of the sword cut is already determined. When we cut with the sword, our body must conform to the sword's nature. When we handle the sword incorrectly we prevent the sword from reaching its full potential.

Honesty



by **Ken Watanabe**
Technical Director

This means there is a lot of give and take in swordsmanship. We cannot enforce our will upon the sword. Part of the sword's nature is that it already "knows" how to cut. Therefore, more often than not, we just get in the sword's way!

Yet, as much as we conform to the sword, we cannot surrender to the sword. The sword is not truly alive until it's in our hands. We breathe life into the sword and allow it to become this storied weapon of famed cutting ability. This is why the Japanese sword is so revered in Japanese martial arts.

We think of the sword as a fantastic cutting weapon, Yet we must also take into consideration that the sword does not differentiate between friend and foe. It will cut into your own flesh just as easily as it will cut down your opponent. In order to wield it properly, its nature demands clarity and precision. All of this is part of becoming one with the sword.

Part of our training in swordsmanship is not just how to transform an inanimate object into a fearsome cutting weapon, but a way to hold up a mirror so we can see our reflections and see how it changes with training. This is what practice teaches us – not about how to swing a sword, but eventually how to be completely honest with ourselves. •



Yesterday morning, I was having breakfast at one of my favorite local restaurants and chatting with the waitress and owner. Although I do not go there very often, they know me very well and I always get good service. During our little chit-chat, I was surprised to hear that my waitress has been working there for over 32 years. She wasn't the only one as another waitress had 30 years and another one had 35 years.

I complimented the owner that he was so lucky to have such loyal employees. I think this is why their service is good and reliable. Then the owner joked, "How can they leave me? They do not have any education." He was only making a bad joke and they started to joke back and forth some more and laugh. Still, there was some sad truth to this. It is such a wonderful situation that they can be together for so long but at the same time it was a little sad. Later the waitress confessed to me that her daughter also has little education and was having a difficult time trying to get a good job.

Just by some coincidence, as I was driving home and listening to the news on the radio, they announced new upgraded truancy laws which threatened students who are truant or missing too many classes in school with a penalty of \$100.00 and, in some cases, withholding their grades. Interviewing the students themselves, they were all vehemently complaining how "unfair" it was to be penalized for missing classes. Apparently, many of the students were missing classes because they were having breakfast at a local hamburger hangout.

My first impression was to think that other countries in the world must see this and think we are so silly. Every country in the world understands how important and how precious education is and we run away from it like the plague.

In many countries, young children would give anything for a good education which is just not there because of funds or opportunity. We give everyone the opportunity for great schooling here and it is treated like garbage.

Wasted Opportunity

I see this same lack of awareness in the dojo too. Often, I have to scold my students for missing

classes or have to endure listening to their excuses as to why they cannot attend this and can't make it to class for that. I don't think that they realize the value of their education and some treat learning like dirt as they trample on such a privilege.



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Several years ago, a student announced to me that he had built a new swimming pool in his back yard. When I heard this, I smiled and knew that we will never see this student again and mentioned this to my assistant. He was so surprised that I said that but, sure enough, several weeks later, I received a letter notifying me that he is so busy at work and that he can no longer practice Aikido any longer. Haha! In this country, we have enough time to build swimming pools and such, for pool parties on the weekend but this is more important than our education and learning. Of course, if we treat Aikido and practice as a form of entertainment so who would opt for Aikido over the cool water of a nice swimming pool on a hot day?

So many times, I have heard students tell me, "Oh, I wish I never quit Aikido many years ago." I can only regrettably say, "Yes, I am very sorry too." Training has so much personal value, but sadly most won't stay long enough to see or reap its benefits. Your training or education should not be frivolously wasted. Nothing is more wasteful than regret.

Editor's note: Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on July 15, 2004.

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

Dojo Coronavirus update:

Los Angeles County should be moving into the Yellow Tier and with a bit of luck we are supposed to remove almost all restrictions by June 15th. Until that time, please follow these guidelines:

- 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.

For more information about Mimi Lam's poetry, please contact her at: lamm.mimi79@gmail.com

Aikido Training Schedule

合気道 時間割

Saturdays

10:15-11:15 AM Regular Class
11:30 AM-12:30 PM Regular Class

Sundays

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

Mondays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Tuesdays

No Class

Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Thursdays

No Class

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular 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

Saturdays

7:45-8:45 AM Regular class

Wednesdays

7:45-8:45 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.

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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