

The Aikido Center of Los Angeles



道の為、
世の為、
人の為
合気道

The Aiki Dojo

Direct Affiliation: Aikikai Foundation – Aikido World Headquarters
Los Angeles Sword and Swordsmanship Society Kenshinkai
The Furuya Foundation

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Upcoming Events

- November 4th:**
Dojo Website photo/video shoot
- November 19th:**
Dojo Ceramics sale
- November 22nd:**
No evening classes
- November 23rd:**
Dojo closed for Thanksgiving
- November 24th:**
Special Black Friday Class
Aikido and Atemi
9:30-11:00 AM
- November 25th:**
Intensive seminar
- December 2nd:**
Ito Sensei teaching at
Friendship seminar
- December 2nd:**
Dojo Christmas party

Message From the Teacher by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

Kono aki wa nan de toshiyoru kumo ni tori	This Autumn, How old I am getting: Ah, the clouds, the birds!
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– Matsuo Basho

The month of November usually signals that the end of the year is near. There is a withering which begins this month and with it sometimes comes a sense of anxiety.

In ancient times, the samurai warriors lived their lives in what might be seen as the November of their lives. Each day they were expected to give their lives if the situation warranted it.

The *budo* warriors of the past could have used this as source of unhappiness or anxiety as they awaited their impending demise. Instead, they used it to learn how to live.

It's easy to think that a samurai must be some sort of single-minded robot who was unfazed by death, killing or destruction. This is far from the case. A true warrior of *budo* realizes the

tenuousness of life and instead of letting it bring them down, they use it as a reason to live.

Basho's haiku is a great example of this dualistic thinking. He deftly demonstrates his ability to recognize the melancholy of his situation in life while also being able to enjoy the moment. He cannot stem the tide of the changing of the colors nor the aging of his life. What he can control is what he chooses to focus upon.

A warrior of *budo* also lives this same duality that Basho displays. The sobering aspect of the warrior's life enables them to cherish each moment because they do not know whether or not there will be another.

The fall colors signal a withering which could be a cause of concern. We cannot control nature nor the unfolding of time. We can, however, control how we choose to live. The Way of Aikido teaches us that "All life is precious" including our own. We can either see that the impending doom of the end is near or that the joy of the new year is almost here. The choice is completely up to us.



Thatched Cottage in the Western Mountains by Tang Yin (唐寅, 1470–1524).

No Empty Spaces

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

In a landscape painting empty space often indicates cloud, mist, sky, water or smoke, partly depending on the suggestions that the solid forms supply. Nonetheless, the real mystery of the emptiness is that empty space refers to *qi* (*chi*), a cosmological term which is formless, but bestows life to Chinese painting. Without *qi*, empty space cannot be differentiated from blank space. The first canon of Chinese painting describes its rhythmic vitality, which refers to *qi*, a metaphysical concept of a cosmic power. The original meaning of *qi* is applied to the air we breathe or to all gaseous substances. Since air is essential for us to breathe, *qi* has been considered as the principle of life in painting, and if *qi* is lacking, a painting will appear lifeless. *Qi* comes from an artist's inner self, it is a result of the interaction between the artist and the object. Empty space in a painting is where *qi* dwells or flows. When *qi* is still, a painting appears tranquil; when *qi* moves then a painting is dynamic and full of life.

– Weimin He, *The Mysteries of Empty Space: An Exhibition of 20th Century Chinese Painting*

We can see this understanding of emptiness in empty spaces in a quote by the prolific Japanese swordsman, Miyamoto Musashi in which he said, “Perceive that which cannot be seen with the eye.”

In Japanese traditional arts, this idea of the intangible or seemingly unsubstantial is of huge importance to the art form. To the uninitiated, these empty spaces, gaps, or pauses don't make much sense, or can even be uncomfortable or confusing. To the initiated, these empty spaces, gaps or pauses can be the most meaningful part of the art or performance. In Japanese, an “empty space” is called a *ma* (間) or another way to describe it is as a *mukei* (無形) which translates as “no form.”

In most, it not all, Japanese traditional arts, what cannot be seen or touched constitutes what is the actual art itself. In order to one to be able to perceive these intangibilities, one needs a certain amount

of training to acquire a certain level of mindfulness to recognize the true vastness of the art. In my opinion, this ephemeral quality of “empty spaces” exists in every traditional Japanese art form.

In Kabuki, throughout the performance, there are these pauses or build-ups where the learnt audience member is supposed to yell out and “participate” in the performance. This calling out is called a *kakegoe* (掛け声). Supposedly, the perfectly timed *kakegoe* by the audience members is supposed to heighten the level of the performance and is indicative of the performer's level of ability.

In *shodo* or calligraphy, just as in Chinese paintings, the calligrapher takes care as to how the characters are spaced so as to help create an effect for the word or words being brushed. The slightest slant or dab can help create the perfect feeling when one looks at the calligraphy. For instance, the other day, my calligraphy teacher, Kuni Sensei made the analogy about the kanji for *asa* or “morning” (朝). He said, “Make the character 月 on the right seem slightly bigger as if the husband is kind of taking up all the space from the wife, but don't just make it bigger.”

We can see the idea of an intangible pause in *Iaido* as well. However, it is something which cannot be seen with the eye but is conveyed by one's body movement, spirit and focus. During the *nukitsuke* or horizontal drawing of the sword, the first 1/3 of the sword is drawn out slowly in order to give the opponent the opportunity to retreat or back down and thus de-escalate the altercation. This is not a traditional physical pause, but a pause in intention. The swordsman slows down the movement of drawing the sword just enough so as to convey to the opponent their intention. Done this way, the emptiness fills the gap while the sword is being drawn and thus it becomes a demonstration of the swordsman's level of self-restraint. Anyone can whip out the sword, but only a truly developed human being can give themselves an opportunity to show compassion and give another person mercy.

Continued on page 6 ...

Aikido Kodokai 19th Anniversary Celebration

Patience + Preparation = Success

by Santiago Garcia Almaraz
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai

Last month we celebrated our 19th anniversary.

When I look back at the years, I am reminded of not only all the good times and success, but also all the failures and set-backs. Personally, I have had to deal with a fire, moving and losing many seemingly gifted students. However, focusing on those things is not Aikido. Looking back, I am also reminded of all the good things such as my relationship with my teacher, Rev. Kensho Furuya and how the dojo has allowed me the opportunity to truly learn Aikido. Over the years, it really has taken a lot of work, but I feel compelled to do the work not because I “have to,” but because I want to.

When we find something we want and set a goal towards achieving it, it doesn't just happen. We have to create the situation for it to happen by not only doing the work, but also by preparing to do the work. If we have homework to do or if we want to fix something that is broken, we cannot just go off unprepared and start doing it. If we do, the results will usually be mediocre. To ensure that our work is done properly and is done well, we need to prepare ourselves, our work environment or just spend some time cleaning our desk. This enables us to create the perfect conditions to yield the best results.

In our Aikido practice we should also be equally disciplined with our practice or our “tools.” The tools we need to prepare for proper learning are our minds and our bodies.

We must cultivate the proper mindset or “tools” so that we “can” learn. Also, we must cultivate the fundamental elements or “tools”



of the technique so that we can build a solid base for our movement in order for our Aikido to be executed with the best movement we can do. Preparing ourselves properly enables us to use our “tools” to capture the best result and not just “wing it” and obtain mediocre results.

Many of the students, especially those in their first few years of practice, are surprised that in 99% of classes we always start with *Tenkan Kokyu-Ho* and I sometimes notice the “this again expressions” on their faces. What these beginning students don't realize is that *tenkan* is the tool which is preparing us to be successful in the future. None of us are good at it yet and that is why we have to do it at the beginning of every class. It is the basis of all the techniques and it is like preparing and cleaning our tools before work so that we can not only be successful, but also be fast, effective and have the proper timing. Practicing *tenkan* ensures that everything is ready and that we can be successful.



In our daily practice of Aikido if we do not embrace the principles, if they are not correct and well worked through, if we do not open our minds and stop worrying about quantity and work more towards quality and if we do not have patience and discipline then it will be very difficult to

discover the art of Aikido.

The main thing I have learned over this last 19 years is that we must be patient and trust O'Sensei, Aikido, the dojo, and our teachers and with time we will be successful because we prepared ourselves for success. Thank you all for your support. I appreciate the opportunity to learn as I teach Aikido. I am looking forward to 19 more years!

What Has Changed?

by Ken Watanabe, Iaido Chief Instructor

A French writer once wrote, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." It is easy to think that change is something for other people and that somehow, we don't change. We might meet somebody we haven't seen for years and think, "they got old!" or we might return to our old neighborhood that has remain unchanged over the years and think, "this place is different." It is not that things or other people change, it is that we see them from a different perspective.

When I was young, I used to like those school cafeteria pizzas when I was a kid – the rectangle-shaped ones served in those compartmentalized trays. I am pretty sure if I had one today, I would not feel the same kind of love for them as I felt back in elementary school. The question at hand is, "did the pizza itself change?" Probably not. It's still the same spongy crust topped with a thin layer of sauce and an aroma of low quality cheese.

Many years ago, a student quit the dojo. This person's complaint was that the dojo was not the same as it used to be. Did the dojo change? It's hard to say especially since I am there almost every day. From his point of view the dojo had changed. From my point of view, this student's practice was, of course very irregular and sporadic. They would be gone for weeks at a time, then return to practice for a few days, then disappear again.

I think everyone should try and maintain a healthy balance between life and the dojo. The only problem is that if a student stops practicing regularly, little by little they begin to forget how to do Aikido and they also forget how to conduct themselves properly. It's almost as if they slowly forget how to be a student. Instead of following the correct etiquette and form of practice, the opposite happens; exception upon exception begins to pile up.

Without a teacher's guidance, without being immersed in training, it is very easy for a student to stray off the correct path. Furuya Sensei used to say, "To step off the path even a step takes a million miles to get back." The problem with veering off the correct way even a tiny bit now can, as time passes, cause the correct path and the student's path to begin to divide further and further away from each other until the two are completely irreconcilable.

Yes, it is true that things, including dojos, change. Over time, students join, students improve, students leave, the technique naturally evolves, and practice schedules change. However, during this student's absences, who knows what ideas they picked up, or habits they learned. Ultimately, it was not the dojo's change that upset the student. What this student didn't realize was that the dojo did not change so much as they themselves had changed.

If a student keeps up their practice, the many changes in themselves and in the dojo will appear to happen naturally. As a student progresses, they begin to see Aikido from different points of view, and the way a student practices the technique evolves with their progress, yet the techniques and their basics remain the same.

If we look at a circle, it is perfectly round. When we first see and think of a circle, it doesn't seem very difficult to draw, but if we try drawing this circle freehand, perfectly round without any tools or templates, then it is not easy. This circle is like any skill we are trying to master. In the beginning the results are less than perfectly

circular. Some of our drawings may somewhat resemble a circle in a roundish way, but it is not quite the same as the circle we are trying to copy. There are many ways to make a mistake drawing this perfectly round circle. Yet with practice, drawing a perfect circle, freehand, is possible.

Is it the circle's fault that we cannot draw it perfectly? No. The circle itself is already perfect; any differences between our own drawing and the perfectly round circle are our own fault. Blaming anything other than ourselves is just our ego taking control.

Blaming the dojo, the teachers or the other students is easy. Blaming Aikido is even easier. What is difficult to see are the changes which are occurring in ourselves

when we aren't paying attention. It is the student's ego telling him that the dojo has changed, causing them to think, "I am right, everything else is wrong." Failing to maintain a regular practice schedule will only cause the student to forget about their training and unknowingly allow their ego to take over. This disconnect from both practice and the dojo will only invite discouragement when things don't go the student's way. Keeping the connection is hard enough when one goes to practice regularly. That's why it is important to train regularly.

The world is constantly changing, some changes are good, and other changes are not so good; yet the dojo, and the practice tries to provide a source of stability for the students. In our own training, it is important not to fall prey to the trap set up by our own selves. Keeping this clear-minded objectivity may be the hardest aspect to our training; how not to become obsessed with our own selves and instead view everything around us clearly and unselfishly. Keeping a regular training schedule allows us to maintain the proper perspective so critical in this fast paced and technologically advanced world.



No Benefit Practice

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

I think if our students think, like many people believe, that cleaning is low-class work, then they will refuse to do it. Also, if they think that it is “work with no-pay,” they may not want to do it either. This is a common attitude everywhere these days.

In our logical thinking today we think, “Why do something if there is ‘no benefit?’”

We have always had this same problem in the Zen temple. We have to say to our Zen group, “There is no benefit to Zen meditation. Your wishes are not granted, you will not get a promotion at work, it won’t bring any good luck and no riches, it is not a miracle cure for disease, and all of your problems will not disappear. Zen sitting is only done for the sake of Zen sitting, there is no benefit and there isn’t even enlightenment or a gain of great wisdom in the end.”

Of course, everyone then argues, “If there is no benefit or reward, why do it?” Or, “If I can’t get enlightenment, why do I sit in meditation?”

This is always the most difficult point to understand in our Zen meditation study classes.

Sawaki Roshi often said, “The only reason to sit (in Zen meditation) is because you love to sit. There is no other reason than this.”

We live in a very economic and “rational” world today, of course, we only think of what is “best” for ourselves and this often means, that our efforts should be directed more to benefit ourselves. Speaking of common sense, this makes sense, we have to work to pay for our home, pay the bills, have money for food and on and on. Of course, we work to get paid in order to live. There is nothing wrong with this and this is perfectly natural. This is the real, material world we live in.

There is also another world we live in at the same time and this is what we call the “spiritual world.” We often think that the “spiritual world” means to sit in meditation or under a magical waterfall or talk about the “higher” things in Life, to chit-chat about God or Buddha or even the principles of harmony and the inner most teachings of Aikido. It is easy to talk about the cosmos, Universe and Nature and Life and how to be good and what is wisdom. However, all of this is not the spiritual world at all, I am afraid to say. Even all my talks here is not “spiritual” or a part of the “spiritual world” at all. Just talk!

We are in the spiritual world when we are in a moment of selflessness. At the moment we think and care for others and put them

above ourselves – this is the spiritual world. Even to care and save the life of a little kitten, to help the elderly, to care for the sick, to act without concern or care for one’s own benefit or profit is the spiritual world. Of course, it is most obviously seen in “good acts” for others. “Spiritual practice” is also seen in sweeping the front of the dojo and cleaning the mats and keeping the dojo clean because there is no benefit, no reward, no glory or fame and no money. We do everything for ourselves ultimately, but entering into the spiritual world is to leave this self-centered world we create for ourselves – even for a moment.

Much of Aikido practice, like many traditional arts, have this instilled within the content of practice – cleaning the dojo, bowing to O’Sensei, bowing to our partners, treating each other with kindness,



ness, putting others before ourselves, or just doing something which is not motivated by self-centered ideas. Helping an elderly lady across the street motivated by a feeling of compassion and caring is a spiritual act. Helping a lady across the street because, deep in the back of your mind, we think that she may reward us or give us some money is not a spiritual act; it is an act of our “normal” materialistic world where we do things to survive for ourselves.

Can you see the difference? Do we do something nice for a friend because we expect something in return? Or do we do something for our friend because it is an expression of love and caring?

In the real materialistic world, we practice Aikido so we can become strong, to throw others down so that we can become famous and popular, so that we can make money, get a higher rank and on and on. In this world, it is easy to be disappointed if Aikido does not meet our expectations. In the spiritual world or Aikido as a spiritual practice, we practice Aikido simply because we love to practice Aikido. That is all! As spiritual practice, we are never disappointed and we can continue to practice Aikido through all kinds of obstacles, disappointments and hardships because it is a act of “love” as O’Sensei said and it is not an act for profit and gain.

When I am about to start a new work project, I always first clean my office and clean off my desk – it feels good to start with a “clean slate” when everything is in order. This is why we feel so good after we bathe and put on fresh, clean clothes. It is always a different feeling from when we are dirty and wearing dirty clothes – can you understand this?

Just like the air after the rain when everything feels fresh and clean. It has such a positive effect on our mental state – just as a clean, orderly living space compared to a messy, dirty one.

Continued on page 7...



No Empty Spaces *Continued from page 2...*

In haiku, the poet uses a *kireji* (切れ字) or a “cutting word” at the end of any of the three verses to either indicate an ending of a thought or to elicit a response or feeling. Below is probably one of the most famous haiku poems written by Matsuo Basho and translated by R.H. Blyth. The *kireji*, I think, is at the end of the second sentence because that’s where I feel it. The first sentence builds the scene in my mind, in the second sentence I see the frog jump, but it is in the third that I actually feel it.

Furu ike ya	古池や	The old pond;
kawazu tobikomu	蛙飛びこむ	A frog jumps in –
mizu no oto	水のお	The sound of water.

This idea of pausing can clearly be seen in the earliest stages of a Karate practitioner’s *kata* as well. The series of movements woven together are called *kata* (形). The beginner’s movement, rightly, will have too many stops and starts which is indicative of their level of focus and concentration and their ability to harness their *zanshin* (残心) which usually translates as “remaining mind.” The seasoned practitioner deftly demonstrates their ability to stretch or carry over their energy or *zanshin* from sophisticated movement to sophisticated movement without breaking their concentration despite being attacked by multiple attackers and using powerful physical movements.

In Aikido, we too have these *ma* or empty spaces. I usually refer to them as “pauses” within the technique. The pause usually occurs just after the initial contact with our attacker. The pause is just momentary so that we can regain our calmness and composure. In Japanese, this could be referred to as “*Ki wo torimodosu*” or to “Take back one’s *ki*.”

We are human beings and thus we are not static and neither is our state of mind. No matter who we are or how much training we have, we are constantly re-centering ourselves. In the beginning, the pause in the technique is usually physical or mechanical where the student stops and their energy comes to a rest. As a student progresses, the physical pauses gets shorter and shorter until it

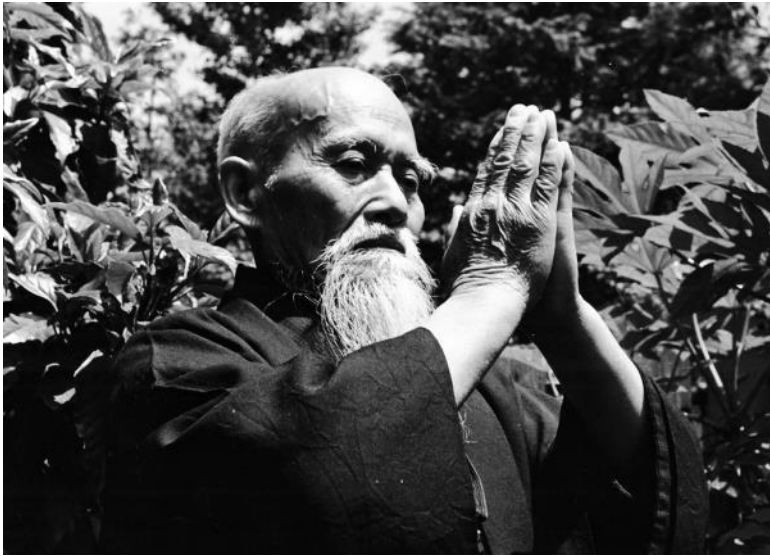
changes over from a physical stop to a mental pause and will be somewhat indistinguishable to the lay observer. When we watch videos of O’Sensei calmly and effortlessly throwing people about, his pause is not perceivable and it just looks like flowing movements. O’Sensei’s movement is overflowing with *ma*, but emptiness not in the way non-Aikido or westerners understand “emptiness.” Weimin He’s qualities of a good Chinese painting can also be used to describe O’Sensei’s movement, “*Qi* comes from an artist’s inner self, it is a result of the interaction between the artist and the object. Empty space in a painting is where *qi* dwells or flows. When *qi* is still, a painting appears tranquil; when *qi* moves then a painting is dynamic and full of life.”

Furuya Sensei wrote:

In Aikido we think about the “out pouring” of our *ki* energy. Most of us think that this is the way to create power in our techniques against the opponent. There is another aspect of this as well in practice. The outpouring of *ki* is much like the strong outpouring of water from a spring. This outpouring also creates “no space” where another energy can enter. It is in this same respect, that we create a strong outpouring of energy that we also create an outpouring in which there is no opening as well.

As humans, we are in a perpetual state of trying to recapture our balance. To take back our *ki* and find balance requires training. Being able retake our *ki* and find our center enables us to fill our lives and our art with mindful energy. This begins with creating a pause in the movement to teach ourselves to be mindful and to learn to regain our composure. This is two-fold in that it allows us to give compassion to our opponent and it also gives us the opportunity to change. The more we train, the more the pause goes from being “empty” to being filled with something which is substantial to only us and thus the space will no longer be empty. Helen Keller said, “The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart.” Our lives are a work of art and despite the “blank spaces” and pauses, it is not meaningless even if it is indiscernible from the outside looking in. As we move into Thanksgiving and the end of 2017, please remember to pause and regain your center and give thanks for your life – it’s a work of art!

No Benefit Practice *continued from page 5...*



protect myself,” we think “I am saving the life of others.”

In the dojo too, when everything is clean and in order, it feels so good to practice there. Part of Japanese custom and in the dojo, when the space is clean and immaculate, the “gods” feel welcome to enter. In the old days, one always could see the *uchi-deshi* sweeping the front of the dojo before practice and they always talk about how they used to have to wake up early in the morning to clean the Aiki Shrine and get everything in order before O’Sensei arrived to do his morning prayers.

There is no benefit to a clean the dojo, but cleaning the dojo makes us feel good and helps us to concentrate on our practice. There is no material benefit, but it is important for our mental state in – I think that ultimately this is a very valuable benefit indeed.

Often, we put Aikido into the same category as other martial arts – Aikido is to protect ourselves, it is self-defense and on and on. Even how we think of Aikido seems to always be about “me, me, me.” In Aikido, as we begin to think of it as a part of our “spiritual training,” we do not think, “How do I

No benefit and no reward type of acts such as sweeping and cleaning the dojo become “selfless” acts which are an important and essential part of our real spiritual training in the practice of Aikido.

Editor’s Note: Sensei originally published this article, in slightly different form, to his Daily Message on January 20, 2006.

Mochitsuki 2017

Come Pound Some Mochi!



West Los Angeles Buddhist Temple

December 9, 2017 (Saturday)
2003 Corinth Avenue
West Los Angeles, CA 90025
(310) 477-7274
<http://westlosangelesbuddhisttemple.org/>

Zenshuji Soto Mission

December 17, 2017 (Sunday)
123 South Hewitt Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Tel 213-624-8658
<http://www.zenshuji.org/>

Orange County Buddhist Church

December 17, 2017 (Sunday)
909 South Dale Avenue
Anaheim, CA 92804
(714) 827-9590
<http://www.ocbuddhist.org/>

Higashi Hongwanji Temple

December 27, 2017 (Wednesday)
505 East Third Street
Los Angeles, CA 90013



The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles

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

Sundays

9:00-10:00 AM Children's Class
10:15-11:15 AM Open

Mondays

6:30-7:30 AM Open
5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals
6:30-7:30 PM Open

Tuesdays

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals
6:30-7:30 PM Open

Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 AM Open
5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals
6:30-7:30 PM Open

Thursdays

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals
6:30-7:30 PM Weapons

Fridays

6:30-7:30 AM Fundamentals
6:30-7:30 PM Open

Saturdays

6:30-8:00 AM Intensive Seminar* †
9:30-10:30 AM Open
10:45-11:45 AM Open

* These classes are not open for visitors to watch.

† Intensive seminar is offered the last Saturday of every month by invitation only.

Iaido TRAINING SCHEDULE

TRADITIONAL JAPANESE IAIDO SWORDSMANSHIP

Saturdays

8:00-9:00 AM Open

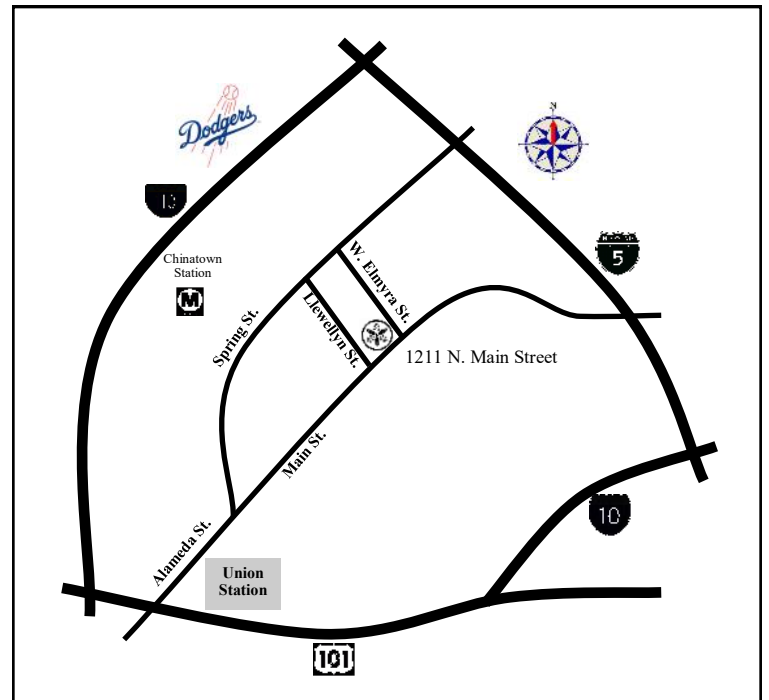
Sundays

7:45-8:45 AM Open

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Weapons

No weekend classes on the last weekend of the month.



The Aikido Center of Los Angeles has been awarded
**Official Hombu Recognition by the
AIKIDO WORLD HEADQUARTERS**

公益財団法人 合気会

Aikikai Foundation – Aikido World Headquarters
17-18 Wakamatsu-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, JAPAN

We are committed to the study and practice of the teachings of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba and his legitimate successors, Kisshomaru Ueshiba and the present Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba.



The Aiki Dojo

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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.

Editor-in-Chief and Publisher: David Ito



Finding Our Dojo



We are located at
1211 N. Main Street

Los Angeles, CA 90012

Telephone: (323) 225-1424

E-mail: info@aikidocenterla.com

We are across the street and one block northwest from
the Chinatown Metro Station.

The entrance is on Elmyra Street.

No appointment necessary to watch classes or join:
*You are welcome to visit us any time during any of our
Open or Fundamentals classes. Please come early.*