



# The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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# Aikido is Collaboration

by Santiago Garcia Almaraz *Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai*

There is a Japanese saw called a *nokogiri* that I use when making a lot of the Japanese architecture around the dojo and my house. It is different than a European saw because it cuts when you pull as opposed to when you push using your body weight. In the beginning, the *nokogiri* was surprisingly hard to use because I tried to cut with it the way I would cut with a traditional saw in which I hold the wood with one hand while I cut with the other. The problem with using the *nokogiri* with the traditional method is that the cut becomes erratic because I am pulling instead of pushing and thus unable to use my body weight or grip strength to steady the wood. Instead I need the help of another person or a vice in order to keep the wood from moving in order to make a steady and precise cut.

Aikido training is surprisingly similar to the use of a *nokogiri*. Aikido, like the saw, is best done with a partner. During training, the student who is performing the technique is the *nage* or *tori* while the student who is “receiving” the technique or taking *ukemi* is referred to as the *uke*. These positions are the same in almost all Japanese martial arts. With this understanding, the practice of Aikido is then a collaborative effort, that is, it is not an art in which only person practices while the other person sits there being passive and is just waiting until it is their turn.

Like the use of the European saw, our natural tendency or our natural instinct is that we first execute the techniques using force or we “force” our partner by pushing or pulling to force them to achieve our purpose, but like with the *nokogiri* the cut ceases to be precise or smooth. Once we learn “how” to use the *nokogiri* properly, that is when we realize it is not based on strength, we then realize how easy it is to use. Aikido is the same way because when we learn to collaborate with our partner then Aikido becomes much easier and our partner becomes much less difficult to control.

In training, the *uke* has to give themselves to the technique and accept their “role” in the movement and do their best to move with the *nage* as they try and match the *nage*’s speed, spacing and timing. The *nage* for their part is trying to do the exact same thing as the *uke* and accept the movement and flow of the technique without collapsing or impeding the movement of *uke* because if the balance of the technique is broken then there is no synchronization, fluidity or flow. The flow of the technique, like precision of the *nokogiri*, is only preserved when both parties seek to help the other or when the one who executes and the one who receives realize the importance of each of their roles.

In training, the first years of Aikido practice are crucial and thus being patient and consistent are the keys to success. The student is patient and diligent just as those who are on the teaching staff. Each knows how difficult it is to learn something new and the difficulty of learning the art itself, while adapting to a series of internal rules or “etiquettes” that are new which sometimes

makes these first years more confusing. Thus, the teacher and the seniors work hard to help the students adapt to the dojo and this “work” of the instructors and seniors is fundamental to the success of the student, explaining the doubts and indicating how to act in each case without being impatient or arrogant. The student for their part returns the hard work of their seniors and teachers by being respectful, diligent and patient.

Eventually, just as when we realize how to use the *nokogiri*, the diligence and patience of the student results in soaking up the way of Aikido and a traditional dojo little by little.



Aikido is a beautiful art that is complex and sophisticated which makes it especially frustrating when learning it in its early stages. When starting anything new, frustration is probably the most common thing we all experience. Unfortunately, most people get frustrated and leave in the first year thinking that Aikido is too difficult for them, or is uncomfortable or unnatural. With some help from the seniors, the beginning students can learn Aikido and begin to enjoy their training as they begin to see that everything is regulated for their benefit; the type of attack, the movement of one’s feet, the spacing, the speed or the placement of the attack or the attacker. Thus, in short nothing is improvised, but arranged so that the student can learn to orient themselves and that is why it is fundamental in Aikido that both parties work in collaboration.

The Japanese *nokogiri* saw is such a simple tool, but I can see how a person not used to it can think it is very complex and think that it somehow does not “work” for them. That is because we cannot impose our will upon it. Aikido is the same way and only when we harmonize with our partners just as we harmonize with the tool will it begin to “work.”

When we start something new, we must have trust in the “art” and work in collaboration with our partners to learn the art. In time, with consistency and patience, our efforts will pay off and our success will come when we have prepared and are ready and not just because we want or will it to. •





## Why Do I train? — *by John Ryu Aikido Shodan*

Since I was a kid, I was always interested in martial arts and regularly practiced one type or another. Growing up as a kid in the 80's, martial arts movies were all the rage and it had a big impact on me. I thought I was familiar with most of the popular styles back then but when I saw Steven Seagal's *Above the Law*, it completely blew me away. That was my first contact with aikido and it floored me. It was so different from anything else mainstream at the time and as portrayed in the movies, it seemed very effective and deadly while looking extremely cool.

Since then, over the years, I have continued to train sporadically in martial arts and even joined an aikido dojo for a bit. But lacking discipline and focus, I dropped out after a couple of months. After maturing a little and experiencing a bit more of life, I made a goal to pursue a black belt in aikido. That is how I joined this dojo and started on my training path.

At first, I was highly motivated and excited about attending class and learning aikido. However, around 3 to 6 months into training, I realized how difficult it was and that just to be able to handle the bare minimum basics would take years of training. That is when my initial excitement and motivation started to go away. I was still very much interested and enjoyed classes but I had to come to terms with the fact that I wouldn't become a grandmaster in a couple of years. Rather, it would take me years and years of practice just to be able to reach the basic level in aikido. This was very hard to take and I believe this realization is the point where many people drop out of aikido training.

Having come to terms with that bad news, and accepting the long-term commitment, I continued to train albeit with less enthusiasm than in the beginning. However, 2 to 3 years into training, I started to grasp the basics of aikido and even man-

aged to execute proper techniques once in a while. I caught my second wind at this point and continued training with a bit more enthusiasm than before. With this newfound enthusiasm, I was becoming better and better in aikido with noticeable improvements day after day. At this point, I was training to get better and took pleasure in improving my aikido.

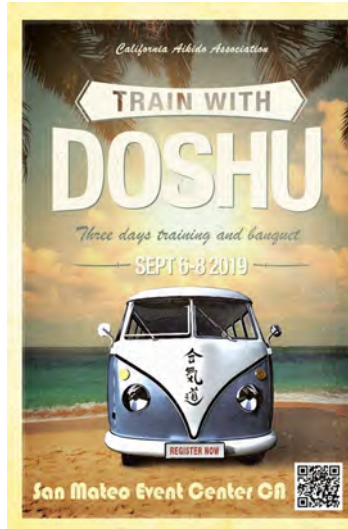
This phase continued until around year 5 or 6 of my training. At that point, Ito sensei spoke to us about a phase in aikido training where it stops becoming pleasurable and turns into work. This is exactly how I felt at that time. Aikido training felt like a burden and I had to mentally fight and come up with excuses just to make it to training. My progress stagnated at this point, I plateaued, and my training hours started dropping. I was also going through many personal issues at this point which further exacerbated this negative mindset.

Luckily I forced myself through this phase, continued training, and broke through my training plateau. My black belt test date was set and this served as the vehicle for the breakthrough as well as motivation to renew my mental state regarding training. Suddenly, aikido became pleasurable again and I think my progress became faster than ever before. Along with progress came satisfaction and with satisfaction came pleasure in training.

At present, I think the main reason I train, besides the obvious reason of reaching black belt, is because I'm getting noticeably better and better at Aikido, and with this progress, I gain a certain satisfaction. Also, with my increased skill level, I am grasping the martial aspect of aikido and gaining deeper insights into what aikido truly is. •



千日の金額より一日の名称名将  
*Sennichi no kingaku yori ichi nichi no meisho*  
 One day with a great teacher is better than a 1000 days of meticulous study.



## Unity in Aikido

by David Ito Aikido Chief Instructor

Last month I attended Sandai Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba's seminar sponsored by the California Aikido Association. There were roughly 700-800 Aikidoists practicing at any given time. It was crowded but in a very harmonious way and everyone had such a joyous sense of friendship. Doshu deftly demonstrated Aikido and emphasized the basics or *kihon waza* movements of Aikido and explained the relationship between the movements of Aikido and *kokyū*. I learned a tremendous amount about Aikido, but also about the true spirit of Aikido.

It was wonderful to see Doshu's powerful Aikido and be in his presence, but the greatest thing was seeing the group unity at this event. The underlying spirit of Aikido is one of care and concern for others. I am sure putting on an event of this size was no easy feat and I am in awe at how well it all went. I was also very much impressed with the staff and their diligence and dedication to hosting this enjoyable event.

In Kisshomaru Ueshiba, Nidai Doshu's book *Aikido*, he wrote:

The Founder expounded, "The world is to be governed by man. It is the universe of man. If you shut your eyes, you see nothing. If you leave out your ego and your self desire, the whole universe will be yours. Aiki is such an assimilation of spiritual and bodily ways." It is the supreme state of Aikido





to be one with the spirit of the universe. For this reason it is called the *budo* of unification and oneness.

With this passage we see how this concept of unity or oneness, as O'Sensei describes it, underlies Aikido. So, I was happy to see so many Aikidoists and Aikido organizations training together and supporting each other. This unity is what is referred to as *amae* (甘え) in Japanese culture. *Amae* roughly translates as "to depend on others." As a family we depend on our parents, but we also depend on our siblings and relatives for support. Our success as a group is predicated on something called *shudan ishiki* or "group thinking" where each person as an individual thinks of the others in their group and with the same mindset towards mutual success and group harmony. It is similar to family dynamics within one family, when one child may look like the mother and another may look like the father while another child may look like mixture of both the parents. These similarities aren't good or bad but just the way of nature, but in the end each family member comes together to support each other for the benefit of the family.

Martial arts can sometimes be erroneously thought of as a singular pursuit. After all, we sweat and bleed all alone and it is easy to think that we also attain mastery all alone. However, if not for the kindness, generosity or compassion of another, let alone the

uke who sacrifices their body for us, it wouldn't be possible to attain this mastery.

Today, more than ever, we need unity in Aikido and it was nice to see this unity on the mat at Doshu's seminar. I hope that we can all take Doshu's teachings and combine them with O'Sensei's teaching of oneness and keep our family together so that students can benefit from this great art for generations to come. *Aikido* by Kisshomaru Ueshiba quotes O'Sensei as saying, "Aiki is the expression of Truth itself. It is the way of calling people together and reconciling them with love whenever they may attack us."



When Aikido is successful, we are successful. When Aikido fails, we all fail. Unity enables all of us to thrive and also preserve Aikido for future.

In order to do this we need to follow Doshu's teachings and acknowledge our similarities while embracing our differences like a family.

The true power of Aikido is not in how well it can destroy another. The true power of Aikido is how it can bring together people and create a sense of harmony, especially where there might not be accord usually. Harmony is humanity in action, love is the true expression of harmony and unity is the way of Aikido. I am so happy to have had the opportunity to train with Doshu and I very much enjoyed meeting and training with so many different people. •



## The Care of Kamae

by Ken Watanabe *laido* Chief Instructor

Sometimes in life we just have to take a stance. Usually this means we care enough to have an opinion about something, whether it is how we like our steaks cooked or whether to use plastic straws or not.

In martial arts, the stance or *kamae* (構え), is one of the first basic movements taught to a beginner. *Kamae* translates to mean “stance” or “posture.” However, *kamae* isn’t just striking a pose or standing fiercely in a particularly *budo* type manner. *Kamae* not only means how we place our feet and how we stand with good posture, but it also means how we maintain our mental stance. It is from a proper *kamae* that we can effectively attack our opponent while simultaneously defending ourselves in the most efficient and powerful manner possible.

For example, in swordsmanship, the first stance we are taught is *chudan no kamae* or middle stance. It’s the typical swordsmanship stance we see all the time where the practitioner holds their sword so it is pointed directly towards their opponent. When we stand in *chudan no kamae*, physically, we train to stand in such a way that we are protected or that there are no openings called *suki* (隙), yet we can also attack in an instant. This means that our whole body is balanced, poised, and ready. Likewise, mentally we try to concentrate strongly yet have a mindset that is free enough to react instantly and appropriately.

In Aikido we are always practicing moving from one Aikido stance to another Aikido stance. Even when it appears as if we are moving freely, we are still moving from stance to stance. If the structure breaks down while we are moving, we might push or pull too much against our opponent giving them an opening to attack us. Likewise, when we finish an Aikido technique we must show *zanshin* (残心) or the “continuing mind.” If our stance isn’t correct, it means that somewhere in the technique we have made a mistake. The technique is much like a math problem. When we make a mistake somewhere in our calculations then that mistake shows up in the end resulting in us getting the wrong answer.

When we examine the root Chinese character, or kanji, for *kamae* (構) we can see that the character *kama* has both a physical and mental translation. Outwardly or physically *kama* can mean “base, framework, or structure” but it can also inwardly mean “readiness.” Also, as a homonym the word *kama* means “to care.” Likewise, *kamawanai* translates as, “I do not care,” *kamawan* means, “do not worry,” while *kamawanu* means “we don’t mind.” Then, there is also *okamainaku* which means “please don’t make a fuss.” On one of our *noren* curtains we have *kamawanu* on it which is supposed to mean, “we don’t care if you enter or not, we don’t care if you challenge us or not, but regardless take care of your manners.”

Ultimately, the very basis of *kamae* is to care. The word *kamae*, therefore, means that we are being mindful of not only our bodies, but of our minds as well. When we move without taking care, the technique’s framework breaks down creating an opening for our opponent to attack us. Thus, when we assume our *kamae*, we must remember that it is both mental and physical. In the beginning, we practice to perfect the physical, outward appearance of our *kamae* because the physical posture is supposed to be a reflection of our mental posture.

This mental posture is the same reason why we clean the dojo before and after practice, we are showing our *kamae* or our mental stance. When we wipe the mats, dust the shelves or sweep the floors we are not cleaning it like a housekeeper; we clean like a martial artist. We do it efficiently, with energy, and in a way that it becomes truly clean. When this *kamae* becomes part of us, everything we do, we do like a martial artist and we become the art itself.

When we practice this physical “stance,” we are also practicing the mental stance. Both become one and the same. When the mind is right then the body will naturally become correct; when the body is correct, the mind will become right. Students should always practice with this idea of *kamae* in mind. •



## Learning the Old Way by Rev. Kensho Furuya

The younger generation of priests today are all very well educated in universities and incredibly smart and sharp, good at business and golf and really know what they want in life and how to get it. I don't seem to have too much in common with them! I have had only a few teachers and consider myself a novice in terms of being a student let alone being a teacher. I think if my own

Zen teacher, Bishop Kenko Yamashita, who was quite typical of the old generation, being a young, accomplished teacher himself during the times of O'Sensei of Aikido, Nakayama Hakudo Sensei of Iaido and Sawaki Kodo Roshi of Soto Zen. The Bishop still carried that flavor of the older generation which is now regrettably gone.

Both Rinzai and Soto priests do not vary so much in their general teaching methods I believe. Generally, we seek out certain priests because of their particular understanding, area of expertise, or experience or lineage. Generally, we learn by two methods. We must learn all of the ways, manners and protocols of the community of priests that we are in, whether it be a temple or monastery. At the same time, we maintain a more personal, private relationship with the one teacher we are assigned to or that we seek out for their wisdom. One cannot complete their training without understanding both aspects of training. By understanding the general community, we become more qualified for more personal teaching. Receiving more personal instruction, a junior priest gains more responsibilities in guiding the general community. Both ways are needed to complete a priest's training. Throughout a young priest's career, they may usually have about three priests to guide them through various stages of their training. Some priests, like myself, only have one teacher. I think a person's first teacher leaves the greatest impression on their life.

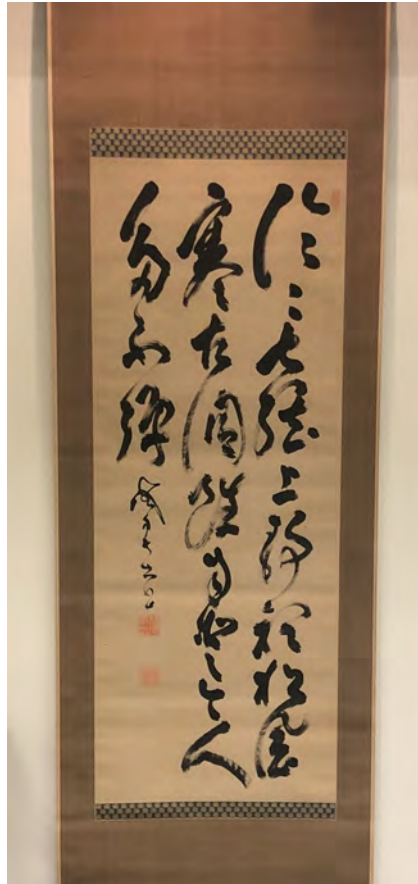
In the community of priests, the rules and manners are strictly observed and unchanging. Within the private relationship with one's teacher, all methods are used to teach them.

Bishop Yamashita taught by the old way of "non" teaching. He never really taught – but, at the same time, I learned so much from him. I just followed him around wherever he went, did his chores, kept his room clean, drove him here and there and did errands for him. I washed his car and kept gas in it so he would not have to do it himself. I cooked for him and tried to take care of him. That is all! I always served tea and cakes to his numerous guests and was always in attendance and I was there when he wrote letters and articles. I stayed around in my office next to his, when he napped or was tired, so somebody would be there if he needed anything. I did not do much more than this.

I learned by observing the Bishop and his manners. I learned by watching how he dealt with people. I learned when he gave sermons and when conducting various ceremonies and serving in

various functions.

I saw many people come and ask the Bishop questions, but he never really answered them and they all went away confused or disappointed. Most, it seems, didn't really want to learn anything from him. They just wanted to hear a word or two to make themselves feel good about themselves. He never did this! He told me, "If I am too nice, they will all come! So I only show them that I am in a bad mood!" And then he would laugh and I would laugh too.



When we were both totally alone, he would start talking over tea and ramble on and on. I always took notes on everything. Inside his chit-chats, there were always these great lessons. But we had to look for it, his teachings never came clear-cut, wrapped-up nicely and delivered to our doorstep. We could only learn something from him, if we really, really wanted to learn something. Otherwise, in a Zen sense, there was never anything there at all!

People who wanted to learn would go all over and pick up things here and there and come to the Bishop and ask him about this and that and he would simply turn them away. I realized that like most teachers, he wanted a student who is really committed to learning from him, not someone who is picking up bits and pieces here and there like a stamp or coin collector.

The other day, I received a scroll which typifies my feelings about students today that was written by Yamaoka Tesshu, a famous samurai from the Itto Shoden Muto-ryu school of swordsmanship who lived in the late 1880s at the end of the Edo period.

The pure, rich tones of the *koto*,  
The quiet sound of a cool breeze in the pines.  
We love to listen to the old tunes  
But few today can play the melody.

It is very different today in Aikido, where we encourage students to run all over the place and learn from as many teachers as possible. This is a popular method in Aikido and I can see many advantages! This I think follows the more American attitude of "more is better"! The old ways are very hard as we can see and they require a great deal more time and patience.

I like the old ways. I learned something very human and profound from my teacher. I talk to the younger priests occasionally, but sometimes I don't get the same feeling. Some seem to have all the answers and are really smart but something somehow seems to be missing. •

**Editor's note:** *Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on August 26, 2003.*

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## 行事

<b>October 26</b> (Saturday) Intensive seminar	<b>December 7</b> (Saturday) Dojo Christmas Party
<b>October 27</b> (Sunday) Children's class Halloween party	Osoji Year-end clean-up
<b>November 27-28</b> Dojo Closed: Thanksgiving	<b>December 28</b> (Saturday) Last Intensive Seminar
<b>November 29</b> (Friday) Special Black Friday Class	December Osame Keiko – Last practice of the year
<b>November 30</b> (Saturday) Intensive seminar	

The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles (ACLA) admit students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, 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

<b>Saturdays</b> 6:30-8:00 AM* 9:30-10:30 AM 10:45-11:45 AM	Intensive Advanced Class Regular Class	<b>Wednesdays</b> 6:30-7:30 AM 5:15-6:15 PM 6:30-7:30 PM	Morning Practice Fundamentals Regular Class
<b>Sundays</b> 9:00-10:00 AM 10:15-11:15 AM 11:30 AM-12:30 PM 12:45-1:45 PM	Children's Class Regular Class Fundamentals Open Practice	<b>Thursdays</b> 6:30-7:30 PM 7:45-8:45 PM	Regular Class Open Practice
<b>Mondays</b> 6:30-7:30 AM 6:30-7:30 PM	Morning Practice Regular Class	<b>Fridays</b> 6:30-7:30 AM 6:30-7:30 PM	Morning Practice Fundamentals
<b>Tuesdays</b> 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

<b>Saturdays</b> 8:00-9:00 AM	Regular Class	<b>Sundays</b> 7:45-8:45 AM	Regular Class
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# The Aiki Dojo

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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, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, the present Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba and Hombu Dojo-Cho Mitsuteru Ueshiba.

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Aikido  
Salamanca Aikikai  
Kodokai 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.

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