



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Fall Forward!



The goal of Aikido training is to become invincible. To be invincible means “to become too powerful to be defeated or overcome.” To become invincible, most of us think that it has to do with beating a lot of opponents or hardening our bodies beyond human limits. However, true invincibility does not come from without and can only be achieved from within.

Becoming invincible can be a convoluted process. Most of us think that the process of becoming invincible has to do with one’s physical development and competing to defeat all of our opponents. One way to say “invincible” in Japanese is *joushou* (常勝). The kanji definitions for *jou* (常) and *shou* (勝) mean “ever” and “victorious.” This definition lends itself to this idea that to be invincible, one needs to compete and defeat others. So, working with this theory we steel our bodies and set about in the direction of defeating all comers.

This was my journey for the better part of two decades. Then something happened along the way - I got defeated. When I was around 27 years old, I met up with a Shihan from Hombu Dojo who was not only physically stronger than me, but also technically stronger. As I competed with him, I was completely overwhelmed by his physical strength and technical ability. Getting “defeated” by him pretty much negated my quest for invincibility because by definition there was someone out there who could defeat me.

Invincible



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

Sometime after I read a quote from O’Sensei that brought everything into perspective. O’Sensei said, “As soon as you concern yourself with the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ of your fellows, you create an opening in your heart for maliciousness to enter. Testing, competing with, and criticizing others weakens and defeats you.”

O’Sensei’s assertion completely turned my understanding of invincibility upside down. Disheartened, I searched for something deeper and more fulfilling than merely just being able to beat other people up.

Later on, I read another quote by O’Sensei which helped to shape my understanding of the Way of Aikido and becoming invincible. O’Sensei said, “The Art of Peace begins with you. Work on yourself and your appointed task in the Art of Peace. Everyone has a spirit that can be refined, a body that can be trained in some manner, a suitable path to follow. You are here to realize your inner divinity and manifest your innate enlightenment. Foster peace in your own life and then apply the Art to all that you encounter.”

Another way to say “invincible” in Japanese was *kakkofudou* (確固不動). Interestingly, *kakkofudou* also means “unshakeable” or “unwavering.” Understanding this definition and pondering O’Sensei’s assertion, I realized that invincibility has nothing to do with what happens outside and is solely concerned with how developed we are within.

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V
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+ Información

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Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung said, “Knowing your own darkness is the best method for dealing with the darkneses of other people.” Jung’s words lead us to understand O’Sensei’s philosophy of *ma-sakatsu agatsu* (正勝吾勝) or that “true victory is the victory over the self.”

Therefore, to become invincible does not happen by defeating others, but by knowing and dealing with our own darkness and defeating ourselves. To defeat ourselves is no easy task and takes a huge leap in philosophical thought.

Miyamoto Musashi said, “There is nothing outside of yourself that can ever enable you to get better, stronger, richer, quicker, or smarter. Everything is within. Everything exists. Seek nothing outside of yourself.” What Miyamoto Musashi could be alluding to is *mushin* in Buddhism and solipsism in Epistemology.

Mushin (無心) or “no mind” in Buddhism is a mental state where one is devoid of holding on to conscious thought. Weirdly, to be *mushin* is to be consciously unconscious. We are supposedly consciously aware that we are acting mindlessly and unconsciously. However, at the same time, we are trying to move that consciousness awareness to an unconscious state to where we are mindful but not reactive.

In solipsism, the “other” doesn’t exist because we’re not sure if anything other than ourselves exists. If only “I” exist, then the other is an illusion that my mind conjures up. Then it’s my mind which is tricking or distracting me. If only I exist then I am distracting myself or, in a Budo sense, I’m confronting myself.

In the spring of 1925, O’Sensei and a naval officer got into a disagreement and the naval officer challenged O’Sensei to a duel with *bokkens* or “wooden swords.” With every spirited cut or thrust by the naval officer, O’Sensei was able to deftly dodge each blow. Finally, after several attempts, the officer gave up. Directly afterwards, O’Sensei went out into the garden to rest. During his rest, O’Sensei said, “I felt the universe suddenly quake, and that a golden spirit sprang up from the ground, veiled my body, and changed my body into a golden one. At the same time my body became light. I was able to understand the whispering of the birds, and was clearly aware of the mind of God, the creator of the universe. At that moment I was enlightened: the source of Budo is God’s love – the spirit of loving protection for all beings ... Budo is not the felling of an opponent by force; nor is it a tool to lead the world to destruction with arms. True Budo is to accept the spirit of the universe, keep the peace of the world, correctly produce, protect and cultivate all beings in nature.”

Many consider O’Sensei invincible. From his words after the altercation with the naval officer O’Sensei didn’t lament about his ability to defeat the officer. One can assert that Morihei Ueshiba became O’Sensei at this point because he realized the true nature of the universe – humanity and the need for non-violence. O’Sensei didn’t become invincible because he could defeat others. Rather, O’Sensei became invincible because he no longer needed to defeat others.

Musashi said, “Seek nothing outside of yourself.” O’Sensei advocated that “the true victory is the victory over the self.” Understanding these two great martial artists’ words, to be truly invincible is really to be able to defeat ourselves and thus true invincibility only exists within. •



To understand Aikido as an “art of peace,” it’s important to practice good Aikido, and by good Aikido, I mean this: it must be practiced as a martial art. All of Aikido’s movements must be done from the standpoint of attack and defense. Without understanding Aikido as a martial art, its understanding will always be superficial.

It’s important to practice Aikido correctly to understand it. Although Aikido’s movements appear soft, circular, and defensive, Aikido also has movements that contain strong, linear, and attacking components. This is because the timing, spacing, posture, and movement in Aikido are derived from sword and spear techniques.

In essence, the spirit of almost every movement in Aikido is weapons work, either cutting with a sword or thrusting with a spear, sword, or dagger. The original idea in the Aikido movement is that of attacking. For example, whenever we step to throw or pin, it is cutting or thrusting. When we move to negotiate an attack, we always move with the spirit of cutting or thrusting. Every step or slide in our footwork represents this idea of “attacking.”

If we think of Aikido’s timing, it is the same as the timing in Japanese swordsmanship. Both opponents attack at the same time. Ideally, at the moment of contact, the one with more skill is the one who will survive. When we think of Aikido’s footwork, its timing, its spacing, its posture, its power issuing, its exten-

sion, and its connection, it is all based on weapons technique.

From this idea of swordsmanship’s razor-sharp movement, precise spacing, and close-shaven timing - a high level of skill - Aikido technique is born.

Even in our big, soft, and circular hand movements, we use *kokyu-dosa* to neutralize our opponent’s strength, break their balance, and control their

movements to align with our own movement. Our hand-blade always moves in the spirit of a strike or to control our opponent’s centerline.

When we practice Aikido, we begin by thinking of it as defense or that “I have to protect myself.” Obviously, I can’t and don’t want to get hit. However, with only a defensive mindset, negotiating our opponent’s attack would be impossible because our timing, reaction, and movement would always be off.

Without knowing how to attack effectively, we would also never understand what it feels like to handle a real attack. To defend correctly it is important to know how to attack correctly. When we know how to attack correctly, we can see what’s required to defend against it, but as our understanding of Aikido deepens, we begin to see no difference between attack and defense.

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Good Aikido



by Ken Watanabe
Shihan



Good Aikido *continued from page 4...*

In the beginning, when we start training, we see the roles of *uke* and *nage* as opposites, attacker versus defender. Them versus us. Winners and losers. We see one student attack and is thrown or pinned, while the other student practices throwing and pinning. Then after four tries they switch roles. In this mentality, one wins and one loses.

An important point in Aikido training is that the footwork is the same whether we are in the role of the attacker, the *uke*, or the defender, the *nage*. If the footwork in our *ukemi* is effective, then our footwork when we throw, or pin will be effective.

People often ask Aikido students, “How do you know who wins?” In the practice, both students win. Both students win because they are getting the benefit of the training, whether they are the one attacking or the one defending. Whether a student is the *uke* or the *nage*, they are practicing how to move their feet, they are practicing how to keep the connection with the other student, they are practicing how to follow each other’s movements, and they are practicing how to negotiate power.

In the case of the *nage*, or the defender, they are learning how to neutralize the attacker’s strength as they practice breaking *uke*’s balance and establishing a good position. From this position, they are protected and able to deliver the Aikido technique – essentially, turn the tables and begin their own attack with a throw or a pin.

As *nage*, they practice how to align with their opponent’s movement (and later their energy) and practice leading it by bringing their attacker’s movement (later, also their energy) into their own movement and energy.

In the case of the *uke*, or attacker, they are practicing the same exact things the *nage* practices. *Ukemi* is developing strong footwork so they can attack effectively, but once their attack and

balance are neutralized, they learn how to defend themselves against the Aikido technique. They develop their footwork so their timing, their spacing, and their connection allow them to position themselves to be protected when thrown or pinned.

In essence, both *uke* and *nage* learn to move correctly in order to protect themselves from their opponent’s power.

When we practice Aikido as a martial art, it doesn’t mean to only go hard and fast, and be rough with our partner. There is a place for that kind of practice. It means to create a condition from where we can understand what it means to attack and be attacked. It means that we need to see where we are protected and where we are open to attack. It means learning to negotiate our opponent’s strength and move with it whether we are being attacked by the *uke* or being thrown by the *nage*.

As the training develops our footwork, posture, balance, timing, strength, and conditioning, we also have to develop how we see the training. Correct training will teach us that attack and defense are two sides of the same coin. In the practice of a single technique both the *uke* and the *nage* are going back and forth between offense and defense whether they know it or not.

Aikido is kind of like a soft martial art with a hard interior, but both soft parts and the razor-sharp parts must be developed in a balanced way.

It is perfectly fine to have an easy, friendly practice to develop our movement and technique, but it is important to remember that Aikido is, first and foremost, a martial art. Because martial art techniques have to be focused and precise, the correct technique and the correct practice will create the correct mindset.

It is impossible to understand what Aikido is trying to teach us if we practice it only with empty, dance-like movements. This is why Aikido’s idea of “non-fighting” can be best understood by practicing Aikido as a martial art.♦

Recently, I watched an interesting documentary on Netflix called *Live to 100: Secrets of the Blue Zones*. This documentary tells us that taking care of our bodies is not just a matter of one thing, but the result of multiple factors. It is about how our daily habits influence the quality of our lives. When we think about healthy habits, fundamentally we think about having a balanced diet and regular exercise, but the ingredients in the recipe for longevity are more complex. Taking care of our body is not just a matter of doing one thing, it is the result of multiple factors. Focusing on eating well is essential, yes, but if we sit all day, healthy eating will only partially help our bodies to be healthy.

Our habits, together with our environment and behaviors, directly impact our longevity. In each chapter of the documentary, the presenter travels to different parts of the world that he calls “blue zones.” In these blue zones there is a high percentage of inhabitants who live to be over 100 years old. The term “blue zones” was first coined by National Geographic explorer and journalist, Dan Buettner. He would analyze demographic data and draw a blue circle around any area that had numerous centenarians that displayed nine specific lifestyle habits. Those nine habits, which became the “Power 9” are: move naturally, have purpose, de-stress, only eat to 80% full, eat a plant-based diet, drink wine, have faith, put your family first, and socialize. For me, the most important factor was having a life purpose.

Watching this documentary as a practitioner and teacher of Aikido, I could not help but see that there were some parallels between various aspects of this documentary and the benefits of Aikido training. To become good or competent at Aikido we must develop all the aspects of the physical practice. Taking good *ukemi* is just as important as throwing. In the study and practice of Aikido, however, being physically competent is only part of the path. Being skillful is not just being strong or fast - it is also being smart and kind. While knowing how to execute the techniques is important, what is equally important is everything that happens before and after the throw. Like the recipe for longevity, in Aikido we cannot just focus on a single ingredient or rely solely on the technical aspect or philosophical aspects of Aikido to get good. Aikido is more than just techniques or philosophy - it is a way of life. What truly separates us from the mediocre is extending our mindfulness to what happens before and after class. Thus, like the blue zones, what defines us as experts are the other factors surrounding our practice. As aikidoists, we need to have a strong social connection, we need to move, and we need to have faith in Aikido and O’Sensei. We also need to have a sense of purpose –

not to mention we should drink wine and eat healthily.

A few of the nine factors like socialization, family, and faith are built into Aikido as an integral part of belonging to a dojo. If we accept that the environment is fundamental for growth, then the group, our relationships, and our way of practicing is as important or more important than knowing how to throw someone down. A good dojo environment is a community where collaboration, respect and humility are important factors to be learned.



One of the interesting factors was this idea of faith. Many of the centenarians that were interviewed belonged to some faith-based community. From an Aikido standpoint, we also have to develop the “mental” work of Aikido. I am not talking about rote memorization. I am talking about studying, going deeper, and advancing our art. Understanding Aikido on a deeper level, more than what happens on the

tatami, is a huge factor contributing to our growth, not only as martial artists but as human

beings as well. Remember, O’Sensei said, “Everyone has a spirit that can be refined, a body that can be trained in some manner, a suitable path to follow. You are here to realize your inner divinity and manifest your innate enlightenment.”

In the end, our work is daily, and our improvements are personal, but what we do and who we are directly

impacts the dojo. So, on a certain level, our improvement is a group improvement. In other words, if you improve, you make your

environment better and vice versa. The dojo is a living thing and like all living things it needs to be taken care of just like our bodies. Being a good dojo member by volunteering and participating in dojo activities, events, and cleanings might not directly impact your Aikido training, but it benefits everyone and the dojo as a whole, which ends up benefiting you.

In the blue zones, health and longevity are a lifestyle, not just one thing. Aikido is no different. We have to focus on technique, attitude, environment and mental development because everything in Aikido counts. It’s okay to dedicate time to the techniques that we like or that work well for us, but we must also think about how to make Aikido a lifestyle. O’Sensei said, “Everyone has a spirit that can be refined, a body that can be trained in some manner, a suitable path to follow.” Thus, Aikido is a practice, and a practice is something that we have to do every day, not just when we come to the dojo. •

Not One Thing



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



Oddly enough, it has been my experience that teachers who are not necessarily eager to teach their students last longer than teachers who are much too enthusiastic about their duties. Of course, students always assume that teachers are most committed to teaching but in actuality it is not really so, they normally guide the student in a friendly but quite detached sort of way. . . the real teaching never seems to get off its feet here.

In olden times, teachers used to say, “I don’t teach you, you must steal the art from me!” In Japanese, “the practice of stealing the technique” is known as *nusumi keiko* (盗み稽古). Obviously, this is a metaphor which creates a dynamic relationship of the student who is trying to “catch” their teacher. Today, I see a lot of “feel good” and “fuzzy” happenings going on, but rarely do I see the teacher and student get down to the nitty-gritty. I don’t mean here that they are into rivaling or competing with each other. I mean that they are really beginning to communicate from heart to heart in the most profound way – at a place where real understanding takes place. To “communicate heart to heart” is called *ishin denshin* (以心伝心).

The first duty in olden times for the student was for them to become a good student. The learning comes as a secondary process. To become a good student does not mean to “brown-nose” the teacher or become a “slave” to their whims. To become a

Teachers & Students



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

good student means to be a model of what a good student should be, conscientious about attendance, practicing hard, applying themselves, being helpful and courteous in the dojo and getting along with others. Most students forget this first step because they think learning is the primary focus. It is through this courtesy and respect that the student gradually gains the confidence and trust of the teacher. It is a pleasure for the teacher to instruct a student who is willing and able to practice well, and listen intently to instruction and be sincere of heart.

In the old days, a student studies under a teacher because they respect them. As much as they may respect the teacher it is also important for the student to earn the teacher’s respect as well. Today, in modern “factory” or “mass-produced” type of dojos, respect is really not all that necessary.

Please keep in mind that being a good student is a matter of heart and spirit, not physical strength or any particular ability. Although physical skill is what we are cultivating at the beginning levels, it is not the only thing nor is it the most important thing. The main goal of a student’s development is to develop a caring heart. •

Editor’s note: *Furuya Sensei posted this article in a slightly different format on his Daily Message on May 19, 2008.*

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

Dojo Coronavirus update:

Currently, the City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles has lifted the face mask mandate for all persons vaccinated or not. Anyone who still wants to wear a face covering in class is welcome to do so. There is also no vaccination requirement to attend classes.

IMPORTANT DATES

October 4th: Special class with Didier Boyet Shihan

October 9-20: Spain 25th anniversary seminar

October 28th: Intensives Seminar

November 22-24: Dojo Closed – Thanksgiving

December 2nd: Dojo Christmas party

December 17th: Mochitsuki at Zenshujji

December 30th: Last practice of the year

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.

Aikido Training Schedule

合気道 時間割

Saturdays

10:15-11:15 AM Advanced
11:30 AM-12:30 PM Theory

Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular
8:30-9:30 PM Fundamentals @Budokan

Sundays

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

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

Mondays

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

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Tuesdays

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

NOTE: Visitors are welcome to observe our Fundamentals, or Regular Classes.

Iaido Training Schedule

居合道 時間割

Saturdays

9:00-10:00 AM Regular Class

Tuesdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class

Thursdays

7:45-8:45 PM 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.

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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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