



# The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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## Training Yourself in Aikido



For anything to truly last, all that is required is for people to be diligent.

Years ago, there was a TV show on the National Geographic channel called Fight Science. The show focused on a specific martial art or technique and would analyze it from a sports science perspective. Furuya Sensei was invited to appear in one of the episodes so that they could analyze Aikido. When we got down to the studio, the director and the kinesiologists watched Sensei demonstrate *shomenuchi iriminage tenkan*. The director and the scientists discussed things like foot pressure, reaction time, and whether or not Aikido was fake. At one point, I heard the director say, “We are watching it and it’s not fake and he is somehow making it work but I don’t quite know how we can explain it.” After a lot of discussion, they determined that they had no idea how to measure Aikido or explain it scientifically. We ended up filming a few different techniques but none of it ever ended up being used on the TV show.

Long ago, the ancient Romans used a special form of concrete in their buildings called *opus caementicium* which is more commonly known as Roman Concrete. Roman Concrete is remarkable because it grows stronger over time and many of their ancient structures have lasted over 2500 years. Compare that to modern day concrete which typically only lasts 50 years. In 30 BC, Roman engineer Marcus Vitruvius wrote that the recipe for structural concrete was a mixture of volcanic ash, lime, volcanic rock and sea-

water. When scientists analyzed the concrete, they found that the seawater had mixed with the volcanic ash and dissolved causing a chemical reaction which created the new minerals aluminum *tobermorite* and *phillipsite*. These new binding minerals would grow and make the concrete stronger over time. The entire transformation and strengthening process takes centuries so the process still isn’t entirely clear. Despite knowing the ingredients and most of the creation process, modern scientists still haven’t been able to reproduce a modern version of the Roman Concrete.

## Be Diligent



by David Ito  
Aikido Chief Instructor

Knowing something is not the same thing as understanding something. Knowing is static and it refers to accumulating discrete facts like the pieces of a puzzle. Understanding is dynamic where we are making sense of facts and see how those pieces fit together in context to form a big picture.

We know a lot about Roman Concrete, but we still don’t know how to fit those pieces together. Vitruvius’ books and notes tell us the ingredients but since we cannot recreate the concrete it is obvious that there are a lot of crucial details that were inadvertently left out. Nobody knows truly how much or how little of each ingredient was added nor do they know the precise order to mix the ingredients. Was there a specific batch size that was optimal? Could the time of day or seasonal climate be crucial elements for its creation? Perhaps there was a specific mixing container which everyone of that time used that had a specific mate-





rial which changed the chemical composition of one or all of the components? Some of these little things which at the time were “normal” use or knowledge could have been left out not in error but because they were just so obvious to the people of that time that nobody thought it important enough to mention. Scientists know what Roman Concrete looks like, they know the ingredients, and they can analyze the concrete down to a molecular level, but they still don’t know how to make it.

Likewise, we know a lot about Aikido, but that information doesn’t help us to understand Aikido because it doesn’t tell us the whole story. We have a lot of videos of O’Sensei doing Aikido, but we can’t learn Aikido by watching two dimensional videos. We also have firsthand accounts of his ability and techniques. However, supposedly, O’Sensei spoke an archaic dialect of Japanese and many of his direct students like Chiba Sensei said that they had trouble understanding him. So, even native speakers might find themselves lost in translation when trying to understand O’Sensei let alone trying to explain his teachings to others. Also, many of O’Sensei’s students have also written and spoken extensively about him and his Aikido but how accurate are these personal accounts? Personal stories are subjective and influenced by the observer so how does knowing these stories help us to understand O’Sensei or Aikido?

Like Roman Concrete, Aikido has been studied from many different angles, so we know what Aikido is supposed to look like, what the philosophical structure is and what the technical elements are, but that information doesn’t enable us to recreate

O’Sensei’s Aikido.

This comes back to the difference between knowing Aikido and understanding it. To truly understand requires diligence, that it will only be revealed in the experience of doing Aikido. Most of the facts about Roman Concrete have been discovered so recreating it only requires diligence and patience. With time and effort, the secret will be revealed to the person who follows Vitruvius’ recipe, puts the time in and, most of all, who is patient. Learning, discovering and preserving O’Sensei’s Aikido follows the same path.

In 100 or 1000 years, will Roman Concrete and O’Sensei’s teaching be lost? Maybe. Like Roman Concrete, scientists know what the end product looks like, they know the ingredients, they can analyze the concrete down to a molecular level, but they still don’t know how to make it.

The solution comes down to diligence. The laborers long ago assumed that the people in the next generation would be diligent and so they took for granted some of the details or perhaps didn’t teach it strictly enough so that all the details would not be overlooked. Maybe they were diligent for the first couple of hundred years but since we cannot recreate Roman Concrete today, we know that somewhere down the line someone was not diligent enough or in some way took the process for granted. I suppose that all it takes is for one person to not be diligent to cause everyone else after them to lose their way.

Each year since O’Sensei’s passing we too run the risk of losing our way. That hasn’t happened yet, but it could happen sooner or later. All it would take is for one generation to take it for granted to change the course of Aikido and cause everyone behind them to lose their way. We have a lot of facts, video and writings to support our training, but we can’t learn Aikido by analyzing Aikido with a computer or microscope. The process for learning Aikido is quite simple. All we have to do is train diligently so that all of O’Sensei’s secrets will be revealed, and in that process, Aikido will be preserved for the next generation. •

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 2 minute aikido technique



Traditional martial arts training does not just help us to get strong and teach us how to defend ourselves. If I took anything from my own training experience, what martial arts gives us is much more valuable than being stronger than other people or being able to throw them down whenever we want. What traditional martial arts grants the student is that it teaches the student how to learn.

Traditional martial arts training seems very old fashioned: do what I say, don't ask questions, and practice, practice, practice. In this environment, we are taught to focus. We need to be able to focus because we are mentally and physically bombarded with challenges, and we might get so preoccupied and distracted that we may even forget which way is left and which way is right. If we allow our minds to think, we might think of how horrible we're doing or how difficult the techniques might seem and then lose what it is we are trying to learn.

One of the precepts of the martial arts and warfare is to bring order to chaos. When our opponent attacks, we must take that attack and control it. We also must try to understand it and make some kind of meaning out of it. Controlling the situation or attack is like setting up bowling pins to be knocked down. They fall in the way we want because we set them up to fall that way. In the case of training, when we have all this information coming at us in class, part of our training is to learn how to take all this chaos and bring order to it. When I was taking my *shodan* exam, I had to deal with demonstrating a half dozen techniques from every standard attack. My initial thought was, "How am I going to remember all of that?" With training, I had to take all

the techniques and find their similarities as well as differences and put them into a logical structure. I had to figure out how a particular basic movement was shared among many different seemingly unrelated techniques. Finding the similarities between twenty separate techniques enabled me to turn them into maybe two or three techniques which meant that I had a

## How to Learn



by Ken Watanabe  
Technical Director

lot less to worry about. In a sense, I had to find a way to take all this information and simplify it so instead of trying to juggle ten techniques and their separate ideas, I only needed to worry about one thing.

Another precept of martial arts and warfare is this: be at the correct place at the correct time doing the appropriate action. When we hear this, we think to ourselves, "That's just common sense!" Although these precepts are simple, they are very profound, and very hard to make a reality.

My teacher used to tell us "Only copy my good habits!" As a student, how do we know what is good and what is bad? We know what we like. We know what we believe is "cool" or "awesome".

Many times the answer is not in front of us. We have to search to find it. Traditionally, the teacher wouldn't necessarily hand out the instruction on a silver platter or in a Ted Talk. Furuya Sensei used to admonish us and say, "You have to steal the teachings from me!" *Nusumi keiko* (盗み稽古) means "to steal the technique" and refers to learning without being directly taught.





Part of our training is in figuring out what is necessary to steal. We have to ask ourselves, “What do I steal? What should I keep?” This “theft” of the technique, in and of itself, requires patience, experience, and knowledge. An expert thief doesn’t break into a safe to steal the costume jewelry! A good student won’t copy and remember the flash and the trash.

In practice, there is a right time to do something and there is a wrong time. In learning there is a right time to think of something and there is a wrong time. We learn the right timing through the repetition of training, and through our teacher’s instruction and corrections. At some point, we gradually begin to see the practice differently. Hopefully, what used to be important to us like speed, power, or winning will lose their appeal.

In our desire to get good, we grow impatient and settle for the easy solution. Our teachers can only tell us so much before we have to put in the work to gain the experience to understand what they are saying. They can only point us in the right direction and be a stepping stone to our progress. As much as they can influence us, they cannot make us good. That comes from within us.

Like an opponent attacking us, when we learn something new, we must see it clearly, for what it is, not what we wish it would be. If we cannot see it clearly, how can we hope to bring any order to it when we are in disarray? In training and in trying to learn the art, we use all of our energy, desire, wits, cleverness, experience, knowledge, and resources available to us. Some of us have talent. Some of us have experience. Some of us might know a thing or two. Sometimes this helps us, but other times this hinders our progress because we believe we already know.

Ultimately, what traditional training does is it teaches us how to practice something. When we figure out how to get good at something as sophisticated as traditional martial arts, we can apply that method to learning anything.

In traditional training, practice is not just an end to a means. Yes, through practicing something we get good at it and it makes us stronger. However, when we practice, we are also learning how to practice, and once we crack the code of how to practice correctly, we are capable of learning anything. •

In a 2017 NHK video, they stated that 1,000,000 people practice Aikido worldwide in over 130 different countries. That means that roughly 0.013% of the world's population in 52% of the countries practices Aikido. Compare that to soccer, the world's most popular sport, where 3.27% of the world's population plays it or Karate in which 2.61% practice it. Therefore, 250 times more people play soccer and 200 times more people practice Karate than train in Aikido. These statistics are daunting, but what that tells me is that Aikido is not for everyone.

I think that as time passes as a practitioner and teacher of Aikido, Iaido and Karate, I have come to accept that the martial arts are not for everyone, no matter how much today people think it is so. The reality is that very few new students survive after the first few months. Thus, not just Aikido but all *budo* requires a special type of person.

When compared to other pursuits like soccer or working out, far fewer people are practicing Aikido. Perhaps it is the accessibility which causes far less people to do Aikido. After all, you can do soccer anywhere a ball can be kicked or workout anywhere there is space.

The fact of the matter is that there is a high attrition rate in all traditional martial arts, and I think it is even more so in Aikido. What makes one person quit and another person stay? Well, clearly each person has their own reasons and motives for staying or going but from my experience it is not the risk of injury, the physical difficulty or even for economic reasons. I think what it comes down to most is discipline because discipline is the essence and the basis of every martial art.

Therefore, the person who succeeds, in not just Aikido but any martial art, is a person who learns discipline or is already a disciplined type of person. In the first years of one's practice, one's attendance is very important, and students have to be constant and consistent with their training. New students must also assimilate to the rules and etiquette of the dojo. In order to maintain a regular attendance and also follow the rules of a dojo, one needs to be disciplined.

This discipline also applies to teachers and instructors. When I speak of discipline to my instructors, I am not speaking about only being strict with their technique or attendance but a discipline that is deeper and more meaningful. True discipline is something that very few people have, because it means leading a

different life, leading a life by example to not just one's students but also to one's friends, neighbors, partners, or employees. In



my case, I recognize that the most difficult thing for a teacher to do is to maintain the correct attitude of respect and to demonstrate the values that I want my students to have. As a teacher, I realize that how one acts represents who they really are as a person and that representation is not only about me but about representing my dojo, family, friends, teacher and art. True discipline is the point where instructors differ from teachers or those who call themselves a sensei. This discipline is more difficult and is harder to maintain especially in today's "anything goes" culture.

When I was a student, I was lucky because I was a student of Furuya Sensei who was a very strict teacher. More than just mere technique, discipline was one of the many things I learned from him. I also learned that technique and discipline are intimately linked. One's technique can't be good if their discipline is bad, and an undisciplined person will never get good.

I am sure it is no secret that *budo* is not for everyone, but it is for a special person. That special person is someone who has what a samurai

would call *meiyo* (名誉) or "honor." A person of honor is one who understands discipline.

Being honorable means having discipline to do what it takes to attain something and that our actions are our own. We may be solely responsible for our actions, but they don't only affect us, so our actions matter a great deal.

*Budo* may be only for that special person, but that person isn't really all that special. What makes that person special is that they have decided to travel this path and realize how important discipline is. True discipline needs to be accompanied by a higher level of virtues and values. Discipline is needed to adhere to those values, and it is in those virtues where we find our growth as human beings and as martial artists.

The world today doesn't want special people, but only a special person will succeed in the martial arts. It is difficult in the modern world to live the way we live and to be disciplined to follow the Way. Lots of times, the modern world will see us as being strange but this Way of *budo* is the path that we have chosen to travel upon. Martial arts aren't for everyone but the person who chooses it is truly a special person. •

## Budo is Not For Everyone



by **Santiago Garcia Almaraz**  
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodo kai



**Editor's comment:** From time to time, Furuya Sensei would answer questions from the internet. In reprinting these interactions, we hope that people will gain something which helps them in their training.

**Question:** "What do you know now about yourself through Aikido now, versus what you knew, say ten or twenty years ago? Has your Aikido changed since then and if so, how?" – Michael C.

**Sensei's Reply:** Yes, it is kind of a personal question, but I don't mind, it is only difficult to answer because it is very personal. One thing I noticed is that I have gotten older age-wise. Spiritually, I feel that I should have progressed much more. As much as I have studied over the years, I realize that there are only a few basic principles which are really important and guide my life and these are simple rules which I

have known from very early on. As you grow with the teachings and they become more and more a part of you, they take on greater meaning and have more impact on your Life. I see people today who think that "more is better" and who worship "variety," but if they don't get too lost, hopefully they will eventually find that what is important in their lives has always been right in front of them. People should focus on what they know and understand at this very moment. As I have mentioned before, I am trying to understand "What is goodness?" The answer is easy on an intellectual level, but to fully realize it in our lives and master this, is truly hard!

How to teach my students and guide them correctly is another big problem for me which I always deliberate upon. Sorry, no answers yet so I rely heavily on the teachings of the great masters that came before me – I feel like I cannot go wrong in this way. I also want my students to understand the teachings of the great masters before they are completely forgotten or tossed out. As Confucius said, "I am a transmitter, not an innovator." I try to follow this precept.

I see that people today don't respect the past or their art as much anymore. Rather than learn what the great teachers have done and said, they are more into forming their own opinions and calling this "truth." I worry about the wisdom of such a practice. To me, it is just idle and superficial self-indulgence and I fear it will eventually lead to their downfall. I see this in so many people today!

In today's society, we have lost our "humanity" and have replaced this with the almighty dollar! This is no good. We, as humans, are moving more towards materialism, not spirituality or



the wisdom of the heart. This, I fear, can only be disastrous.

As for myself, over the last 20 years, I feel that I have lost a lot of ambition but at the same time a lot of ego too. I only long for a quiet, peaceful life and to continue teaching my students. I only want to guide them and instruct them in the best way possible so they will realize all of the possibilities and truths which Aikido

## Knowledge and Experience

can open up for them. I would like to see them become humane and compassionate people with good hearts. I think

true strength comes from this, not technique, strength, money, or political power.



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

I would like to see the world become a better place to live in for everyone, not just the privileged few. There is too much suffering in the world today and many of us are living with everything we would want and more than we could possibly need. It seems so unfair

I realize the world is changing. I suppose that everything has its season. The only thing that I regret not having is a family and children, but I chose this life as a teacher and priest. My heroes have always been priests and warriors who have devoted their lives to martial arts. After all these years, I still hold on to this lineage.

If there was anything to change – I would wish for a great deal of money! Haha! Only because I know just where it needs to go – food for starving children, more hospitals and doctors to care for the ill, and more schools and good teachers for our children.

Nowadays, my only desire is to see my students do well and continue training and a much bigger, state of the art TV – just joking. All-in-all, I am very blessed and thankful for much which I probably don't deserve, so for this, I must always be humble. This is how I feel these days. •

**Editor's note:** Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on September 18, 2003.

# UPCOMING EVENTS

行事 .....

**Dojo Coronavirus update:**  
The dojo is now fully open for indoors training with contact.

- Your temperature will be checked upon entry.
- People with showing symptoms will not be allowed to train.
- Currently, LA County is requiring that all people vaccinated or not must wear a mask indoors.

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 .....

<b>Saturdays</b>		<b>Wednesdays</b>	
10:15-11:15 AM	Regular Class	6:30-7:30 PM	Regular Class
11:30 AM-12:30 PM	Regular Class		
<b>Sundays</b>		<b>Thursdays</b>	No Class
9:00-10:00 AM	Children's Class		
10:15-11:15 AM	Regular Class		
11:30 AM-12:30 PM	Regular Class		
<b>Mondays</b>		<b>Fridays</b>	
6:30-7:30 PM	Regular Class	6:30-7:30 PM	Regular Class
<b>Tuesdays</b>	No 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>		<b>Wednesdays</b>	
8:00-9:00 AM	Regular Class	7:45-8:45	Regular Class
<b>Saturdays</b>			
7:45-8:45 AM	Regular class		



## The Aiki Dojo

is the Official publication of the

**Aikido Center of Los Angeles**

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17-18 Wakamatsu-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, JAPAN

Contact: 03-3203-9236 | aikido@aikikai.or.jp | www.aikikai.or.jp

**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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**The Aikido Center of Los Angeles**

羅府合気道学院古屋道場

1211 N. Main Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012

(323) 225-1424 | aikidocenterla@gmail.com | aikidocenterla.com

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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