



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Rise Above

“Be grateful even for hardship, setbacks, and bad people. Dealing with such obstacles is an essential part of training in the Art of Peace.”—Morihei Ueshiba

The coronavirus pandemic has created a unique situation that is impacting all martial artists similarly regardless of style, border or nationality. The adversity of the pandemic is a gift which is revealing our true character or lack thereof.

Regardless of the art, all warriors or martial artists follow a Way or *do* (道). The Way is a set of principles which guide every aspect of the warrior’s life. The author Nitobe Inazo outlined the Way as Eight Virtues: Righteousness (*Gi* 義), Courage (*Yu* 勇), Benevolence (*Jin* 仁), Respect (*Rei* 礼), Honor (*Meiyo* 名誉), Honesty (*Makoto* 誠), Loyalty (*Chugi* 忠実) Self-control (*Jisei* 自制). However, on paper and on our lips, these are just words because without action they are meaningless.

Following a Way necessitates that the warrior be a righteous person. Righteousness are the rules which govern our actions, and it is something that we cultivate through martial arts training. Every *budo* has *kata* (型) or “predetermined forms.” These “models” are the rules which govern our movements but they also hide within them mental and spiritual teachings. So, in a sense, *budo* training shapes the person that we are, inside and out. Righteousness doesn’t begin and end at the door of the dojo. It is in everything we practice at the dojo from cleaning and bow-

ing to the techniques we use to defend ourselves with and eventually these practices become part of everything that we do. Practicing righteousness enables us to improve the quality of our daily lives. Also, we are only able to follow the virtues of *budo* because we are righteous.



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

The famous Zen quote, “fall down seven, get up eight” typifies the courageousness of a warrior. Typically, a person has to be brave in order to even start a martial art. Courage is put into practice many times a day in class when our partners attack us. With every technique and each block, punch or throw, we are learning to stand our ground in the face of adversity. In the beginning it can be hard to keep going especially when things get hard or are overwhelming, but the warrior inside us says, “Be brave and do it again.” It takes courage to keep going when adversity rears its ugly head.

The greatest strength a warrior can have is to be benevolent. It doesn’t require any training to hurt or kill another – anyone can do it. That is why in the martial arts, they say, “true *budo* does not kill” or “shinmu fusatsu” (真武不殺). *Budo* training is about developing the strength of character to be kind. The more one trains, the gentler we become because we realize the fragility of life and lethality of the art we wield. It takes a tremendous amount of inner strength to not give in to the desires of our egos. True inner strength is not demonstrated in what we can do, but in what we choose not to do. There is a famous Japanese proverb which illustrates the strength of benevolence, “Nasake ni hamukau yaiba nashi” (情けに刃向かう刃なし) or “There is no sword which can oppose kindness.” Anyone can kill but only a select

King and Queen

by Mimi Lam

Thank you to my parents for crossing the ocean
 For I have an ocean of words to express my gratitude
 But I can only give a handful
 I've cried oceans knowing you couldn't understand
 Sometimes you feel an ocean away
 But you tend my garden with your nose kisses and I grow
 Your treacherous journey brought me life
 How can I pay you back
 When you provided the warm embrace of a home
 Erased any traces of poverty and turned me into a warrior?
 Who is there left to face when you volunteered to be on the frontlines
 And I am left to take the crown?
 I kneel before your bravery and kindness
 Wishing to be half as honorable



few can choose to be kind.

There is a saying in *budo*, “Everything begins and ends with respect” (礼に始まり礼に終わる) or “rei ni hajimari rei ni owaru.” Conventionally speaking, most think this about bowing as a gesture of respect towards one’s opponent and that is ostensibly true. However, the respect that we are actually cultivating when we bow is not only for our opponent, but for ourselves as well. The only true way to have respect for others is to have respect for ourselves. Thus, in training, we learn to move with dignity and grace which comes with having self-respect. That is why the Japanese say, “*Yaiba ni tsuyoki mono wa rei ni suguru*” or “The best warrior surpasses all others in decorum.” To act with respect is to have self-respect.

A warrior is a person of honor. Having true honor is when our inner person matches our outer person. Some might call this integrity. Many of us say, but fewer actually do. For me, honor should be the last virtue because it is the virtue which ensures all others. There is no righteousness, courage, benevolence, honesty, loyalty or discipline without honor.

It goes without saying that all warriors are honest, but a warrior’s honesty goes further than just telling the truth. Honesty is about intention. Do we live a life similar to the Five Precepts of Buddhism of not killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying or intoxication? Our actions speak to our character. Thus, in training, honesty is really about the intention of our actions. When we are having a bad day, we refrain from taking it out on others. When we are up against adversity and act this way, we aren’t aware of ourselves and thus we are not acting with an honest intention.

The best warriors aren’t always the most loyal. The movements of *budo* can be learned by anyone and so anyone can pretend to be or say that they are loyal. It is easy to do when others are look-

ing, but the truest test of loyalty is when there is nothing to gain and when no one is looking. True loyalty reveals our true character and our real motivation.

The hallmark virtue of all warriors is self-control. All of these other virtues are just concepts which require self-discipline to carry out. Perhaps that is why self-control is the last virtue. True *budo* is about change, but not just physical change. The change that we all seek in training is the realization of the self. Concepts are just words, but they are brought to life with diligence and practice over time creating a change or self-realization. To follow the way of *budo* is hard and requires constant and consistent work. That is why in *budo* they say, “Living is hard, dying is easy.” In class, we learn the discipline to have self-control. Without discipline, words are just words. With discipline words help to guide our actions and help us reach our goals.

Adversity tempers the sword of our character. The pandemic is a test which reveals our true character. American author James Lane Allen said, “Adversity doesn’t build character, it reveals it.” The coronavirus forces us to look inward and ask the hard question, “Am I truly living the way of *budo*?” Regardless of the answer it reveals where we truly are and where the work needs to be done, physically, mentally and spiritually.

Warriors create their own destiny. The pandemic can either make us or break us. Regardless of the outcome it reveals who we truly are. An often used theme in Zen and the tea ceremony is *nichi nichi kore konichi* (日々是好日) which is intended to mean, “every day is a good day,” but it can also mean to “Live meaningfully.” We cannot control what happens to us, but we are in control of who we choose to be and what we choose to do. A warrior rises above and does their best and leaves the rest to fate. We are warriors and people of true character; let the pandemic make you, don’t let it break you. •



Be Ready!

If the coronavirus teaches us anything, it is that we must be prepared at all times. Before the coronavirus, there were times when things were very difficult. Sometimes, I had no students and I felt that teaching the way Furuya Sensei taught me was going to be impossible. Even before the pandemic, there were times when I thought I would have to close my dojo because of fires, the stress from changing locations or when I had no students to teach. Today, things again seem dire and I sometimes wish for the difficulties of the past which seem much easier when I look at them now with fresh eyes.



by Santiago Garcia Almaraz
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai

Before the coronavirus and all its difficulties, I thought that all I had to do was focus on teaching what my teacher taught me and do my best to preserve what I had learned for future generations. When I think about Sensei and all the other teachers who have been teaching classes for years, I think about their difficulties and how difficult it must have been for them to make the decision to teach. I am sure that it must not have been easy, and their journey must have been very difficult as they sacrificed and endured many setbacks and obstacles.

For me, in the face of all the setbacks and difficulties that the coronavirus has brought, I think that these times are about affirmation. Questions like, "What type of teacher do I want to be?" or "How do I want to teach?" seem to arise and help me to gain clarity so that I can better deal with the pandemic and all of its setbacks. These questions help me to ultimately become the teacher I want to be. When our teachers impart us with the responsibility of being a teacher, we must realize that it also won't be easy and that it will take a great amount of courage and sacrifice. Today's pandemic reaffirms that for me.

When we all start out as teachers, it is easy to be enthusiastic and full of optimism because we have no idea what the path ahead entails. We all have the desire to do our best, but the day-to-day wear and tear can erode our enthusiasm and replace it with pessimism. These hardships will test our conviction and purpose. To help us on our journey, it helps if we spend time thinking about our role and what it is that we want. This reaffirming process helps us to persevere and not quit when things get hard.

Editor's note: *Ito Sensei reviewed the first book in The Sword That Saves series in our December 2016 issue.*

I have just finished reading the second installment in *The Sword That Saves* series by Ambrose Merrell. Much like the first book, I am completely blown away at how well the book is written and researched. Most times, sequels aren't very good, but this second book in the series is an exception. The only superlative that came to mind when I finished the book was, "wow." Here is the description from the back cover which gives a brief summary about the story:

After the traumatic loss of his parents, fifteen-year-old Sam vows to battle his anger and protect his little sisters. But with all three siblings fostered out across Vancouver, he fears he'll never reunite his family. When a mysterious martial arts master offers to help, Sam surprisingly gets his loved ones back before they're thrown through time...

Plunged into feudal Japan, Sam discovers he must train night and day to defend powerful scrolls from an ancient evil. But learning to control his swirl of emotions won't be enough to defeat Darkness. Sam's sisters must also harness their special abilities before the powerful evil consumes the world.

Can the three siblings embrace their powers in time to prevent the end of humanity?

The synopsis is general and it doesn't do the story any justice.

I believe that one's purpose for teaching has to come from a greater source other than "what I want" or "what is easiest for me." Sensei used to often say, "O'Sensei did all the work for us." What he meant was that we don't need to reinvent Aikido, but rather just follow the teachings that O'Sensei set forth. That is why I believe that my comfort or desires are irrelevant. O'Sensei and my teacher have spent years learning and practicing this art so that they could impart it upon me and thus it is my job to pass it on to future generations.

The interesting thing about teaching is that one has to accept that students will leave and that there will be good times and bad times. If we only look for the good times, we will suffer and possibly quit when things become dire or desperate. When things were hard, I always remembered Sensei saying, "this dojo was built on many failures" and his words brought me solace and encouragement.

With the pandemic, we have to practice in a modified way and in some instances, things are completely on hold and some dojos



*"We lose ourselves in books.
We find ourselves there too."
— Anonymous*



When I think about it, most great novels don't come with summaries. Summaries are for throwaway paperbacks that one might buy at the airport. This book and the one preceding it are far from throwaway paperbacks. These books are the kind you buy for other people not intending them to be gifts.

My admiration continues for author Ambrose Merrell. His story has so much depth that I can't fathom how he was able to write this book. Despite these books being written for a young adult audience, they have so many layers that are well thought out and researched. Within this one book, there are samurai stories, interpersonal relationships, young people coming of age, metaphysics and a fight between good and evil to name just a few. I make it sound pretty general, but I don't have the writing skills to succinctly explain the story and its elements without ruining it for you. All I can tell you is that there were several times while reading this book when I shook my head thinking, "He just explained a metaphysical concept in a kid's book that took me 50 years to understand!" The only thing I can think of is that this book was written divinely and that Ambrose just channeled my deceased teacher who happens to be the inspiration for the teacher in this book.

There was one line in the Amazon description that pretty much sums up for me how I feel about this book: "Warning: this is no ordinary story. It could change your life forever." If a book is good enough, we lose ourselves in the story. If the book is great enough, we find ourselves as well. *The Sword That Saves: The King of the Tengu* is a great book. • — David Ito

have had to close. The social distancing, financial hardship and lack of student retention have created complicated situations for all martial arts schools and dojos.

I understand that without students it is difficult to transmit or teach "something" but even without students we must still be prepared. Figuring out the best way to teach during the coronavirus has its ups and downs but even if there are no students on the mat, we must continue to practice, learn, study and grow. We aren't able to foresee when things will change or get better. We all hope for new students to knock on the door and, who knows, maybe that person who calls is the next instructor of the dojo. All we can do is be ready to do our best.

Whether the times are good or bad is not up to us nor is it in our control. What is in our control is our ability to work hard and teach the best way that we can regardless of the students, viruses or conditions. Therefore, the only thing that we can do is maintain a composed mind and a strong body and be ready to do the best that we can. •

From our very first day in class, we all have questions. Yet in traditional training, asking questions is discouraged.

The simple reason is that once we begin talking, our bodies stop moving and practicing stops. In the beginning, Aikido basic techniques are best learned with our bodies. It's not efficient enough or beneficial to understand Aikido only with our heads. The Aikido knowledge we have rattling around in our brains can only come alive within the techniques when we move.

Yes, it is important to follow your teacher's instructions properly, but being a good student is more than just being obedient or compliant. It is also important to be a little skeptical. Having a question guides our focus and it means that we are thinking more deeply about the technique. Thus, having questions when training is normal. A question means you are thinking and trying to understand and learn. However, the dojo is not like meeting at Starbucks to debate serious topics all afternoon. A dojo is a place where we move our bodies, work hard, get uncomfortable, persevere and learn Aikido with our whole bodies.

There is nothing wrong with having a question. As a beginner, it's tempting to go for the easy way out and ask a question. However, it's also important to remember that in the martial arts, asking our teacher a question is like attacking our opponent where our words create an opening which can be exploited. It's also said that asking the teacher a question is like jumping onto the back of a tiger. Yes, the teacher might know the answer, but they will not spoon feed you like a momma bird feeds her chicks.

Although it's said that "There are no bad questions," there are some questions that don't need to be asked because sometimes we ask just to hear ourselves talk. Many years ago while driving Furuya Sensei and a senior student back from dinner, the student asked, "How do you defend against attacks on the street?" Sensei answered, "Just practice the basics more!" I could tell the student was not satisfied with that answer, because at the time, it did not answer the question for me either. It wasn't until years later, while keeping that answer in my memory, that I saw the value in that answer. The route to mastery is training and mastering the basics of timing, spacing, posture, connection, extension of *ki*, and blending, to name a few. Sensei's answer was supposed to mean that after we have mastered those basics, then we practice them at an advanced level. It is no different than a beginner and an expert playing the scales on a piano, but the expert's playing will sound completely different.

Asking a question like that student asked is like asking your teacher, "What would you do if you won the lottery?" Any answer

would just be speculations and playing around with fantasies. It might be fun to daydream about things like that, but it has no real place in training.

Sensei used to say, "Before asking a question, try to find the answer for yourself through practice." A teacher never answers a

student's question directly because they want the student to try and answer their own question through their own practice. There is an old Chinese proverb which illustrates this point: "Tell me, I'll forget. Show me, I'll remember. Involve me, I'll understand."

In my own experience, following Sensei's instructions was always easy. However, my brain could understand the words being said to me, but somehow my body could not. Although I never had that "I know better" attitude, I still had many questions about the whats and the whys of Aikido. There always seemed to be so many aspects to practice that did not make any sense to me. Intellectually, I knew the basic techniques were important because Sensei taught them in almost every class and we practiced them until we were sick of doing them. In my head I knew that with correct practice, I would be able to catch on, but realistically I felt

like I would never catch on.

Of course, after 30-plus years of training and teaching, I now see the only way I could have understood these teachings was to both practice the movements as well as reflect on them. With time and patience, eventually I was able to answer my own questions.

Students are supposed to follow diligently but still question. With time and diligence, the proper question will arise. In time, the answer will be revealed. A student who constantly questions is no better than a student who only follows. I had to learn how to be able to follow instructions, yet I also had to be able to spend time training wondering why and how. Following and questioning are a balance that we must strike while training. Finding this balance might be one of the more elusive parts of practice, reconciling the benefit of both of those two sides.

Questioning to understand and understanding through practice. Martial arts training, Aikido training in particular, fosters a sense of teamwork and harmony, but it is also designed to instill independence. Teachers don't want to hear questions that aren't well thought or worked out and they especially don't want them asked at the wrong time. Teachers want to hear the questions that come out of our bodies during training. It helps them to see where the student is at. But they also want to see if we can answer them on our own too. •



Asking Questions



by Ken Watanabe
Technical Director



It is such a funny world we live in. On the news, I heard that they are close to cloning a baby human girl and calling her Eve. Quite an achievement as far as modern science is concerned. On the same news program, it also reported that “obese” people are suing fast food chains, such as McDonalds, as a cause of their problem. They compared themselves to those who smoked too many cigarettes and became ill. In another segment, scientists have also developed a new device to keep us awake while we are driving.

We advance ourselves in science and we are proud of ourselves, yet we still do not know how to feed ourselves or even stay awake when we drive by ourselves!

We are so smart; we always look for the easiest way out! I see this same desire for convenience all the time in the martial arts. So, I think that martial arts are at an all-time low. Of course, most of us think that we are at an all-time high because everyone, referring to martial arts teachers and businessmen, are making so much money. I am speaking about the art itself, not what people have done to turn it into a commercial for-profit enterprise.

What is the easiest way to do Aikido or Iaido? This is what everyone is thinking! No. To dig a hole with a shovel, you need a shovel and a lot of elbow grease! There is no other way to get around it, but today we are very smart. If I ask, “what is the easiest way to dig a hole with a shovel?” Most will answer, “It is easier to pay money and hire someone else to do it!” Or, “Decide you don’t need a hole.” Or, “Steal someone else’s hole!” How can we say that we are smart? We cannot even feed ourselves properly or even stay awake when driving down the freeway at 65 miles per hour!

One day, someone called me and said, “No matter what, I want to study Aikido more than anything in the world! But, my wife needs my attention, my job is too busy, I live too far away, I don’t have enough money, I go to school and have no time, and I have three other hobbies. So, I don’t know when I can come to the Dojo, and on and on and on!” I said, “Well, you have more reasons for not doing Aikido, than you do for doing it, go away!”

We all have busy schedules and those who want to practice will

Culture Crash



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

make the time and opportunity to practice. Those who do not, will find any reason not to. It has always been this way as long as I can remember. I have many diligent students who are decidedly the busiest people in the world, yet make time to come to practice regularly.

People today look at Aikido and immediately try to find the “easy” way out! Too bad they were not around 30 years ago! How hard it was to practice with no dojo or qualified teacher. When I was young, sometimes I drove 50 miles one way just to find a place to practice each day of the week. There were not many good teachers around to study under either. Not to mention even a decent mat to take ukemi on! Today, I envy people. They have so much that they take for granted and I still hear the same complaints!

We all know what is good for us and what is the best way to achieve our goals. We all know that eating three Big Macs for lunch and smoking five packs of cigarettes is bad for our health. No one also should have to tell us not to drive a car when we are about to fall asleep! For those who want convenience and don’t want to be told what to do, they will find any excuse not to train. For others, they see the value of traditional training and find some way in their busy schedule to find time to practice even a little Aikido!

The New Year is upon us. Life looks like it is going to get tougher. Politicians are thinking of war and many of us cannot even do an honest day’s work because there are no jobs. There is much suffering and pain in this world. It is not because others are unfair to us and treating us badly – no! We are just living in the world we have created for ourselves!

In Aikido, we gain more than strength, we gain clarity, focus and the skill to open our eyes and see everything very clearly! Please, please keep up your training!

New Year’s light brings new hope. Not once a year, but each day, and so we should celebrate every day as a holiday!•

Editor’s note: Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on December 28, 2002.

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

Dojo Coronavirus update:

Due to the high incidences of COVID-19 cases, the dojo will maintaining a limited schedule and all classes will be outside. We have purchased 6' x 12' mats for everyone to use so that we can still do ukemi safely. Please maintain six feet social distancing and wear a mask at all times.

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

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

合氣道 時間割

Saturdays

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

Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Sundays

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

Thursdays

No Class

Mondays

No Class

Fridays

No Class

Tuesdays

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

Saturdays

8:00-9:00 AM Regular Class

Wednesdays

8:00-9:00 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.

Affiliated Dojos of the Aikido Center of Los Angeles



Aikido La Gomera Aikikai
Kodokai Dojo



Aikido
Salamanca Aikikai
Kodokai Dojo



Aikido Valladolid Aikikai
Kodokai Dojo



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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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