



AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES

NEWSLETTER

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Los Angeles, California,
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Aikido and Our Lives

It must be a sign of my old age that I reflect upon my life in Aikido more than I did just several years ago. I have just turned forty and I have spent 75% or thirty years of my life in Aikido.

I may not seem very old to most people, but, as for myself, I find that I have more and more to reflect upon year by year and somehow this makes me feel older. In addition, my students seem to be getting younger and younger before my very eyes! I really don't think they are getting younger, but, it seems to me that I am aging faster than they are. This may seem like a sad conclusion on my part. It is not. It just seems to be a natural tendency welling up in me after so many years, as I teach Aikido from day to day reflecting upon the past as I look to the future.

I feel very lucky that I was able to learn from many excellent teachers. Most people could not be so fortunate. I am also thankful that, at such a young age, I have established a very nice dojo and have many excellent students who all show great potential. I have several students to carry on my work in Aikido and take over my school. The dojo is growing rapidly and many students are more involved in running the school and taking responsibility for its smooth operation. I don't really think an Aikido teacher can ask for more in his lifetime.

However, as I see many students coming into the dojo, I think few realize today the hardship and sacrifices of yesterday. Sometimes, we easily take for granted what we have today and forget that it is the product of a great deal of work, hardship and sacrifice. I notice that it is easy for newer students to come and go as they please, but my older students who have been with me for many years and have shared such much together know how far we have really come.

The success of the dojo was not built on a series of many minor successes leading to a major success today. Our success today was built upon many, many failures! There is a popular saying that many say comes from Bodhidharma, the Zen sage. "Nanakorobi Ya-oki." This is roughly translated as: "Falling down seven times but getting up eight."

We fail many times but we must keep picking ourselves up and going on. It may seem like one failure leads to the next but if we cultivate our spiritual strength through our Aikido practice, we can go on and on. This is one of the great benefits of Aikido. The power to continue in the face of great hardship brings success.

Fifteen years ago, I told my students that someday I would build a traditional Japanese style dojo here in Los Angeles. At that time, no one believed me. As a matter of fact, several students and friends laughed at me and probably thought I was losing my mind. I didn't know how I could do it but, somehow, fifteen years later, here we are.

After we opened our present dojo, we had many, many difficulties. These hardships were shared by my students as well as myself. One of my teachers told me to bear it for ten years and then everything would be all right. We are going on four years now and I was afraid for a while that I would not make it to even the fifth! But now, our membership is increasing and with the support of our growing membership, our problems are shrinking day by day. To me, this is a miracle.

It is difficult for myself and so I know how difficult it must be for my students. But, I believe there is a great Aikido lesson here. Aikido is not so much to acquire skill and strength as it is to learn patience and perseverance. By having faith and keeping our hopes strong, I believe we can accomplish miracles.

We are in an age of science, not miracles. We may think that miracles are gone, but, if we look very closely and with a great deal of attention, we can see miracles happening at every moment. It is silly to say that a drop of water can break a stone, but, if we go to the beach, we can find thousands of stones bored through by gentle drops of water! A single blade of grass seems like a rather insignificant thing but, with all of our science, we still cannot re-create one.

Building the dojo we have today has rather felt like gentle drops of water boring through solid rock. Every step, however small, leads to our goal. But, if we quit, we lose everything. In our training, we must cultivate the power to go happily from one day to the next. For everything, we must be thankful.

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In the dojo, we pay our respects to the Founder, O-Sensei, and to each other, especially our seniors. It is not simply to create a feudalistic environment of members ranked higher or lower on a scale. We are thankful to our seniors recognizing and appreciating the great hardships they have gone through to provide what we have today. This is an important feeling of thankfulness we must continually cultivate day by day. As newer students experience the same hardships and devote the same blood, sweat and tears to their training, they soon find themselves in the position to guide and encourage their juniors.

In this way, we pass the tradition and teachings of Aikido from one generation to the next.

But, we must have the capacity for faith, perseverance and thankfulness or it simply becomes a self-centered illusion. This is what most people fail to understand. Many students believe they are struggling and sacrificing themselves but they are simply fulfilling their own needs. There is nothing wrong with fulfilling our needs, ultimately, it is what we are doing. However, we must find the most constructive way to fulfill our needs as we are sharing and helping our friends and fellow students to fulfill their needs as well. This is true faith and the true spirit of Aikido.

When I left Japan, one teacher wrote his final teaching for me. "Don't be concerned with the respect of others, but you must exhaust yourself for them." I could never understand what this meant until twenty years later.

When we struggle for ourselves, we only satisfy our "small self." When we work for others, we fulfill our "greater self." And, in this, we can find great happiness and true fulfillment.

True Faith and Another Drop of Water.

"A drop of water can pierce through a stone," as we were just discussing, is a well known teaching in Japan. This is an interesting story told to me many, many years ago when I was a very young student of Aikido. It is a story which I have never forgotten and has inspired me through many difficult moments.

Long ago in Japan, there was a very wealthy business man who was about to retire after many years of

hard work and struggling. He had managed to build up an excellent business with a bright future, however, he did not have a son or heir. He had three young workers in his company who showed the greatest potential to take over his business but he was not sure who was the most qualified. He wanted someone with the same will to endure hardship as he had to continue to build up a successful business.

He decided on a test. One morning, he called all three young men to his home and explained that one of them would soon take over his company. All three were very happy because it not only meant a company of his own but great wealth and prestige as well. All three were confident that they would succeed in passing the test on their ability.

All three were lead into the back garden of the old businessman's home. Three large barrels were set up and each of the three young men were given a bucket. The old man instructed each of them to take his bucket and fill up his own barrel and the first to succeed would be named the successor of the company.

Each one immediately grabbed their buckets running to the well to fill the barrels up. However, much to their surprise, when each one poured the water into his own barrel, they realized that each barrel had no bottom. What a strange test! However, each one thought to humour the old man, so all day and all night they continued to run back and forth pouring buckets into barrels with no bottom. Of course, by the next day, no barrel was full and they were completely and totally exhausted. What a stupid test they all thought. Of course, no one can succeed in filling up bottomless barrels. They were very discouraged and angry at the old man.

The old man inspected each barrel carefully and concluded that since no one could fill the barrel up, no one could take over the company. But, he offered each one a second chance at another test. This would be their last chance.

All three, exhausted as they were from the first silly test, arrived bright and early the next day.

Much to their surprise, the same barrels and the same buckets were put before them. This made them very angry because none of them wanted to be humiliated again by this old man's stupid whims. But, it was a matter of a great deal of money and a big company so

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they all decided to try again. This time they noticed that the barrels now had bottoms but now the bottoms were missing from the buckets! All three were again instructed to fill up the barrels with water and the first one to succeed would inherit the company.

Two decided that it was hopeless and quit. Filling up bottomless barrels with buckets of water or normal barrels with bottomless buckets as all quite useless and silly. However, one young man stayed and followed the instructions of the old man, like before. He dipped the bucket into the well and ran over to the barrel and went through the motions of pouring water. He noticed that this time, however, the bottomless bucket still caught one drop of water and one drop of water remained in the barrel with the secure bottom. He continued all day and all night, one drop of water at a time, and by the next day, his barrel was full. The old man picked the right person and his company prospered long after his death. This young man became rich and famous. It was this young man who has handed down this true story of how he came to own such a big corporation today.

The barrel is like ourselves and the buckets are like our abilities. We may have great ability but if we have no capacity to hold it, we are like bottomless barrels which will never be satisfied. Yet, if we have the capacity, even if our abilities are small (like bottomless buckets) we may still succeed if we work hard and continue our labors to fulfillment. Therefore, in our Aikido, we must not judge others on their ability but on their capacity to hold to themselves and endure.

New students can easily become discouraged and quit. It is up to the older students to guide them along and encourage them to continue their efforts. There is no possibility of success or fulfillment for those who quit. Day by day, we work hard and eventually can see our goal. This is the spiritual aspect of our Aikido training. I hope this story will inspire some of the newer students in their Aikido training as this story inspired me over twenty five years ago.

Do Aikido Techniques Really Work?

A senior student recently brought this question up to me and caught me by surprise. My first thought was it was a silly question. I felt like asking in reply: "Why would I be devoting my whole life to some-

thing which didn't work? Again, I thought it was like asking an algebra teacher if mathematics really works.

As I thought about it a little more, I realized that it was a very common question which pops into the minds of many beginning students and seniors as well. I recall as a beginning student, myself, I thought there were some techniques which I would never use in a "real" situation. When I went to Japan to study, however, all of my doubts were erased through studying under many top instructors. Because of this, I have not had this type of doubt of many, many years and I never gave it a thought until now.

Why would people ask this question?

I think people ask this question because Aikido movement is so different from anything people have seen in this country. We always think of any fighting system as a very rough and tumble, blood and guts battle. Aikido movement is very circular and flowing. Also, Aikido emphasizes a spiritual aspect of training as well which may lead people to think of Aikido as more of a philosophy than a martial art.

In addition, there are so many uncertified and non-legitimate instructors in this country teaching very questionable martial arts that I think many people are very wary about joining any particular dojo.

Beginning students cannot see the bigger picture.

If students could see Aikido practiced all over the world and attend classes at the Aikido World Headquarters in Japan, they would have no doubts as to the legitimacy or effectiveness of Aikido. In addition, if beginning students study the history of Aikido as it was created by the Founder and how Aikido has developed in the world over the last several decades, they would see how important Aikido has become as an international martial art of great and substantial reputation. If beginning students can meet some of the outstanding masters of the art today, I think they would be convinced of the legitimacy of the art.

There are many steps to training.

Many students may doubt the effectiveness of Aikido because they don't immediately begin to throw their partners hard and because they do not learn to punch and kick. There is a step by step method to learning Aikido. One must first develop basic skills and gain understanding in the fundamental techniques of the

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art. Aikido pays great attention to balance, footwork, timing, spacing with the opponent, centering, perception, posture which we do not see taught in other martial arts until intermediate and advanced stages. Also, the beginning student immediately begins to practice with a partner. This means that the training must be made "safe" so that both partners can train and practice the techniques without injury to each other. This is a very important aspect of training. Also, in Aikido, the student must control the training to his own level of skill. It is difficult to throw a beginning student hard or allow him to enter more advanced training if he hasn't built up enough skill and endurance and proper knowledge of all the techniques.

Beginning students must realize that he must first master the basics before he can learn other aspects of the art.

Also, for most beginning students, it is enough to figure out which is the right or left foot and what is up and down, without trying to worry how effectively he is moving. Once a student becomes acquainted with the many Aikido techniques and develops fluidity of movement and strong balance, he may enter more rigorous training and quickly develop "effective" techniques.

Students must understand the teacher. I teach the way I do because it is the most successful method for me and it has developed the best skills of each student for me. It is a method which was handed down to me by my teachers who have experience teaching for decades combined with my own experience in teaching. Because the methods I use produce the best results, I continue to teach the way I do. It is not a haphazard process and I do not teach without some teaching plan in mind and without evaluating constantly the progress of all my students. This is very important for every student in the dojo to understand.

Also, each student must be taught differently and so the teaching must be customized to every student. This is why teaching Aikido can be very difficult. It is not like many other martial arts that teach the art in large groups with no personal contact and individualized instruction.

Aikido was originally designed to polish the skill of

masters of martial arts. It is only within the last several decades that we are developing a standardized method to teach laymen and people with no background in the martial arts at all. This is not easy for people to understand. It is also the reason why Aikido technique appears so easy but is so difficult to learn in practice. I have seen many people who look at the art and think it is very easy to learn because the movements look so simple. They become immediately discouraged, however, when they enter the mat because, in actuality, the movement is very difficult. Experts always make what they do look easy. In reality, complicated techniques do not work well in so-called "real" situations. The most effective techniques are always simple, easy to apply and adaptable to any situation. Complicated techniques have too much that can go wrong with them at the wrong moment and, generally, these techniques have a very narrow application. This is not a good perspective of martial arts.

Aikido is not a sport. It is a martial art. Many people get this confused. A sport has many controls and is practiced in a controlled situation. In a martial art, like Aikido, one learns to move against multiple attacks, armed attacks, attacks from the side or rear, etc. We cannot do this when a referee is watching us closely. Competition does not duplicate a "real" situation. Effective techniques to be used in a real situation can only be developed through continual training on a daily basis. Winning and losing in competition also does not duplicate a real situation. In a real situation, it can easily become a matter of life and death. This is also something we learn to deal with through our training on the mat everyday under the supervision of a competent teacher.

Aikido can be effective for the individual until the day he dies. In sports, we are over the hill by the time we are thirty. The Founder of Aikido practiced until the day he died at 86 years old. He reached the peak of his physical strength at the age of 76. His spiritual powers continued to grow and grow without end. This almost never happens in a sport.

In Aikido, we deal with our lives and all of its questions, difficulties, problems, etc. It is an ongoing process which never ends. It is a way to regulate, control, develop, strengthen, enhance, improve, elevate and complete our lives. It never ends. In sports, when we don't like it anymore or we get bored, we simply quit or play something else. We can't do this in real life.

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SUMMER SCHEDULE

We have a busy schedule in the upcoming months and we need everyone's help and participation. In demonstrations, students who are not actually demonstrating are needed to help pass out flyers and answer questions of the audience. We are also having another Open House, and we need many students' help. This time, however, the dojo will cover the costs of most of the food and drinks, in addition to people demonstrating, we need people to answer questions, serve food, watch the dojo and set up the television for the Aikido videos to be shown. If we all work together as we should, as part of our Aikido training, we can make every event enjoyable as well as rewarding.

Please note the following upcoming events. We are very busy!!!

June 11, 1988

San Fernando Valley Martial Arts Expo from 10:00am. We will be demonstrating Aikido and Iaido.

On the same day, we will be demonstrating Aikido from 3:30pm to 4:00pm and 4:30pm to 5:00pm, at the Adults Arts and Crafts Fair in the Japanese Village Plaza.

June 12, 1988

Aikido demonstration at the Adults Arts and Crafts Fair for the second day. Time schedule is the same as for June 11, 1988.

June 18 & 19, 1988

Aikido demonstration on Saturday and Sunday for the Children's Arts and Crafts Fair in the Japanese Village Plaza. Time schedule for both days is 1:30pm to 2:00pm and 3:30pm to 4:00pm. Our Children's Class will be the main stars of this demonstration but advanced students will be demonstrating as well. Lunch will be provided for participants in between the demonstrations.

June 26, 1988

Our Second Open House. We need everyone's help. Some volunteers will be needed to make salads, deserts and munchies. The main courses and drinks (sodas) will be provided by the dojo. Everyone should attend. 1:00pm to 5:00pm. Please invite your friends. Everyone welcome.

Nisei Week Schedule

We will be conducting our Sixth Nisei Week Aikido Demonstration on August 6th and 7th at the Yaohan Mall (Little Tokyo Plaza) on the second floor. This is located at the corner of Third and Alameda Streets near the dojo. The demonstration will be from 2:00pm to 3:00pm on both days. This first day will emphasize Aikido and the second day will emphasize Iaido.

We will also be demonstrating Aikido in the opening ceremonies for the Nisei Week Coronation Ball on August 6, 1988 from about 7:00pm. The time has not yet been decided as of this printing. This is a great honor for us to represent the Japanese fine arts in the Little Tokyo community this year.

We will need many volunteers to help pass out flyers and answer questions in the audience. Everyone should attend our demonstrations and give their support.

PASADENA OLD TOWN ARTS AND CRAFTS FESTIVAL

The following students participated in April's Pasadena Old Town Arts and Crafts Festival.

MR. DOUGLAS FIRESTONE
MS. KATHY HEINEMANN
MR. KAZ NISHIDA
MR. TONY GONSALVES
MR. MANUEL ALMAGUER
MR. VICTOR RODRIGUEZ
MR. BLAKE ASHLEY

CHILDREN'S DAY FESTIVAL-JAPANESE VILLAGE PLAZA

The following students participated in the Children's Day Festival at the Japanese Village Plaza in April, last month. Congratulations at a demonstration well done.

Saturday's Demonstration
MR. DOUGLAS FIRESTONE
MS. KATHY HEINEMANN
MR. MANUEL ALMAGUER
MR. TONY GONSALVES
MR. VICTOR RODRIGUEZ

MS. ELIABETH MINAMI
MR. ELLIOTT MINAMI
MR. DANIEL MINAMI
MS. DAPHNE BUSH YAMAZAKI
MR. RYOJI YAMADA

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cont.

MR. TYSON AFLALO

Sunday's Demonstration

MS. KATHY HEINEMANN

MR. BRIAN REVERMAN

MS. MITSUKO YOSHIMOTO

MR. KAZUHO NISHIDA

MR. TONY GONSALVES

MR. MANUEL ALMAGUER

MS. DAPHNE BUSH YAMAZAKI

MR. RYOJI YAMADA

MR. TYSON AFLALO

MR. RON ROCHA

MR. CHRISTIAN ROCHA

MR. DANIEL ROCHA

MR. KRIS YOUNGSTROM

MR. GABRIEL YOUNGSTROM

MR. JONAS YOUNGSTROM

MAY PROMOTIONS

The following promotions are awarded to students for their outstanding progress in training on May 11, 1988.

Children's Class

2nd Kyu - Brown Belt

KEN HOKAMA

DAVID HOKAMA

3rd Kyu - Blue Belt

DANIEL MINAMI

ELLIOT MINAMI

ELIZABETH MINAMI

MALCOLM QUON

DAPHNE BUSH YAMAZAKI

4th Kyu - Blue Belt

RYOJI YAMADA

MITSURU YAMAHATA

5th Kyu - Orange Belt

CHRISTIAN ROCHA

KEVIN KAWA

6th Kyu

TIMI ITO

TYSON AFLALO

7th Kyu

JONAS YOUNGSTROM

GABRIEL YOUNGSTROM

DANIEL ROCHA

CANDIDATE FOR NIDAN (2ND DEGREE BLACK BELT) FOR 1989.

MS. KATHY HEINEMANN

CANDIDATES FOR SHODAN (FIRST DEGREE BLACK BELT) FOR 1989.

DR. MICHAEL ALBERTSON

MS. MITSUKO YOSHIMOTO

MR. TONY GONSALVES

MR. MANUEL ALMAGUER

MR. TOM MCINTYRE

Adult Classes

1st Kyu

MR. JAMES BEAL

MR. STEPHAN STEPHANIDES

2nd Kyu

MR. DAVID YOUNG

MR. DAN EATON

MS. SHERRY EATON

MR. RICHARD ELLORIAGA

MR. YASUSHI MATSUKI

MR. MARK MOORE

MR. RON HILL

MR. JOHN SOLBERG

MR. SUMET LIKHITSOTTHIWONG

MR. ADAM BALZANO

3rd Kyu

MR. BRIGIDO ANAYA

MR. LEE HART

MR. DAVID PERRY

MR. KIM SMITH

4th Kyu

MR. DAVID SCHWEIZER

MS. JANIS WILKINS

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5th Kyu

MS. KEIKO TOMATSU
MR. GEORGE HANSON
MR. KELLY SANDS
MR. BRAD RADAR
MS. CHRIS PREJEAN

6th Kyu

MR. KENNETH GONI
MR. SUKKOO LEE
MR. MICHAEL TERESCHUK
MR. BEN HANAOKI
MR. MORGAN WEISSER
MR. GLEN GUZMAN
MR. TOM BAKER
MR. JAMES BORJA
MR. RIC JONES
MR. TOM VALERA

"Congratulations to everyone for their hard work and great progress in their training. Please keep up the good work." - Chief Instructor.

DOJO T-SHIRTS

The dojo is preparing a second batch of t-shirts. The first batch was a aqua-marine blue with our dojo seal and name in white. This batch will be white with black lettering. The front will be imprinted with our name and a small illustration and the back will be imprinted with the Founder's calligraphy, "AGATSU" which comes from the phrase, "MASAKATSU AGATSU KATSU HAYABI." ("A TRUE VICTORY IS A VICTORY OVER ONE'S SELF, A VICTORY WHICH IS ABSOLUTE LIKE THE SHINING SUN.") "Agatsu" means "Victory over one's self."

The T-shirts will sell for \$8.50 which also includes a small donation to the dojo in the price. We have ordered one dozen small, two dozen medium, three dozen large and two dozen extra large. Please purchase your t-shirt before we run out.

We also have a small order of polo shirts in silver with a dark blue imprinting of the dojo name and a small illustration on the front. We only have one dozen extra large and one dozen large. We were unable to afford any more than this. If the members like this style, we

will order more next time. These polo shirts are very nice and will sell for \$13.00 which also includes a small donation to the dojo. We hope everyone likes the polo shirts and many apologies for the small order this time.

Please make the purchases for the t-shirts and polo shirts separate from your monthly dues in order to keep our accounting clear. Thank you.

OUR DOJO NEWSLETTER

Last month, we circulated over one hundred issues and still it was not enough. We will be printing one hundred and fifty issues this month. We send out about twenty issues to out of town friends and former students. We previously sent out about forty issues a month to friends but this was cut down because of the expense. Many students seem to appreciate our newsletter and it is gaining popularity all over the country. Please grab your issue quickly at the beginning of the month before we run out. We try to print each issue by the first of the month.

The Asian-American Newsletter in Florida will be reprinting excerpts from our newsletter regularly.

The newsletter is free to members of the dojo. Non members should make a small subscription donation of \$10.00 a year if they wish to have the newsletter sent to them on a monthly basis. This will cover the costs of printing, handling and postage.

Students are also welcome to submit articles for the newsletter on Aikido, their experiences in training, impressions, poems, events, etc. They should be related to Aikido or the dojo. The editors reserve the right to edit each article for publication.

TRAINING SCHEDULE CHANGES

Beginning and new students are welcome to practice in the second hour evening class from 7:30pm to 8:30pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Tuesday evenings, second class, is for advanced students, third kyu and above, only.

We are currently taking a poll to decide to re-open the second class (7:30pm to 8:30pm) class on Fridays or to extend the first class from 6:15pm to 7:15pm to a longer class of one and a half hours.