

the living art of aikido

an ancient tradition grows in the arts district

Rev. Kensho Furuya

The Aikido Center of Los Angeles Dojo was first established in Silverlake in 1974. I moved to my new location in the Arts District in 1984. At that time, there were only a few artists in the area, but it was considered a very fast-growing area with tremendous potential. The idea of "New York-style" lofts in the downtown area was very new for Los Angeles at that time. I liked the new, fresh energy of this neighborhood and its proximity to the Little Tokyo area, where I grew up as a kid. The area was quiet and secluded then; very nice for serious Aikido training.

Aikido is a traditional Japanese martial art but has not undergone the popular transformation into a sport, performance art or leisure time exercise in modern times. Aikido is unique in that it is non-competitive: no yelling and kicking, no breaking boards or jumping in the air. No fighting high up on the tips of a bamboo forest.

Aikido emphasizes circular movement—not to collide or overpower the opponent, but to blend with his energy and continually move out of the line of his attack. Aikido emphasizes the mental and physical center and its easy, natural movement.

The Aikido Center of Los Angeles is a unique space and has been featured in *The Herald Examiner*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Rafu Shimpo*, and *The LA Reader*. It is unique in the sense that the "dojo" or "school" is a handcrafted 17th-century Japanese-style space built within a loft in downtown Los Angeles.

The founder of Aikido, O'Sensei, meaning "Great Teacher," often said, "Life is a work of art." Life is always a process of expressing nature's natural beauty and finding the harmonious way of life through practice and refinement. This does not mean that Aikido is ineffectual or lazy. Indeed, the training is strenuous and disciplined, and requires mental attention and awareness at every moment. It is in this awareness that we see the attack: we become, in all aspects of life, more aware of ourselves, who we are, and what we are doing here. This is a difficult process of transfor-

mation, from the self-centered ego to higher perceptions of the self and the world at large.

Often, passers-by see students cleaning the front of the dojo and often are perplexed as to why they must do such janitorial tasks. It is not for the convenience of the teacher, but is a part of training one to understand the "caring heart" that cares and values everything, and the practice of labor without merit meaning. Oddly, cleaning and purification of the environment is the basis of most spiritual training in all cultures around the world.

Aikido is for everyone: women and men, from the very young to senior citizens. Because of the non-competitive nature of Aikido and its emphasis on blending with the opponent, as opposed to crushing him, Aikido is an effective art for everyone.

The Los Angeles dojo itself is considered a work of art and will be featured in *LA Loft Living* by Barbara Thornton, former Architectural Editor of *The Los Angeles Times*, as one of the 20 most beautiful and significant loft spaces in Southern California. The book is expected to be in bookstores very soon. Many of the fixtures are antiques from Japan, and the dojo itself represents the "shoin-zukuri" or Samurai style of living space of the 17th century.



Everyone is welcome to practice at the Aikido Center of Los Angeles, located in the alley at Vignes between 2nd and 3rd Streets, and recognizable by the wooden gate and bamboo garden. Classes are offered seven days a week.

About Rev. Furuya

The Aikido Center of Los Angeles is under the direction of Rev. Kensho Furuya, 57, who began his martial arts training at the age of 8. He is a graduate of both USC and Harvard University, and trained at the Aikido World Headquarters in Tokyo, under the tutelage of Doshu Kisshomaru

Ueshiba, the son of the Founder of Aikido. He was ordained as a Zen monk at the Zenshuji Soto Mission in Downtown under the late Bishop Kenko Yamashita. For many years, he has participated in many cultural and community events in the Downtown-Little Tokyo neighborhood. Several years ago, the Southern California Japanese Chamber of Commerce recognized him as one of the "outstanding cultural organizations" in our community.

Rev. Furuya, or "Sensei" as he is popularly referred to, has branch affiliated dojos all over the world, including Israel, Spain, Germany, England, several in South America, Mexico,

the Bahamas, and Turkey. His Yahoo group, Aikido-Iaido-KODO and the Daily Messages in his website are read all over the world. Sensei is also the author of the popular *KODO - Ancient Ways* available on Amazon or at Bunkado in Little Tokyo, and the nine volume DVD, *The Art of Aikido*. Sensei is a 6th Dan in Aikido and a 6th Dan Kyoshi grade in traditional Japanese swordsmanship.

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— Photos courtesy of Rev. Furuya

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