



# The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

## 道の為、世の為、人の為 合気道

# The Aiki Dojo

Direct Affiliation: Aikido World Headquarters, 17-18 Wakamatsu-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, Japan  
Los Angeles Sword and Swordsmanship Society Kenshinkai  
The Furuya Foundation

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### Upcoming Events

**April 27-29th:**  
O Sensei Memorial Seminar

**April 29th:**  
O Sensei memorial service  
7:00 PM

**May 26th:**  
Instructor's intensive

**May 28th:**  
Dojo closed  
Memorial Day

**June 30th:**  
Instructor's intensive

**July 4th:**  
Dojo closed  
Independence Day

**July 28th:**  
Instructor's intensive

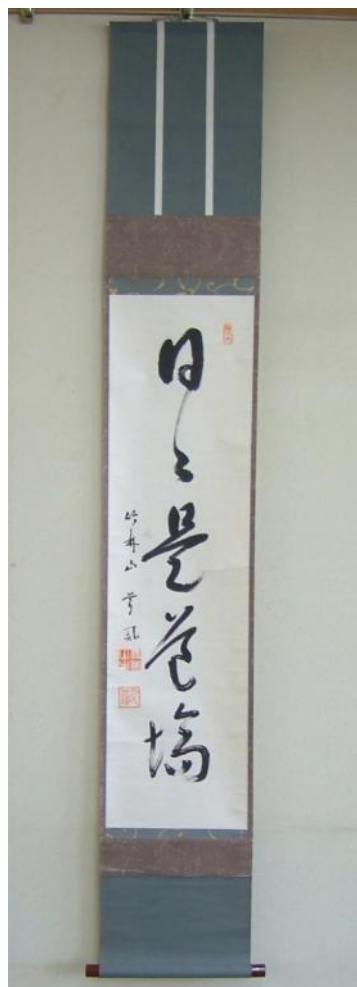
**How to Get the Most Out of Your Training** Japanese art, the teacher models the skill and the student copies. You might think, "That sounds easy enough," but nothing could be farther from the truth. Copying is one the hardest things for students and even teachers to do.

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

Have you heard the joke about the absent-minded maestro who was hurriedly walking up Seventh Avenue in New York City when a tourist stopped him and asked, "Pardon me, how do you get to Carnegie Hall?" Breathlessly he replied, "Yes, practice, practice, practice." This very old joke from the 1950s is actually sage advice. The only way to get really good at anything is with practice. I don't care if you are learning English, knitting, medicine, or Aikido, the only way to become an expert is with practice. That being said, there are many ways and methods in which to practice; some are good, some are bad. Here are a few concepts to help you get the most out of your practice.

**Just copy**  
"We shape clay into a pot, but it is the emptiness inside that holds whatever we want."  
*Tao Te Ching*

To get good at Aikido, just copy. Nothing else is required: not size, strength, speed, youth, athleticism, or a particular gender. Let me reiterate: *copying is the only thing you need to do to get good.* For thousands of years in every traditional



Hibi kore dojo translated as, "Every day is practice."

Japanese art, the teacher models the skill and the student copies. You might think, "That sounds easy enough," but nothing could be farther from the truth.

Copying is one the hardest things for students and even teachers to do.

At the root of our intellect as *Homo sapiens* lies the impulse to discriminate and try and understand our surroundings, but this same quality which helped us advance in some ways inevitably leads us astray when we indulge it on the mat. Students have a hard time copying because they want to learn the skill by understanding it with their minds instead of with their bodies, which only slows down their learning and retention speeds. Teachers and senior students sometimes have a hard time copying because their minds or egos get in the way – in other words, their cups are full. They get caught up in judging the movement based upon issues of right/wrong, good/bad, or different/same. Both types of thinking pose great barriers to learning. True copying requires that we turn off our "discerning

mind" so that we can actually perceive what is being taught and just imitate it.

*Continued on page 2...*

## How to Get the Most Out of Your Training

*continued from page 1...*

It takes a long time for our bodies to get used to and learn the movement being taught. Our minds know this and since we are thinking beasts, we think, “If I can figure it out, I can learn it faster.” Wrong! Aikido learning is experiential, which means that we can only learn it with our body, not our mind. To get good we have to master the form and that form will lead us to enlightenment. There is a Buddhist saying from the Heart Sutra that hints at the deep truth of this, *Shiki soku ze ku, ku soku ze shiki*, which means *form is emptiness and emptiness is form*. We should reflect very carefully on this.

When we have mastered the form, we can cast off the mold and achieve emptiness or enlightenment, but the emptiness cannot exist without the form. Only after years of diligent copying can we earn mastery and this is why the very first tenet in learning any traditional art is “copy now and understand later”. The surest path to success in the dojo is to copy without judgment or ego, regardless of who teaches or what they teach. If we can copy in the dojo, then we can bring that copying ability to our daily life. What do you think your life would be like if you could copy anything with no judgments and without ego? How far could you go? What could you achieve? The answers to these questions can only come when you look upon anything and everything and just copy it. That is why the key to becoming good in any endeavor is to copy.

### Choose your attitude

“Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude.”  
*Zig Ziglar*

We cannot, unfortunately, teach attitude because attitude is the outward expression of our inward feelings. In other words, how we feel inside influences our perspective and our actions. Sensei once commented that our true inner self is reflected in the way we do Aikido and that we can learn everything we need to know about someone by watching them do Aikido.

I say that you can’t teach attitude because we choose our attitude and therefore our mindset. Attitude is a function of experience, so our feelings arise out of the story that we tell ourselves every day. These stories all begin with, “I am” but they all end differently – some good, some bad. No person or thing makes us have these feelings; it seems to me they merely manifest our state of mind. If this is true then our feelings, based on some prior experience, have framed our attitude at this very moment. The famous psychiatrist Viktor Frankl may have thought along the same lines when he wrote, “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last

of the human freedoms — to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

When we train and only focus on the movement, we are learning to be mindful of our actions in each moment and therefore choosing our attitude. Practicing mindfulness reveals that more often than not these feelings have no basis in *what is happening now* and simply echo our mind’s preoccupations with history that we can turn on or off. Therefore what we really do in practice is learn to re-frame the story we tell ourselves; when we practice properly we become mindful of the moment and no judgments arise. Eventually, we can change how we feel about ourselves by developing a different perspective that will influence our attitude about not only

*Shiki soku ze ku*

training but life as well. This is probably one of the most overlooked aspects of Aikido training and could possibly be the reason why O Sensei took great pains to assert that “The only true victory is the victory over yourself.”

### Be consistent

“You can’t get much done in life if you only work on the days when you feel good.”

*Jerry West*

In order to get anything out of our training, we must first come to class. Yes, I know: we want some way around it, and I hate to tell you this, but there is no magic pill or secret – we have to come to class to receive any of its benefits. Believe me, I have tried every other way! That being said, all that is required is to have a consistent practice.

Training is a spiritual practice, not because of the art, but because of the sacrifice it takes to keeping going and developing ourselves in spite of the difficulties and obstacles. Consistency builds momentum. Think of it as a wave that you make with your hand in a pool of water: if you keep your hand moving in the same direction, then the wave keeps going, but if your hand stops, so does the wave. Keeping a consistent training schedule sustains the momentum of our wave of progress. It doesn’t matter if we train once a week or once a month so long as we train consistently. Committing to developing ourselves and keeping up our momentum matters most; when we stop, our momentum ceases.

Something about keeping a commitment feels very spiritual, no matter its nature or how challenging it seems, and gives us a certain kind of power that we can eventually access in our regular lives. In this aspect it is not so much what we do as long as we keep doing it. Remember even specks of dust can pile up to form a mountain in time.

*Continued on page 7...*

## We Are All Unique – Just Like Everyone Else

by Gary Myers, Iaido Chief Instructor

We all consider ourselves to be unique. There is no one else like us in the world. We come from different parents, different cultures, and ethnic upbringings. We are the unique offspring of nature and nurture which, combined with our internal self image called ego, makes each of us feel that we are distinct from everyone else.

However, at our most basic level we are composed of much the same elements; I think the term in science-fiction stories is “carbon-based life forms”. These elements combine until we get to the level of our genetic makeup, and that begins the process of our individuality. But we are still made up of the same molecules and chemicals. These chemicals interact to change our emotional state, and those interactions can be triggered by outside forces or by our own state of mind. We essentially experience all the same human emotions and feelings: happiness, sadness, anxiety, pain of loss, exuberance, lethargy, jealousy, pride, love, loneliness, the list goes on and on. Although we may feel them with different intensities at times, those feelings remain the same nonetheless. All these feelings and emotions are what bind us together as a species. The Way of Nature has made sure that we share these feelings and emotions that go beyond just the urge to propagate. Even in that regard, we are not so different from our animal ancestors looking at Springtime as the time for mating, e.g., “In the Spring a young man’s fancy turns to thoughts of love.” So even though we are each unique, our composition and our feelings are the same, just like everyone else.

In practice, we may have a unique set of problems that are ours and ours alone. But each problem itself is not unique. Flaws can result from our own misinterpretations or misunderstanding of the instruction or they can be the result of prior injury, compensation, or a combination of both.

A side note about injuries, if you’ve had any kind of active lifestyle as a kid, it’s very likely you’ve injured yourself. Injuries are sneaky, we feel like we get over them, we recover, and are just as good as prior to the injury. But in reality the injury is just lurking in the background to remind us when we are older that there is an eventual price to pay for our feeling bulletproof in our youth. I remember a doctor telling me after a broken collarbone injury at the age of 17, that when I got older that I’d be better than a meteorologist in telling when it was going to rain. He was right. Also as we age, injuries are harder to bounce back from. About half of our Iaido group has experienced some form of injury outside of practice in the last six months. I remember Sensei being more forgiving in not doing the techniques quite right as we recov-



ered. A good teacher knows the difference between flaws resulting from misinterpretation or those from injury. This is why it is essential to let your teachers know if you’ve experienced a recent injury.

Getting back to our feelings, the word has two meanings: we feel things on a sensory physical level and we feel things on an emotional level. Recently a student recounted an old story about his interaction with Sensei in a *bokken* class, which highlights the difference in the meanings. He said that Sensei got really mad at him and started yelling at him for not trying harder. The student responded to Sensei, that he felt he was really trying hard. Although Sensei may have stopped yelling at him, what the student felt emotionally and what Sensei sensed by seeing his efforts were quite different. This is often the case, that what we feel and what is physically real are entirely different. That is why learning the fundamentals is a results-oriented learning process in which we do as shown or told. Fundamentals are impossible to integrate if they are intellectualized through feelings at that early stage of learning. This is why the *shu* stage of learning is rigid and structured. We can’t rely on feelings; we have to rely on results. We can’t teach our own feelings to others, but we can teach the result and through that process students will begin to experience their own feelings in doing the correct fundamentals. In Iaido results are: the sword is cutting and thrusting effectively. If it isn’t, no amount of feeling means anything.

### Good Suburi

Good *suburi*, for example, is simply the result of gripping the *tsuka* properly, letting the arms extend out, letting the elbows hinge when they get to eye level, letting the left wrist touch the forehead, then pull the left hand straight out. But it does all begin with the proper grip. In Iaido the term for the proper grip is *te no uchi*, or literally, “the hands of cutting”. No matter the previous position of the hands, the right and left hands twist inward so that the palms are on the top ridgeline of the handle. The middle, ring, and little fingers of both hands grasp tightly around the handle so there is no space in the hands for the handle to move or slip. There is 80% power in the left hand and 20% in the right. This is how we place the hands on the sword when we do *suburi*. If you have studied Aiki-ken, or Battodo, this grip will “feel” very restrictive. It is supposed to, because the tip does not drop below your hands in Iaido *kirioroshi*. When we do *kesa* (diagonal) cuts, as are done in Battodo or Aiki-ken, the tip does pass the level our hands and there is some wrist hinging. Conversely, some Muso Shiden Ryu Iaidoka also have trouble making the transition to Battodo and Aiki-ken because the grip “feels” too loose.

*Continued on page 7...*



## Reality and Truth

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

I often think that we get the two mixed up; I don't really think they are the same thing. What do you think? Reality is definitely not Truth. Nor is Truth very often the Reality of our lives, although we like to think it so. We aspire to Truth and it is this same Truth we use to verify, confirm, or justify our lives. Many times, more often than not, it is only a strong, personal belief. Reality, on the other hand, is something we either try to confront or deny, and even flee at times.

I often think that Truth is something we make up in our heads and more often a strong belief than anything else. Many times, it is no more than our strong opinion about something. My truth is certainly not your truth, nor the truth of the guy standing on the corner

over there. If I say, "That is an ugly shirt you are wearing." It is not Truth – except for being *my* truth perhaps. Possibly it is a different truth for you and in your truth, the shirt is actually very nice. It is certainly not a reality as well – or perhaps it is simply my own reality: "What an ugly shirt!" Maybe your reality is: "Mine is really quite nice and cost a lot of money, whereas your shirt looks cheap and doesn't even fit you!"

Most of the time we are mixed up with reality, and certainly Truth is something we really do not want to know about at all! No one wants to hear, "Well, the truth is, you have bad breath and bad taste and I don't like your haircut!" This is not Truth. Even as reality, it is still only an opinion or biased, very personal viewpoint. I think we have to be very careful when we use such words. Reality and Truth can be so dangerous in the wrong hands – usually mine and yours!

In many ways, this is true in the way we teach Aikido and the way we learn Aikido. I am continually concerned with this subject. I was talking with one of my younger instructors the other day, and he remarked, "How difficult it is to teach people!"

"Yes, I know," I said, "some people are very easy to teach and eager to learn and some people do not understand anything you say, however you say it and however clearly you try to make yourself understood. This is the nature of teaching Aikido."

Many times, I see that students can be filled with so many of their own ideas and that nothing new or nothing an instructor may say can come in. It is like the Zen story of the scholar who visited the Zen master. One day, a scholar came to visit a well-known Zen

master. This scholar was quite well-known himself and actually only wanted to boast of himself to others and show off his knowledge. As he sat down, the Zen master asked if he would like some tea. The Zen master poured the tea into the scholar's cup and continued to pour until it began to overflow and run all over the table. "Stop," said the scholar. "If you continue to pour, no

more will go into the cup and it will spill all over the table!"

"Yes, of course," replied the Zen master. "Just like your mind at this present moment. It is so filled that nothing more will go in!" This story became famous when Bruce Lee used it in one of his movies. Many people are like this full tea cup: nothing more will go in. Many times, the advice must be "Empty your tea cup!"



### Teacher's Mission:

In our dojo, or probably in my own personal method, it is important for the assistant instructors and the Chief Instructor to have good communication. I like to be on the same wave length so that we can coordinate the teaching program for the students in the most beneficial and effective way.

It is not simply to teach what you feel like just at the spur of the moment or to experiment on the students, but to think and study and re-evaluate continually what is best for the students and what are their current needs. A teacher must continually think about the class as a whole and the general standard to be set for all of the students and, at the same time, more specifically, what students need as individuals. This is a difficult skill which must be developed with experience. It is not a theory or opinion.

At the same time one must be aware of the class as a group and students as individuals, one must also keep in mind the standards and requirements of the art itself. The standards and methods of even a very small dojo must be in line or match the standards of their parent dojo – in our case, Hombu Dojo. Too often, large organizations lose their perspective and the individual needs of the students are lost. Too often, in small dojos, the view becomes too narrow or the perspective shrinks and we are attentive to each student but lose the overall view and standard of Aikido in general. Too often for instructors, the dojo becomes a "political arena" for one's personal views and opinions or a "stage" where one can perform for his audience and express his talents and views. Both of these ideas are incorrect.

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**Reality and Truth** *continued from page 4...*

The dojo is a so-called “sacred” space, meaning NOT religion, but an area which is defined as a place of learning. It is where the student and teacher both study the art of Aikido.

In general, from the standpoint of teaching students, it is the teacher’s mission to sacrifice his own personal viewpoints and opinions and desires to express himself or show authority for the sake of the students. At the same time, it is important for the students to enter the dojo with an open mind and strong aspiration to study and learn. In the worst scenario, the teacher is too occupied to show off and the student is too full of his own ideas to learn anything. This is not a dojo at all, it is an arena, stage, or playpen.



really surprised and disappointed me. I realized that this attitude prevented anyone from ever trying to learn from him.

At the time, there was another instructor in this same organization; although she was not as good, she had many students. I think it was her warm heart and strong desire to be a good teacher that brought many students to her. She was also very humble and modest and this is what also drew many to her. There was another teacher there as well: he wasn’t very skillful but “seemed” very nice because he always talked up a storm and was so chatty with everyone. Unfortunately, everyone came to realize that he was all talk and never really did anything or accomplished anything. In Japanese, he came to be known as *horafuki* or “horn blower” – all noise and no action!

I especially hope that my assistants will think about this seriously.

When I was studying another art, I remember that there was one young instructor who was extremely skilled and very studious. He studied hard and advanced himself very quickly. I noticed however, that he could never have any students as much as the head teacher in this art wanted him to succeed. Actually, as good as he was, he was much too boastful and conceited and too eager to show off his skill or show his authority. One time, he remarked to me (although I was just a beginning student at the time), “most students are too stupid to learn from me, I am just too good!” This remark

In Aikido too, there is a demand and responsibility to be very good and skillful to become a teacher. At the same time, a good teacher must have many other qualities outside of a piece of paper with the number of a Dan rank on it and strong arms, just for throwing people around. In my own opinion, there must be a strong love of the art of Aikido in order to teach others. Often, many mistake this for :”love of one’s self.”

**Editor’s Note:** *Sensei originally posted this article, in slightly different form, to his Daily Message board on July 8, 2004.*



## AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES AFFILIATED DOJOS

### INTERNATIONAL

#### Spain

**Aikido Kodokai**  
Salamanca, Spain

Chief Instructor: Santiago Garcia Almaraz  
www.kodokai.com

#### Mexico

**Veracruz Aikikai**  
Veracruz, Mexico  
Chief Instructors:

Dr. Jose Roberto Magallanes Molina  
Dr. Alvaro Rodolfo Hernandez Meza  
www.veracruz-aikikai.com

### UNITED STATES

#### California

**Hacienda La Puente Aikikai**  
Hacienda Heights, California  
Chief Instructor: Tom Williams

#### Arizona

**Aikido Renbukai of Arizona**  
Surprise, Arizona  
Chief Instructor: Michael Van Ruth



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Aikido Center of Los Angeles



## Reverend Kensho Furuya Memorial Services



Aikido Kodokai in Salamanca, Spain



Kihon Dojo in La Gomera, Spain



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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 also will dedicate yourself to your training and to enjoying all the benefits that Aikido and Iaido can offer.*

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### Questions/Comments?

We welcome all questions and comments. Please send us a letter or an e-mail and our team will do our best to come up with an answer. We reserve the right to edit questions and letters for clarity and length.

Please e-mail submissions to: info@aikidocenterla.com

## How to Get the Most Out of Your Training

*continued from page 2...*

### Practice mindfully

“The Way is in training.”

*Miyamoto Musashi*

To practice mindfully may sound easy but by far it is the hardest thing to do. To show up for practice and just train seems an arduous task because most of us bring so much of our baggage into the dojo. When we train, we think of someplace else; instead of developing mindfulness in our training, we think of something else. We come in feeling sad, angry, frustrated, or just in a plain old funk. When we dwell on the past or the future, we neglect the present moment.

Training teaches us to become aware of our every action, if only for that class. These minutes can turn into hours, then days, then weeks, and eventually years. Once we become fully conscious in the dojo, we can extend this mindfulness into every aspect of our daily lives. After that, everything is training (*hibi kore dojo*) and nothing appears mundane any longer. Aikido becomes a way of life, or what we might refer to as the Way.

When we follow the Way, everything is training. It takes years of training to see that the Way encompasses everything we do. In the dojo some days it is easy to practice the Way, but other days we fall far away from it. The Way offers the middle path where we don't revel in victories or get discouraged by defeats; that is why we call it *practice*.

## We Are All Unique – Just Like Everyone Else *continued from page 3...*



Some people are under the impression that the hands pull the sword up to *jodan* position, and then pull down on the cut. Unfortunately this up and down “feeling” results in a weak cut because the tip of the sword just moves at the same speed as the hands in a linear motion. When they pull up they usually pull their elbows out and engage the bicep muscles. Not only does this result in a subsequent pulling down, which makes the arms shorter, it also pulls the hands to the sides of the handle making the grip weak. Both of these factors contribute to a weak cut. Cuts should always be big, meaning the arms need to be extended out both to the top and outwardly when cutting. In essence we want the energy to flow from our center to the tip of the sword in a radial motion. The most efficient energy transfer is to allow that power flow straight down our arms and into the sword. If we put a kink in the arms by trying to use upper arm strength the energy gets stopped. It is like water flowing through a garden hose; if we put a kink in the hose, water will not flow properly.

Back in the Stone Age when there were record albums instead of downloads, one could see a record spin on a turntable at 33 1/3 rpm. A point on the outer portion of the record has to travel a greater distance than a point near the center to make one revolution, yet both make one revolution in the same amount of time; therefore, that point on the outer edge of the record is travelling faster than the point near the center. The greater the radius the faster it goes. If we think of the tip of the sword as that point on edge of the record, the longer we make our arms, like a radius, the faster the tip of the sword will move and the more power it will have. Of course we are not all the same body types; we each have our own set of unique physical attributes. Fundamentals by definition apply to everyone no matter how tall or short, thick or thin. We can think of fundamentals as the rules that go beyond our own uniqueness, they are applicable to each of us, and to everyone else.

## Get Over Yourself

“If one really wishes to be master of an art, technical knowledge of it is not enough. One has to transcend technique so that the art becomes an ‘artless art’ growing out of the Unconsciousness.”

*D. T. Suzuki*



In order to get the most out of our training, we must look farther than the technique. To “transcend technique” means moving without moving or thinking without thinking in a place of nothingness or emptiness. To understand this, we must practice until we grasp more of a feeling absent of words.

Professor Suzuki isn't talking about apathy or becoming like gelatin. He points to the place where, no longer ruled by our ego, we can let go of ourselves: in this place, neither yesterday nor tomorrow concerns us. We become the master of our feelings and control where we are going, and therefore choose how we think, feel and act. Thus we must first begin with copying (mastering the form), attitude (mastering the mind), being consistent (having resolve) and attentively practicing (learning mindfulness). As we master these seemingly easy but difficult tasks we will come to realize that to carry out any or all of them, we must first sacrifice our ego. Sensei used to say, “Cut off your head and leave it outside before you come into the dojo,” probably because he knew the biggest barriers to our development were our own minds and how we chose to use them. All martial arts are spiritual practices, and spiritual practices are based upon this awareness: mindfulness is the trait which virtually ensures that we are following the Way. If you want to get to the Carnegie Hall of your life, please practice.

# Aikido TRAINING SCHEDULE

## Sundays

9:00-10:00 AM Children's Class  
10:15-11:15 AM Open

## Mondays

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

## Tuesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

## Wednesdays

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals  
6:30-7:30 PM Intermediate  
7:45-8:45 PM Weapons\*

## Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Bokken

## Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

## Saturdays

9:30-10:30 AM Open  
10:45-11:45 AM Advanced\*

6:30 AM Instructor's Intensive: last Saturday  
of the month by invitation only.\*

\* These classes are not open for visitors to watch.

## *We are directly affiliated with:* **AIKIDO WORLD HEADQUARTERS**

Aikido Hombu Dojo - Aikikai

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

We are committed to the study and practice of the teachings of the Founder of Aikido,  
Morihei Ueshiba and his legitimate successors,  
Kisshomaru Ueshiba and the present Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba.

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, and national or ethnic origin in administration of their educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.



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# Iaido TRAINING SCHEDULE

## TRADITIONAL JAPANESE IAIDO SWORDSMANSHIP

## Saturdays

7:15-8:15 AM Beginning  
8:15-9:15 AM Intermediate/Advanced

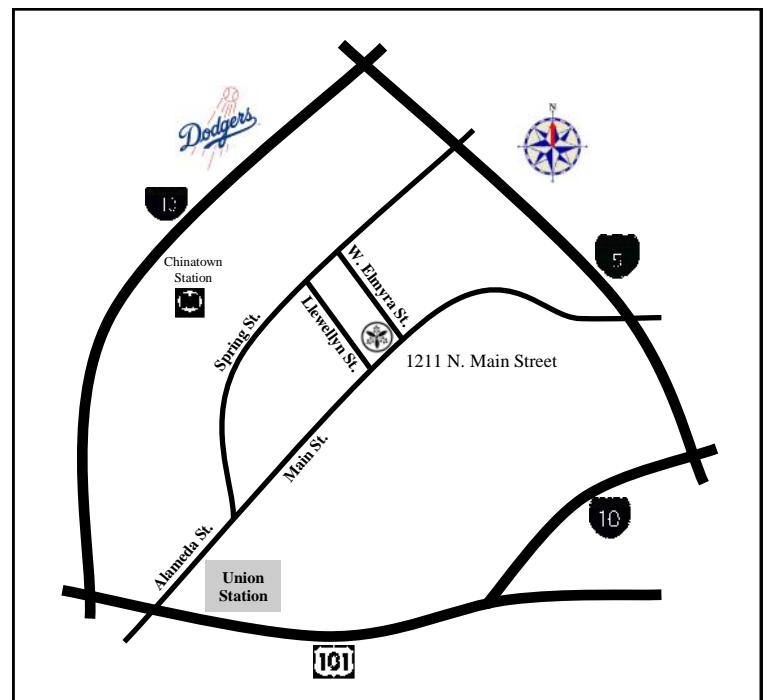
## Sundays

7:45-8:45 AM

## Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM (Bokken Practice)  
7:30-8:30 PM

No classes on the last weekend of the month.



## Finding Our Dojo



We are located at

1211 N. Main Street

Los Angeles, CA 90012

Telephone: (323) 225-1424

E-mail: [info@aikidocenterla.com](mailto:info@aikidocenterla.com)

We are across the street and one block northwest from  
the Chinatown Metro Station.

**The entrance is on Elmyra Street.**

**No appointment necessary to watch classes or join:**

You are welcome to visit us any time during any of our  
Open or Fundamentals classes. Please come early.