



The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

道の為、世の為、人の為 合気道

The Aiki Dojo

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Los Angeles Sword & Swordsmanship Society Kenshinkai
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Reverend Kensho Furuya
April 25, 1948 – March 6, 2007

Sensei Memorial by Gary Myers Iaido Chief Instructor

There's not a day that goes by that I don't think of Sensei. Each day I put on the watch he gave me for my birthday, ten years ago. Each morning when I make my coffee, I open the coffee canister he gave me. One could say that he helps keep me alert and on schedule each day. It's difficult to think of just a single remembrance of Sensei since he had so much of an influence on my life. We both had a passion for Japanese antiques, so it was in part through his encouragement that I'm in the Japanese antique business. Some of my favorite conversations over dinner with Sensei were about art, swords and Japanese movies

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Haru o hete, hana no sakari ni Aiki tsutsu. Omoide oki, waga mi nari keru.

*Each spring I come here to become one
with the blossoming flowers.
My body thus has become just so many memories.*

Hagakure ni chiritodomarereru, Hana nomi zo...

*Hidden away under the leaves,
one flower still remains...*

Saigo, 12th Century

In the Dojo by David Ito Aikido Chief Instructor

March 6th marks the second anniversary of Sensei's passing. Like most people, it is hard for me to believe Sensei is gone. Although Sensei has passed on physically, his affect spiritually lives on with us. I am continually amazed at the impact that Sensei had on so many people – not only in our dojo, but worldwide as well. People still contact us about his passing and share stories about his lasting influence on them.

I studied under Sensei for 17 years; I assisted him on numerous Aikido-related events; I shared many meals with him; I was also lucky enough to have had the opportunity to accompany him on seemingly mundane everyday tasks, appointments and errands.

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Footsteps

*by Santiago Garcia Almaraz, Aikido 4th Dan
Chief instructor, Aikido Kodokai*

Two years have passed since Sensei left us, but I believe that many of us continue to see him in each class and in the students we teach in our schools. Perhaps for the branch dojos like mine it may feel different, but I sometimes have the sensation that Sensei still lives and teaches classes in his beloved dojo in Los Angeles, enjoying the friendly company of his students. At least this is how I like to remember it. Every day that I wear my keikogi and hakama, I am trying to follow in Sensei's footsteps. It is a path that feels so hard at times; it is a way full of sacrifices.

Lamentably, as human beings we only value what we have when we no longer have it. This realization happens in all aspects of our lives: we complain about our job, but when they dismiss us, it no longer seems such an inconvenience; we often get disgusted with our significant others but when we separate, in the lonely time of reflection that follows, the things that angered us no longer seem so serious, they lose their importance when we hold them up beside the person we love who has since gone.

I always greatly respected Sensei as my teacher, but I do so even

more now that he is no longer there to guide me on this difficult way. Sometimes when I visited ACLA I heard students complain about how hard or demanding Sensei was; nowadays I am sure that these same students would love to hear Sensei chastise or correct them. If the miracle would only happen, they would never complain again.



We must learn to value what we have in every moment, since we do not know what the next moment will bring. In these times we are anxious to see that everything happens tomorrow. We fill our heads with dreams of future actions and waste the gifts that the present moment offers to us. The legacy that Sensei has left us is not for us alone; it is also for those who follow us, and those who follow them, and on and on. Thus we have the responsibility to keep Sensei's legacy alive and pass it along as pure and intact as we can.

To all the ACLA students who work day to day in the dojo practicing, in administration, cleaning: you have the privilege, honor, and responsibility to contribute to something special and incredible. Maintain the legacy of Sensei's lessons. It is a hard way and full of pitfalls, but between us all we can and will make Sensei proud, wherever he is.

Sensei, we will remember you always. Thank you very much.

Lunch to Latenite

by Ken Watanabe, Aikido 5th Dan, Iaido 5th Dan

When Sensei was alive he was an imposing authority figure to the students in the dojo. I'm 6'1" and he barely came up to my shoulder, but the height gap made no difference to me. When he wore his uniform and I took his ukemi, he seemed larger than life. It was only until I saw a photo of us together when I realized how short he was compared to me.

Sensei was known to possess an encyclopedic knowledge of Japanese culture, particularly anything having to do with swords, the samurai, Japanese martial arts (or fighting arts in general), and I don't think that any of us, his old students, could ever imagine attaining that level of expertise. He epitomized the image of a martial arts teacher, ever-vigilant with a trained eye that could catch the smallest error. His dedication to the dojo through its many trials seemed to make him superhuman. Sensei was a rare person, and I think that any of us who studied under him can count ourselves fortunate.

Years ago, I was driving with Sensei through Hollywood, near the intersection of Sunset Boulevard and Fountain Avenue and

both of us caught sight of a restaurant's name. Then I heard Sensei ask, "What's 'Lunch to Latin-ette'?" The only reply I could give was, "Uh, Sensei? That's 'Late-NITE'," and he burst out laughing at himself. Today, Lunch to Latenite is known as The Kitchen, one of the restaurants we used to frequent, and I remember the "Latenette" incident as one of our inside jokes, usually brought up by me (when Sensei was in a good mood, of course).



*Sensei with Mark Ty, Ken Watanabe,
Jun Watanabe, and Carol Tanita*

Even the founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, once told a few students something to the effect of, "What? Did you think I was a god?" He had come out from between classes to catch a quick snack from a noodle vendor parked in front of Hombu Dojo, and when he forgot his change, the students sort of looked at O'Sensei in disbelief; O'Sensei forgetting his change? Of course, O'Sensei, being god-LIKE, read their minds and gave them that answer.

Even after his death, most of us are still in awe of Sensei and how, through tireless effort, he molded us into the Aikido and Iaido practitioners we are today. He was a strict taskmaster, yet possessed this contagious sense of humor. He was not only a great teacher, but also a great human being.



O'Sensei Memorial Seminar

April 24-26, 2009

Guest Instructors:

Kei Izawa, Aikikai Tanshinjuku
Yasumasa Itoh, Aikido Tekkojuku Boston

Everyone is invited!

Schedule

Friday April 24th

5:15 PM: Bill Allen, Aikido 2nd Dan
6:30 PM: Yasumasa Itoh, Aikido 6th Dan

Saturday April 25th

8:00-9:00 AM: Gary Myers, Iaido 6th Dan (intro to Iaido)
9:15-10:00 AM: David Ito, Aikido 4th Dan
10:10-11:00 AM: Yasumasa Itoh, Aikido 6th Dan
11:10 AM-12:00 PM: Kei Izawa, Aikido 5th Dan
12:00-2:00 PM: LUNCH
12:00-1:15 PM: Meditation (optional)
2:00-2:50 PM: Santiago Garcia Almaraz, Aikido 4th Dan
3:00-3:50 PM: Tom Williams, Aikido 4th Dan
6:00 PM: Welcome party in the dojo

Sunday April 26th

8:00-9:00 AM: Ken Watanabe, Aikido 5th Dan (intro to Jo)
9:15-10:00 AM: David Ito, Aikido 4th Dan
10:00-11:00 AM: O'Sensei memorial Service
11:10 AM-12:00 PM: Kei Izawa, Aikido 5th Dan
12:00-2:00 PM: LUNCH
2:00-3:00 PM: Yasumasa Itoh, Aikido 6th Dan
3:00-4:00 PM: James Doi, Aikido 5th Dan

**Schedule is subject to change without notice*

*"If we didn't have a soul,
we would always be 'right'."*

~Reverend Kensho Furuya



Branch Dojos

Hacienda La Puente Aikikai

Hacienda Heights, California
Chief Instructor: Tom Williams

Aikido Kodokai

Salamanca, Spain
Chief Instructor: Santiago Garcia Almaraz
www.kodokai.com

Veracruz Aikikai

Veracruz, Mexico
Chief Instructors:
Dr. Jose Roberto Magallanes Molina
Dr. Alvaro Rodolfo Hernandez Meza
www.veracruz-aikikai.com

Aikido Renbukai of Arizona

Surprise, Arizona
Chief Instructor: Michael Van Ruth
www.aikidorenbukai.com

Moriyama Sensei Visit

May 27-31, 2009

Moriyama Sensei, 7th Dan is the Chief Instructor of Pearl City Aikido Dojo located on the island of Oahu. He has been studying Aikido since the early 1950s.

Everyone is invited!



Aikido
Hawaii

Special thanks to Mark Ehrlich for editing all the articles!



Lone Sword Against the Cold Cold Sky

by Mark Ehrlich, Aikido 2nd Kyu

The weather has turned rather chilly; February has seen the City of Angels pelted with rain hurled down from looming masses of dark cloud. The show never lasts long, though. Some stiff wind that launched from, say, the shores of the Great Lakes always sweeps in and scours the sky, revealing a high blue dome that in the blustery air looks cold and brittle, like porcelain. Yet beneath the sky, so much else in the world feels fragile to me as I hustle to the office, my hands balled up into fists, burrowed deep in my pockets for warmth, with the mercury poised just below 50 degrees Fahrenheit – a temperature that most of the rest of North America, steeped in sub-zero temperatures with wind chill factors to boot, would welcome with open arms and a sigh of relief. I think about Sensei a lot these days.

This bit of weather reminds me of how Sensei often played the role of dojo almanac. Through his daily messages we might learn that the nights had become too hot to sleep; sometimes, as in a few of his last notices, it became so cold in the dojo at night that Sensei would see his breath as he hunched shivering next to a small space heater, working as always into the wee hours – editing the newsletter, writing his daily messages, posting to his on-line discussion group, planning the next annual seminar, checking up on an absent student.

The yudansha at ACLA had the good fortune to study under Sensei for years, and so have learned things I will likely never know as a martial artist. I notice that I've become greedy around them; I'll read their recollections in this issue or prick up my ears as they chat amongst themselves for that very reason, eagerly seeking some tidbit that might illuminate the path I've chosen to follow, some clue that will make my daily frustration with my shortcomings easier to bear. At times, the fact that I also briefly studied under Sensei feels like cold comfort; I wanted to learn as much from him as he would care to teach me. Perhaps, in the end, that happened, but this possibility does nothing to diminish my sense of loss.

Teachers like Sensei have the biggest impact on our development, those who raised us aside, because they prompt our self-discovery. By hook or by crook, they get us to trace the outlines of who we are and what defines our character. When we face tough choices, our relationship with them might result in gentle counsel, or a rough shove off whatever pier we've built and headlong into the unknown. Both strategies have their place; both can make us stronger and guide us as we make our way in the world. Yet when your world is the Way, I imagine the teacher's impact becomes magnified, if only because the talk and the walk amount to the same thing, or will one day (we hope). Thinking along these lines, it seems hardly surprising that we who knew Sensei even a little still find him a force in our daily lives, the voice in our heads that echoes relentlessly. Hence his admonition: *Always act as if your teacher is watching.* It makes sense: Sensei saw everything, still does.

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Sensei in the 1970s

Sensei Memorial continued from page 1...

Of course Sensei always made a lasting first impression on people and I have often recounted my first meeting with him. The only thing I will mention here was his response to me when I asked if it would be disadvantageous learning Iaido being left-handed. His response, "the secret of Iaido is in the left hand," is what I now tell new students on their first day. I continually try to be the conduit of his instruction as he was for his teachers. At the beginning of each class when I bow to the kamiza, I ask for his guidance in my teaching.

Sensei's life was teaching martial arts, so it is only natural that life and martial arts lessons were intertwined. The discipline to learn martial arts was to be carried over to the rest of our lives. When he felt there was a disconnect between them, he would let us know in no uncertain terms. As I said at his funeral service, Sensei believed that everyone had the capacity to learn and to better themselves. He asked more of us than we sometimes asked of ourselves and he made sure we questioned why this was so. He was uncompromising in his principles of teaching. I am sure that if he had one regret it would be that he did not have enough time to teach us more: I know it is my regret. However, as Reverend Kojima has often said, Sensei is still with us as we continue his teachings in our teaching and our practice.



Sensei in front of Hombu Dojo in 1969



*Sensei with Karate Shihan
Fumio Demura*

When Sensei Laughed

by William Allen, Aikido 2nd Dan

The older students in the dojo all learned a great deal from Sensei, and it is very common for us to recount stories of him. Usually these stories point out Sensei's strictness, or how demanding he was as an instructor, or how idiosyncratic he could sometimes be. I tend to relate those kinds of stories because they may interest, even entertain, people who have never met him. Sometimes they can sound like so-called war stories about how I lived through a particular incident when I upset Sensei or disappointed him. Personally, I found it hard to be myself around Sensei. He had a way of keeping me on my guard, and he always noticed when it was down. If I was the slightest bit inattentive or careless, there was usually a quick reprimand, or perhaps even a slap, coming to shock me to attention. He was always trying so hard to make me better that there was no way I could remain myself.

To be honest, there were many times that I felt Sensei was too hard on people, many times that I disagreed with him, and many times that I was really angry at him. Through all of that, I remained a devout student because, despite the negative feelings I frequently confronted, I found Aikido as taught by Sensei to be one of the most fulfilling things I had ever attempted. In one of his daily messages Sensei once wrote something like, "You may look at me and see a fat old man, but it is really a fat tiger waiting for his next meal to come to him. You want a master who spouts beautiful wisdom, but you get a cranky perfectionist who belittles your lack of technique and points out your slightest mistakes." I would say that Sensei's self-description was pretty much on the mark. I asked him once if he had tried other techniques for teaching, and he told me he had studied and tried many different approaches, but the only one that really worked was the traditional method of making students fear the teacher's wrath, and occasionally giving out a small compliment. Then he laughed.

Sensei laughed a lot. Partly, his laughter was a way of communicating the fact that he was joking, partly he found his own eccentricities and behaviors laughable. When I was a new student, he was so serious about martial arts that I found it easy to believe he was equally serious about everything, but he did like to laugh and joke when he spent time with people outside of the dojo. Probably every senior student can tell a story about Sensei's unique sense of humor. I really only remember one joke (that I made) that he seemed to find very funny. He was relating how upset he was about some situation, and how he had such an argument with all of the people involved, and now everyone was angry at him. I just responded quietly, "Yes, well, you're always the diplomat." He stared at me for a second, then just began laughing.

Sensei, more than any other person I have known, defined himself through the martial arts. His own technique was very, very

good, and he demanded a lot from each of his students. The students' quality was the direct result of Sensei's knowledge of martial arts, and his ability to transmit that knowledge. If you gave a poor account of yourself while representing the dojo, then you would have to spend at least a few days staying out of Sensei's way after the initial lecture and reprimand. On the other hand, nothing made Sensei happier than when he received a good report about a student. I never saw Sensei more proud than when Mark Ty was allowed to join Third Doshu's advanced seminar at Hombu Dojo. (I can only imagine the paces Mark was put through before attending those classes.) Once, when I came back from visiting another dojo, Sensei asked me how it went. I replied that nobody could believe that I had studied Aikido for only three years. "Yeah," he responded, "you just don't realize the value of the instructions you get here!" He was in a good mood for a few days after that.

A Funny Ode to Aikido

by Kensho Furuya

I come, I go,
Where nobody knows,

I'm here, I'm not,
I am never caught,

I'm up, I'm down,
I'm still not found

I'm front, I'm back,
I give no slack,

Today, tomorrow,
It's only you to sorrow!

I pin, I throw,
It's Aikido!

Editor's note: Sensei posted this poem to Aikiweb's Silly Poem forum on 10/9/2003

After Class

by Eric Russell, Aikido 2nd Dan

One of Sensei's characteristics that I remember most fondly was something that was rarely seen on the mat – his sense of humor. The times spent after class while Sensei sat on the blue mats near the entryway will stick with me forever. He'd reminisce about his daily activities and there was always a quirk that happened along the way, something that perhaps only his ever-attentive mind and eyes seemed to catch, or some minor occurrence in his astounding history that he amazingly remembered. Interspersed in his storytelling would always be a pause with a puzzling look on his face, expressing even further insight. These stories and his take on them are so vivid that I sit here chuckling at this very moment.



Two Centimeters

by Steven Shaw, Aikido 2nd Dan

Sensei was probably the most exact person I'd ever met. I always liked everything to be perfect for him, and I always tried to make it so, even though I fell short repeatedly. I tried always to be early for class, to clean every speck in the alley, especially the cigarette butts flung carelessly to the ground by uncaring consumers of disease and addiction. I wanted all the evidence of this metaphor for all our societal ills to be placed in its proper receptacle, the trash. Those things sullyng the sacred space of our dojo and the home of my teacher must be removed. I wanted to ensure that Sensei had every opportunity to bask in the illumination so that he may better shed light on the paths of his students. "Why should Sensei be distracted by the things which disgust me?" Clearing myself of distractions so I could better focus on my training was what I owed him, and in return he taught me more about myself than I knew there was to learn.

What Sensei taught me more than anything was precision. I am not saying I perform with precision, but that he taught me what it was. Precision is the exactness of two centimeters. One Saturday morning as the sun's rays illuminated the mats through the skylights, we trained in Iaido. Sensei taught a smaller novice group, to which I belonged, on one side of the mat while Myers Sensei led the advanced group on the other side. Sensei had each of us go through *Inyoshintai*, and when I finished the second *nukitsuke* he said, "Stop." I held my breath, anticipating what was to come next, my insecurity jumped to corrections. I remained in the position in which I had stopped,



frozen in body as my mind watched and perceived Sensei inspecting and moving around me. Between his thumb and forefinger he grasped the tip of my sword and moved it two centimeters toward the target, a projection of my self. "There. That's right."

I had never held myself to such an exacting standard before. I have goals of what my ultimate self would be, but the ultimate self is an ideal that because of its perfection and unobtainable nature, I allow myself to fall short out of self-preservation. I had done this repeatedly in my life, allowing myself not to live up to my ideals, but Sensei held me to his ideals, the ideals of his teachers, and the ideals of their teachers. In this way, he not only lifted me to a higher self, but also integrated the ideals and standards of his teachers into my "Ultimate Self." He showed me the mirror and held me to the standard so that I may know the importance of two centimeters and the precision that it takes to be my best. Since then, I have tried with all my being to hold myself to the standards set by my teachers. I do not always measure up, and that is something I must be at peace with, but I know what the measure is. By knowing the measure I do not fumble in the darkness without direction, but move, instead, toward the beam of light that was Sensei's life and our relationship as teacher and student by allowing Sensei's light to pass through me to those who come to train with me and learn to measure themselves against the ideals of our teachers.

"Students get everything handed to them on a silver platter - yet they have no awareness that they must, in turn, serve others with this same silver platter."

~Reverend Kensho Furuya



Sensei teaching at Pasadena Buddhist church in the 1970s



Sensei demonstrating at Yaohan plaza



Sensei with Suganuma Sensei



In the Dojo continued from page 1 ...



I had the chance to learn a great deal from Sensei, but wasted it daydreaming or counting the minutes until I could go home. I let my selfish ego get in the way of my training. In Japanese, you would

describe such behavior as *mottainai*, which means to be wasteful of resources, time, opportunities, or food. My wastefulness leaves me feeling like I missed out on so much. One of Sensei's favorite sayings – *the moment has passed* – perfectly describes how I feel. Not unlike most people, I wish I could have had much more time with him, especially now since I daydreamed away my opportunity. So now, I have to try to catch up. Every day, I try to read at least one chapter out of *Kodo*. If I have time, I watch a few minutes of Sensei's videos. I feel like it really does help me stay on track. I hang on, hoping to find a morsel or nugget of wisdom in his writings or videos that I somehow missed before. I begin to understand now what it means to be a teacher, and I look to Sensei and his writings for guidance.

I have discovered something interesting about *Kodo*. The way Sensei wrote each chapter fascinates me: they all seem to speak directly to me and I am sure other people feel the same way too, because it reads as if he reaches out to me through *Kodo*. By some strange means the reader becomes part of the book; you can see yourself in each one of the chapters. Consequently, each section plays some type of role in my life, so I try earnestly to learn what I am reading.

I'd like to share one instance of this effect. A couple of years before Sensei passed away, Isoyama Sensei, whom Sensei always held in the highest regard, visited the Los Angeles area to teach a seminar. Sensei and I attended the seminar along with some of our other students. At the seminar, even though he suffered from a great number of health problems, Sensei respectfully participated in Isoyama Sensei's class. We were all really surprised at this, but we just continued to train. Sensei diligently trained and sat seiza, even with his bad knee. We could tell that he was in pain, but to everyone else he seemed to be enjoying himself.

During one of the breaks, I noticed that Sensei had given his hakama to one of Isoyama Sensei's students whose own hakama had torn. Without thinking, I said, "I have a spare hakama in my car, let me go get it." Sensei tried to dissuade me, but I insisted. When I returned with the hakama, Sensei tried to deter me and we started to argue. I said, "He shouldn't be wearing your hakama. Here, give him mine!" To me, since that student was only shodan and Sensei was 6th Dan, it should have been impolite for him to wear Sensei's hakama. I made a big stink about it, but finally gave into Sensei and then stormed off. After class, I immediately went over to Isoyama Sensei's student and insisted on fixing his torn hakama and returned it the next day, mended

good as new.

At lunch that day, Sensei and I got into a huge argument over the hakama. I still could not understand why he was so adamant about letting this student wear his hakama and I wouldn't change my position. He rebuked me and said, "You always think you are right and that you know everything." For a long time I did think I was right, until years later while I was at a seminar where a friend brought me a nice dessert made with a cream cheese frosting. As I started to eat it, one of the students ran up and said, "You can't eat that, you are allergic to milk." My friend felt bad and I was embarrassed.

Later, as I was casually reading the chapter in *Kodo* about the right relationship between the teacher and the student, I realized my mistake those many years ago. The torn hakama was not the issue at hand. The issue really was Sensei's relationship to Isoyama Sensei and the respect my teacher had for the eminent Shihan. It was obvious to everyone that Sensei could not physically practice, but he struggled to keep going out of respect. When Sensei saw that student rip his hakama, he had the perfect opportunity to excuse himself from the mat without embarrassing himself or Isoyama Sensei. Helping the unfortunate student also provided Sensei with a graceful exit; although everyone knew that he could not continue, they could give him a gracious pass. This is prototypical Japanese behavior. However, that rescue never happened because I exposed Sensei, made a fuss over the hakama, and to make matters worse, I returned the freshly-repaired hakama the next day.

Sensei's article struck a chord with me when he wrote that students should safeguard the trust between the student and the teacher by maintaining proper etiquette, manners, and attitudes at all times. At the time, I thought that I was right and I couldn't trust that my teacher might really be right. Sometimes when we think we are right we must look at the situation from the other person's point of view. I let my ego get in the way of trusting my teacher.

Kodo maps out how we might best live our lives as teachers or students of the martial arts. It is not written in the typical self-help book format; no one tells you what to do step by step. Instead, *Kodo* follows a more ancient format that portrays correct behavior in narrative story. The pitfalls of others serve as our road signs to change and ultimately to success. I cannot tell you how many times I have opened *Kodo* to some random page and the story somehow directly related to my life at that moment.

Sometimes, I like to wonder if Sensei wrote or picked out certain stories for certain people. My picture appears in the book doing suwari waza and I wonder if he put that picture in there so that I would read that specific chapter. Is it some type of cryptic lesson for me? I like to think so, and I have looked at the other pictures and articles and tried to match the article with the student. It really does make you think. In any case, I imagine that *Kodo* will become one of those books, like *Hagakure* or *The Unfettered Mind*, that people will read generation after generation. I hope they do.



Effort and Energy

by Jacob Sisk, Aikido Shodan

Recently I attended a friend’s wedding, and he and his soon-to-be bride asked me to read a poem as part of the ceremony. I am very fearful of public speaking – it generally makes me very anxious. I practiced reading the poem a few times, but it was rather a tongue twister (Ogden Nash’s “Tin Wedding Whistle”, full of bad puns and funny mispronunciations) and I didn’t make much improvement.

A few hours prior to the wedding, I began my usual panic, and began to think of how Sensei wrote, and how it felt to read his writing. As Mark Ehrlich put it to me long ago, everyone had a “proprietary” relationship with Sensei – people experienced Sensei intensely personally. It is true of his writing, too. When I read much of what he had written, I feel like he is writing just to me. In that written connection, I always feel like Sensei was pouring his learning and his good will and his optimism and that I (the reader) could one day soon become my best possible self, and that he was grateful for the chance to show me how to become it.

I decided that in my recitation, I would try to make the wedding recipients feel the way I felt when I read Sensei’s writing, and that what I had to do was to pour all of my good will and energy into the reading, the way Sensei did in his writing. I figured that if I did this, then it wouldn’t matter if I stumbled over a word, or read a line twice by mistake.

And so it was! I read the poem flawlessly (I am told), and countless wedding guests thanked me for my reading afterwards. It became a very important part of the ceremony, and I like to think that I was able to give the bride and groom a great gift.

A few days later, I was talking to Ito Sensei about it, and how it reminded me of something or another Sensei had written about and talked about, about how to make each encounter with another human being mean the most. Ito Sensei has a far better memory than I do, and reminded me of *Ichi-go ichi-e* from Tea Ceremony. On that subject, Sensei wrote once:

We are taught to have the spirit that “the tea one makes will be the last cup of tea you will ever make for your guest or friend. One must put his entire effort and energy into this one cup of tea, because it will be his last and therefore must be the best cup of tea he will ever drink.”

I didn’t “get” the lesson when I read this, years before. I didn’t even remember the name or the idea. I only “got” the lesson by remembering Sensei’s actions themselves – how it felt to read his writing, or how he would give his thanks for a nice meal or an errand with a little gift or snack or a kind e-mail. And what a powerful lesson! Sensei’s very words and actions were the living embodiment of this lesson, which I only began to understand years later. Perhaps this is why Sensei’s dealings with others felt “proprietary” – he was able to treat each conversation like that final cup of tea and truly lived the lessons that he tried so hard to teach. Indeed, the lesson was in how he wrote, not necessarily what he wrote. He was his own best example.

Now, that last cup of tea is long over. I live far away, and I struggle to conclude the lessons that Sensei helped me to begin. I wonder what other lessons he tried to teach with his words that I will one day finally learn by remembering his actions. I sure do miss him, but I am thankful when he reaches out of the past and corrects my future.

Here today and gone tomorrow, they say,
But gone is gone as gone can be.
Where do my teachers go?
To another happier place I pray. . .
To teach again their great knowledge which I will never hear again.
When my times comes too,
Please bury me to face my masters of those wonderful days of past,
So I will have no trouble to find them,
When I awake in another place. . .
~Reverend Kensho Furuya

Editor’s note: Sensei posted this poem to Aikiweb after learning that Arikawa Sensei had passed away. 10/19/2003



*Kisshomaru Ueshiba
with Sensei*



Sensei's Impact

*by Mike Van Ruth, Aikido 2nd Dan
Chief Instructor, Aikido Renbukai*

How does anyone measure the impact that one person can have on another's life? How deeply and far-reaching does one person's influence make itself felt in our actions, character, life choices, or even down to the way we walk and breathe?

Whether one, as a student at ACLA, realizes it or not, we all have been molded to some degree by Sensei's teachings. You may have not studied under Sensei directly, but you are still affected by the legacy that is left behind in those students who did, just as millions have been touched by the Founder's teachings, but were not even born during his lifetime.

We can all agree that our Aikido training, the techniques we practice and how we practice them, is a direct result of Sensei's instruction. His verbal explanations, physical demonstration, and continual correction shaped his students' Aikido, leaving an indelible mark on them.

Sensei also used teaching methods that may have seemed unorthodox by Western standards, which explains why many of his teachings may not be as easily recognizable. Many of his teachings were not verbalized; Sensei would instead foster certain training conditions that would guide students toward a particular mental and physical understanding, forcing the students to focus, pay attention to detail, push beyond their limits, or to increase their awareness of their surroundings and themselves.

I remember training in a crowded dojo. Sensei would walk about on the mat, and even though I was focusing on the training at hand, I had to keep a constant mental note of where he was. The last thing I wanted to do is throw my uke into him or be the uke that rolled into him. The dojo we trained in was surrounded by fragile antiques, ceramics, and shoji screens. One wrong move could result in damage to those items and a stern scolding.

Our training didn't just begin and end in the dojo. Going out to lunch with Sensei with a group of students or entertaining a special guest of the dojo was a lesson on etiquette and how to conduct yourself. The focus was on humility, hospitality, and treating others with respect and sincerity. Sensei's teachings extended beyond the art of Aikido to encompass how to develop ourselves as individuals.

So, how far-reaching are Sensei's teachings? I don't think anyone can fully answer that question. All we can do as his students is have gratitude and honor him with continuing his legacy and hold on strong to the core values that made Sensei's dojo so special. Even as I teach in Arizona, I don't consider it my dojo. I am still Sensei's student. I honor him by continuing his Aikido and his values, as ACLA does. May we all be grateful for and honor him with our continued training. In doing so, Sensei will continue to live on in all of us.



Sensei with Yoshikazu Fujimoto and Johnny Mori

Sensei and Attitude

by Jeff Wheeler, Iaido 3rd Dan

Sensei devoted the majority of his life and energies to preserving and passing on the arts of Aikido and Iaido. He truly valued as precious the sacrifice, hard training and devotion of those who came before him and who had worked so diligently to pass their knowledge to our generation.

Many years ago, as a new Iaido student of Sensei's, I remember occasions when he would lament that, in many ways, the spirit and essence of martial arts were steadily

being eroded in our modern age. In our generation, with its hard focus on material gain and the myriad pressures such focus creates, many teachers fall into the trap of treating their dojos much like any other business, often indulging the egos and attitudes of students, much like a merchant who asserts that the customer is always right. Some teachers even indulge their own egos by discarding techniques that had been carefully preserved and transmitted from teacher to student for centuries. I think what bothered Sensei most, however, was perhaps the attitudes that many teachers and students now evidence in their martial arts practice.

Attitude was important to Sensei. Regardless of any pressures, Sensei had no tolerance for an incorrect attitude in his students. He knew very well that when ego and self-centeredness were present, learning stopped. As an example, I remember him recounting a phone conversation with a prospective student who at some point asked the question, "If I study at your school, how long will it take for me to get a black belt?" "Five years," was Sensei's response. Later in the conversation the question was raised again - "How long will it take me to get a black belt?" "Ten years," Sensei advised. Some minutes later the question was once again raised - "How long do I have to train at your dojo to get a black belt?" This time Sensei declared, "Twenty years!" Missing the point entirely and no doubt incredulous at this answer, the caller wasn't heard from again.

We are now approaching two years since Sensei's passing and as we continue to move forward I see everywhere in our dojo the attitudes he worked tirelessly to instill: respect for others, service, humility, sincere dedication to training, and so much more. I like to believe that Sensei's spirit sees us still, and is pleased.

Our ongoing challenge now is not only to carry forward the purity of technique he taught and insisted on, but also to continue to work just as carefully to engender within ourselves the attitudes that truly elevate each of our inner beings as well as the arts Sensei passed to us.

"Everyone makes mistakes. We make them all the time. Our job is to correct and learn from our mistakes."

~Reverend Kensho Furuya



Four-Hour Lunches

by Jake La Botz, Aikido Shodan

Sensei, as anyone will attest, was a great lover of food. He knew every restaurant within a 10-mile radius of the dojo. When Sensei got to know and trust students, he would eventually invite them out to eat with him.

I had been at the dojo for about a year or so the first time I was invited to tag along to eat with a group of students after class. Not sure how to act in the presence of the great teacher, I kept my mouth shut and watched how his closest disciples acted. There was a definite sense that protocol and etiquette were somewhat looser at dinner than at the dojo, but Sensei still carried the gravitas of being Sensei. It was clear that there existed a precarious invisible line between *friend* and *student* that one needed to tread carefully.

Sensei expected his senior students to undertake responsibilities at the dojo. As I progressed towards senior status, Sensei began to ask me to perform tasks for him. Half-jokingly, he would suggest that “artist-types”, like me, weren’t much good for ordinary work, so one of the tasks I was given was to come by the dojo and massage him occasionally. He seemed to think that artists have “intelligent hands”. I don’t know if I was any good as a masseur, but I enjoyed getting to know Sensei better.

When I would come by to massage Sensei, he would be upstairs in his loft watching some obscure foreign horror movie, buying things on eBay, writing articles, answering questions from Aikido enthusiasts on the Internet, or talking long-distance in Japa-

nese. When he was ready we would go downstairs and I would do my best to employ my “intelligent hands” to their task. Sensei would almost always fall asleep.

After the massage, we would usually go out to eat at one of his favorite haunts. I particularly liked his unusual assortment of favorite Chinese restaurants. One was an old-time place in East LA that had a secret menu (items not listed) of Chinese-

American specialties from days gone by. Another place was a Shanghai-style restaurant in Alhambra. He also liked to go the cheap Hong Kong-style restaurants for breakfast ... beware the peanut butter French toast!

During these outings, which almost always lasted four hours, Sensei would tell stories about the old days: people he’d met, places he’d been, stories about other teachers and students. He had known and taught many famous people back in the 70s. There were sordid tales that involved movie people, cocaine ... leather pants! Sensei himself never did any drugs; his main addictions seemed to be food and collecting swords. I loved to listen to him. He had a great sense of humor. Sometimes I would forget he was Sensei and cross the invisible line, and sometimes he would allow this, to a certain point. Eventually the heavy hand would come down and he would remind me who he was.

I felt a deep connection being formed between Sensei and me as time went on, though perhaps it was not a typical friendship. We had a mutual love of film, Buddhism, and food, among other things. He was a most knowledgeable, interesting, and funny man. It goes without saying that he was also an incredible Aikido teacher. I only wish I could have gotten to know him better.



Sensei with Izawa Sensei

martial arts, and ultimately lived a solitary life in order to preserve this space he built and lived in, the dojo, so we as students could practice every day. He had the tenacity to continue to teach us traditional Hombu Aikido and etiquette, when the world around him was constantly changing and developing new ways to practice this martial art. I was very inspired by his way of thinking as a teacher, and in this way have been able to continue my practice for the past 14 years.

I think he passed on this strength to us, his students, so that we may continue to practice and preserve his teachings and the teachings of his masters before him. I am so grateful to be able to continue practice, and that the dojo remains and thrives in spite of the many great difficulties we have faced over the past two years. So every year when I see the plum blossoms in February, I know that the anniversary of Sensei’s passing is near, but I also know that there is great hope in the face of adversity in the blooming promise of Spring.



Blossoms

by Maria Murakawa, Aikido 2nd Dan

When the plum blossoms start blooming I can’t help but think of Sensei. When Sensei passed away two years ago, all the plum trees in Little Tokyo were in full bloom. Days after he left us I was walking along Second Street, still in shock over his sudden passing, and the only thing which consoled me at that moment were these flowers, at the tail end of their blossoming beauty.

In Japan the plum blossom symbolizes resilience and perseverance against all odds, because it blooms in the winter snow after all the other plants have shed their leaves, and it is the first to bloom before all other plants. In many ways this beautiful winter flower reminds me of Sensei, and what he taught us as his students. He lived by example as a teacher who put his students’ needs before his own, dedicated his life to the ancient way of





Sensei in the 1970s

Reflections on Sensei

by Carol Tanita, Aikido Shodan

It is hard to believe that it is already two years since our beloved Sensei passed away. So much has happened since then, with the move of the dojo, and finding its new home on Main Street. It seems like yesterday we had the dojo's 30th anniversary celebration. Sensei was so proud of the dojo and all of you.

I have not been able to practice Aikido for quite some time now, but the dojo has such a special place in my heart, and holds such wonderful memories for me. I think of all of you as family and I am grateful to be even a small part of such a wonderful place like the dojo. I look forward to coming back soon.

I think back to my first meeting and interactions with Sensei when he worked at the Bank of Tokyo almost 25 years ago, and the way he was so meticulous and thoughtful about the gifts he selected for his fellow workers and friends. Although we had a system of wrapping at the store, he would always make it a point that he wanted each and every package perfect. I did not know that he was practicing and teaching Aikido at the time, but I used to admire his sense of aesthetics and appreciation for the Japanese culture.

Later, my cousin Ken Watanabe decided to take instruction under Sensei, and this was when I learned that my bank customer happened to be his instructor. Watching the Aikido demonstrations at the Nisei Week and Higashi Honganji obon festivals left me in awe. Watching Ken doing Iaido and Aikido was one thing, but to watch that funny and shy bank customer performing such graceful yet powerful movements was an eye-opener!

Later, when Sensei and Ken performed a demonstration for *Sai-shin Dojo*, a Buddhist summer program for children, my son Nick was awed and inspired to try Aikido. Nick has come a long way since those days, and I am always grateful to Sensei and the members of the dojo for embracing Nick as their own. Sensei always encouraged Nick to practice, and he used to tell me that in his younger days he was also told that he had some educational challenges, but he was able to overcome them with determination and hard work. He wanted Nick to do the same. I look at where Nick is today, and I owe a lot of his successes to Sensei.

It was during this period when Nick moved up to adult class that Sensei encouraged me to practice Aikido. I did not think I could do it, and I think even my cousin Ken didn't think I could either. This marked the time when Sensei and I moved from being friends; he became my teacher, and I became his student. I was so used to joking with Sensei at the store that Ken had to reprimand me on the side. Over the years, I finally learned to speak only when spoken to. One of the many things I learned from Sensei was that if he pointed out my mistakes, or corrected me (numerous times), that was a good thing. If he never talked to me or pointed things out – *Oooh, you better watch out*. I was never more reminded of Japanese etiquette than when I started

Aikido.

I think all of us have some heartfelt memory of Sensei, but my fondest memories were the times we would go out to eat. He always had a taste for fine food, but the "good" food was always at the mom-and-pop places, or real dives. He would order, because he hated the fact that I ate healthy, saying I needed to eat more meat. He said I needed the meat for my Aikido, and that eating salad wasn't going to give me any stamina.

I remember his jokes: if I didn't laugh, he would get mad at me; if I told jokes, he said I wasn't funny. He wanted me to be more ladylike, but how can I be a lady in the dojo? I recall a lot of tears, I think because I had to swallow my pride. I didn't understand that all of this would make me a better student. It took time, a long time to learn and understand. Sensei gave me a scroll with the Japanese character that reads *Patience*. There are times I think he meant he had patience for me, not that I have patience. All of these memories were such important life lessons for me. I think I am a better person to have known Sensei. Even now, there are times I step into our new dojo, and I think, *What would Sensei be saying now? What would he be teaching us now? Where would we go eat next?*

I had the opportunity to visit the dojo for the first time this year for the *Kagami Biraki* and I was so happy to see Ito Sensei teaching the class, and to see so many of the same faces. I started to cry because I thought of Sensei, and in that moment, I think he was watching everyone practice, too.



"If you learn anything in this world, ...



... learn the value of life."

~Reverend Kensho Furuya



A Challenge

by James Bassett, *Aikido 1st Kyu*

To write something about Sensei that conveys deeply who he was, especially to people who were not his students, struck me in a powerful way, since I am always coming to understand him anew each day as his lessons return to guide me.

I imagine perhaps some newer students in the dojo grapple with the obvious impact that Sensei had, and continues to have, on all of his students; how he resonates in the teaching and life of the dojo, and by extension how we who studied under him all grappled in the same way with Sensei’s attempts to explain the impact and importance of his great many teachers. I believe that Sensei would support, if not our praise of and devotion to him, the development of a thorough understanding of the importance of one’s teachers. Often Sensei would speak of the importance of respect and proper form of relationship that could yield, perhaps imperceptibly and over time, a deeper and more valuable transmission of wisdom through practice – how to be a human being. There were many versions of this: the proper respect for one’s parents, for one’s teacher, and for one’s classmates, all of which create the conditions for learning and more subtle levels of understanding, and all of which could happen when motivated by generosity.

Sensei practiced all of these and some people were not prepared for his capacity for generosity. This remains to me one of his most astonishing characteristics. People are simply not prepared to have all of their faults (or even a few of them) pointed out!

How often we have to bite our tongues and mark our words, navigating a labyrinth of possible outcomes and hidden repercussions! Bracing for backlash and every form of unintended consequence, this web of half-truths branches on and on like some kind of trap. Sensei was unafraid to deliver the wake up call, however, and struggled because of it. After the initial shock and grappling with the truth of Sensei’s observations, one had to make a decision: face your newfound self-knowledge or turn away in denial and assorted excuses. His selflessness could be measured in part by the struggles of a dojo without the diversions of so-called “deals” and other forms of coercion gauged to maintain membership. You came to the dojo, practiced hard and took your licks. It was straightforward and unambiguous. You knew where you needed to be and what you needed to be doing. If you weren’t focused and running at full speed, you were challenged to make adjustments. If you didn’t give your partner a strong attack, it was pointed out. If you were “just being you” in the worst sense, you were notified. In this way, Sensei produced community. Everyone, in a certain sense, became unmasked in the dojo and given the opportunity to see who they really were through the mirror that was Sensei. The hierarchy and protocol, along with Sensei’s direct nature, provided an essential structure for one to cope with the challenges of practice and self-reflection.

This challenge makes for just a small part of the importance of Sensei as our teacher, especially in light of what he gave and encouraged us to give, and how it continues to be a creative force after his death. Sensei would ask, *Are you paying attention?* and *Do you understand?*, and while I would answer *Hai!*, I always knew I had a long way to go. Thank you, Sensei.



Sensei with IAF delegates at a demonstration in Long Beach, CA

*“To part from the Way is only the width of a single hair.
To return to the Way is a journey of ten thousand miles.”*

~Kodo: Ancient Ways

Thank You Sensei

by Alvaro R. Hernandez Meza, *Aikido 2nd Dan*
Co-Chief Instructor, Veracruz Aikikai

When I started the practice of martial arts, my primary concern was their physical aspect. However, while I was advancing in my practice, I began my search for the philosophical aspects of training. Teachers make little emphasis on this side of training because most of the arts like judo and karate are essentially competitive sports. Fifteen years later, I finally started to practice Aikido, which I believe is the martial art that follows the budo tradition. Even so, the teachers with whom I began my practice adhered to the same physical aspect of the art, neglecting its deeper more meaningful philosophy. By meeting Roberto, a friend and classmate, I had the opportunity to meet Sensei. He was both a renowned master of Aikido but also Zen monk too. Only then, did I meet my expectations of what a real sensei should be. It was an honor that he accepted me as his student through our dojo affiliation. His examples and daily writings are being kept alive thanks to his students. After Sensei’s death, they have become our teachers. I am grateful for the opportunity to have met Sensei who lives forever in my heart.



Sensei with members of Veracruz Aikikai

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Heart to Heart

by William Gillespie, Aikido 4th Dan

“While teaching class last evening Furuya Sensei collapsed and died....” Sitting at my desk in London reading David Ito’s e-mail, I wept – spontaneously, openly, sorrowfully – over the passing of my first Aikido teacher.

Meeting Sensei, becoming his student, serving as his deshi had changed my life for the better, forever. So many things I counted as good in my life had flowed from interacting with this extraordinary person years before. Now, he was gone. I had an immediate feeling of deep loss. If we had been able to meet once more, what would be said? What could be? Thank you (and there are seemingly countless ways to say it in Japanese) could not possibly begin to convey my feeling of gratitude.

Sensei was “experiential not conceptual,” as he often said about Aikido. Mere words are inadequate to explain him: the Sensei whom I experienced was not necessarily the same one whom others encountered, particularly at other points in his life or in other contexts. As for me, I can say that Sensei changed lives just as his teachers had changed his. This process has deep meaning and legitimate teachers deserve tremendous respect. Sensei (先生) – “preceding life” – connotes the person who goes before us on the path and who transmits knowledge gained from countless hours of self-sacrifice, both by that teacher and by those who came before that teacher, back to the original source.

Thanks to Sensei, I moved to Tokyo at the start of 1997 to train daily at Hombu Dojo. To this day, I am still at Hombu Dojo. For over a year I had no job, no commitments, only Aikido class: I trained three, four, or five times a day, starting with Second Doshu’s morning class; it was the same 6:30 a.m. class Sensei attended when he lived at Hombu Dojo in 1969 as a kenshusei. Sitting on the mat before Doshu’s class at that early hour, one cannot help but feel the deep debt owed to those who precede us. I can speak for myself at least in saying I do not possess gifted

vision, but the legendary English scientist Sir Isaac Newton had it right when he said, “If I have seen further, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants.” In fact, we all stand on the shoulders of our seniors, trying to see further.

Each time you walk into ACLA for class, it would serve you well to remember those who have gone before and that you have – in ways great or small – been entrusted to continue that journey based on the gift of all the journeys completed by others before you. Use your time wisely. As the sign said in the ACLA men’s changing room, “Not even a million dollars can buy back one minute of your life.”

However, it would be wrong to pen an overly serious note because Sensei’s sense of humor was one of his finest qualities:

“Did you hear about today’s special Nisei week demonstration?”
“No, Sensei.”
“Apparently an Aikido instructor is going to be attacked by the Nisei Queen and her Court and will skillfully defend himself . . . eventually.”

One day I accompanied Sensei to a lecture and demonstration for elementary students in Little Tokyo. The demonstration was fine. The lecture went well. The schoolteacher commented how quietly and attentively I had sat while Sensei spoke. What she didn’t know was that my feet were fast asleep. When I tried to stand to wave good-bye I nearly fell on my face. Sensei roared with laughter. Another time, after seeing and enjoying the movie *Braveheart*, with its famous “kilt flashing” scene before battle with the English, Sensei said to me, the proud son of Scots, “So you descend from a people who have failed to understand the benefits of underwear.”

I hear Sensei's voice in my head often. My wife and I split our time between London and Beijing each year; I help a Shihan with his dojo and have started another one. It is amazing how much Sensei’s words stick in my mind.

Continued on page 14...

Although I rise before the early morning sun,
My day does not start till the footsteps of my early students.
Even great music of classics I play day long,
Cannot match the sounds of ukemi on the mats.
After practice, and they leave for home,
Sleep does not come easy in this quiet dojo.

~Reverend Kensho Furuya

Editor’s note: Sensei posted this poem to Aikiweb on 10/25/2003



Isoyama Sensei (2nd from left), Sensei, Paulson Sensei and students



“Indeed, teachers should study more how to teach. Students should study more how to learn.”
~Reverend Kensho Furuya

Sensei’s Spirit

by Rey Espino, Aikido 2nd Dan

When I was a young man, an important ritual was to read Sensei’s monthly article for his “Ancient Ways” column published in *MA Training*. There in articles such as “Make Mistakes Correctly,” and “Tests of Time,” I learned of traditional values and an educational philosophy not seen by me before. Years later, those articles would be the basis for Sensei’s book, *Kodo: Ancient Ways*.

Right around the time of the book’s publishing Sensei also created his nine-volume instructional video series. I recall one year staying up all night watching equipment belonging to a movie company who happened to be shooting on the dojo premises. As soon as I got paid, I purchased the entire video set. Now many years later and no longer a young man (four kids old to be exact), I am glad to have access to Sensei’s writings. Through them, I recall his mind. I am glad to have Sensei’s instructional video series. Through it, I review his physical movement. Today, the seniors whom Sensei trained and the dojo he made are important resources. It is through those individuals and in this space that I have access to Sensei’s spirit.



Heart to Heart continued from page 13....

- Irimi: slide in!*
- Tenkan: turn!*
- Back straight. Chest open!*
- Cut down.*

*Just as it is; don’t insert your personality.
I am not here for your entertainment.*

Sensei possessed a rare combination of intellect and both natural and developed physical ability. (Ask James Doi how, as a university student, Sensei pinned a USC wrestler when the fellow told Sensei, “That stuff doesn’t work.” Ikkyo apparently did.) His teaching method was extraordinary. More often than not, martial arts teachers have more brawn than brains. Both traits are ideal: the pen complements the sword, and vice versa. Consider yourselves fortunate to have learned from such a uniquely gifted, educated, and trained person. I do.

I recall Sensei saying that when he trained in Iwama in 1969 so many things had been left untouched since the Founder’s passing. Students were still in such a shock. This neglect seemed to trouble him somewhat, though he clearly sympathized with everyone’s understandably deep loss. (He said too that he ducked into “the study” and copied the title of every book of O’Sensei’s he could find.) It was pleasing to read in your newsletter that despite the sudden loss of Sensei, ACLA members worked together so successfully to relocate the dojo. What a beautiful new space! Even in the face of loss, one must carry on. Undoubtedly

A Personal Note

by Tom Williams, Aikido 4th Dan
Chief Instructor, Hacienda La Puente Aikikai

It’s hard to talk about any lessons I learned while training with Sensei. Partially, I guess, I am still processing it all. But mostly, whatever I learned is personal and of little use to anyone else. I’d compare it to experiencing a hurricane. I’ve been through two of them; one a direct hit. Anything I could say about it wouldn’t come close to the actual experience. I will say that there are times when I am practicing or teaching in which I have a clear vision or feeling of Sensei’s technique. So, if you train with me at those times, you may get a direct transmission of Sensei’s lessons.

One thing I found, on a personal level, was that Sensei was often a thoughtful and considerate person. He once gave me a skin cream to use on the surgery site of a skin cancer that I had removed from my face. He found it on the Internet and ordered it for me. He felt it would help reduce scarring. I appreciated his concern. There were a number of other times when he extended himself on a personal level to me. I have very fond memories of those experiences.

Sensei is looking down, outwardly nitpicking at all your mistakes while inwardly smiling with pride.

I shin den shin (以心伝心) means heart-to-heart transmission. A rare and (for some) sacred way, it embodies the highest form of teaching. Find comfort that we can safely say Sensei passed on so much knowledge to his long-time students this way. Consider yourselves fortunate to have teachers and sempai like Ito Sensei, Meyers Sensei, James Doi, Ken Watanabe, and Kenny Furuya. I have seen a lot of Aikido now and some of it is good and some of it is, well, less so. In the spirit of ancient training methods, treat your sempai at ACLA with respect and “steal” what you can from each of them!

It was very sad to lose Sensei so suddenly and so much earlier than hoped. But with every death there is an opportunity to reflect on what you will do with the remainder of your life. Each of us in our own small way has the power to be extraordinary. We can affect those around us positively or negatively. Through training, study, and experience you can realize that you can choose daily, moment by moment, how you will interact with the world. Choose well. As the wise American author and humorist Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) said, “Let us endeavor to live that when we come to die even the undertaker will be sorry.” So strive to live that well and you will honor the teaching of Sensei ... and all those who have gone before you.



Aikido and Zen

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

I believe that fundamentally Aikido should be studied from the standpoint of Aikido, and therefore, I have always kept my studies in other martial arts and disciplines at a happy distance from my Aikido training and have only called upon them to enhance my understanding of Aikido but never to alter it. In the last three years, however, I have pursued my Zen studies quite wholeheartedly. I have had an interest in Zen for quite a few years now but recently it has come to have profound meaning for me and has become inextricably intertwined with my perspective of Aikido. At present, I find my Aikido and Zen training very compatible. Although I would not proselytize Zen in Aikido to my students or others; Zen, in many ways, has answered many questions for me and shaped a new perspective within me and my thinking. I hesitate to use the term “answer,” because they are more like distant glimmerings at the end of a long, dark tunnel.

We have probably all studied Zen, in one form or the other, at one time or the other, for all the same or similar reasons. I was searching for “enlightenment,” spiritual inspiration, focus, guidance, etc. I found inspiration and guidance through my Zen masters but, at the very same time, I discovered that these are exactly all the wrong reasons for entering into Zen training. A great Zen master, Sawaki Kodo Roshi once said, “The only reason for doing Zen is because you like Zen.” In other words, practicing Zen for “enlightenment,” inspiration, knowledge, insight, etc. are only selfish, one-sided motives of personal convenience which dilute or distort the actual practice of Zen. We should not seek out Zen as some kind of universal placebo but we should only “do” Zen.

In the same respect, I think we enter Aikido training for the same or similar reasons at first. We want to become strong, “macho,” we want to grasp KI, we want to throw people to the ground or cause them pain with some mysterious hold or lock. When I first started Aikido at a very young age, I wanted to become a great Aikido master but it took me nearly 30 years to realize what folly it was. We have basic human needs to affirm ourselves and our existences. We practice Aikido for a number of years, sometimes 10 years, 20 years and even 30 years or more, and then, unless we disillusion ourselves completely, we find that not much has really changed within ourselves or all around us. There is still fighting; there is still much suffering and there is still much conflict within ourselves and all around us.

Although we know deep down inside that this is so, we spend our entire lives avoiding, running away or fighting this reality. This, I think, creates a deep inner disappointment about our Aikido and

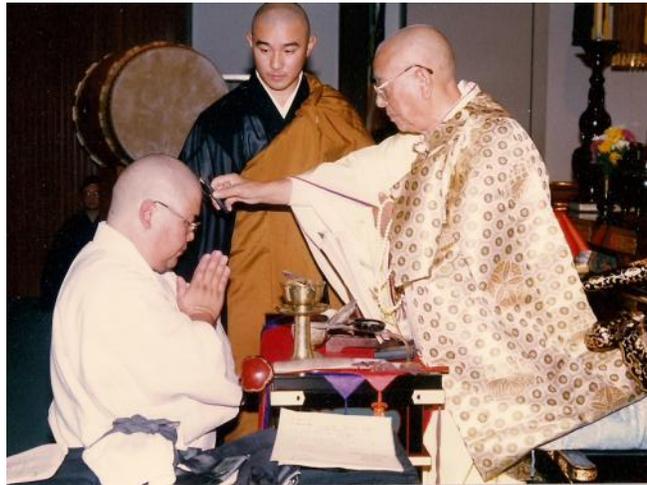
our lives. We think that Aikido can “solve” all of our problems and cure all of our ailments. This disappointment creates great desire for satisfaction or relief within ourselves and, as we try to satisfy this desire, we attach ourselves to power, fame, money, notoriety, etc. The list is endless. And as we realize that we cannot control the reality of our existences we try to control others. This leads to endless fighting and suffering. I do not believe this is the message of Aikido. It is said that “a contented man is never poor and a discontented man is never rich.” Once, Sawaki Roshi was asked, “What benefits have you received from Zen?” Sawaki replied, “I have practiced Zen for over 30 years and have received nothing.”

This is not a negative or dismal outlook to take. Sawaki Roshi meant that we should practice Zen for the sake of Zen itself. In the same respect, we may want to consider the possibility of practicing Aikido for the sake of Aikido itself without ulterior motives or selfish reasons.

Dogen (1100-1153), the founder of Soto Zen, wrote that Zen sitting is enlightenment itself. We continually fall into the state of “becoming” and we rarely are “what is.” In other words, we practice Zen “to become enlightened.” Or, we practice Aikido “to become strong.” Our practice becomes colored by our personal aims for gain. In Soto Zen sitting, sitting is enlightenment and there are no certificates of mastery, no trophies, no prizes, no hearty pats on the shoulder and no shouts of “Well done.” If we relate this viewpoint to Aikido, the practice of Aikido becomes the

realization of Aikido itself. There is no causal effect and there is no “becoming.” In other words, there is no space between “what is” (reality) and “what I want to become” (desire). If the practice of Aikido is the mastery (actualization) of Aikido, it becomes essential to throw everything of ourselves, body and soul, into our training because every moment of our training “is” the actuality of what Aikido is. Suffering and conflict becomes a part of our training and if we can accept it wholeheartedly, a transformation takes place and it no longer becomes what we are fighting against. Please do not interpret this to mean that we must artificially create suffering and conflict in our training. There is plenty of misery and suffering to go around for everyone as it is. We must see how the suffering in our lives is a part of our lives and if we can see it as such, it is no longer suffering. If somehow we can penetrate this problem, the Aikido path of non-fighting will be discovered.

(Editor’s Note: This article originally appeared in Aikido Today Magazine (Vol. 1, No. 2, July 1987). Reprinted with the permission of Aikido Today Magazine/Aiki.com)



Sensei being ordained in 1989



Letters

To the Sensei and Students of ACLA:

I was saddened to learn today of the passing in 2007 of Sensei. I had the good fortune to swap some e-mails with him in 2005 when I was researching a Japanese sword and had also at the time recently finished reading *Kodo: Ancient Ways* for the first time as part of my karate training. Even to a complete stranger contacting by e-mail Sensei was helpful and encouraging and I found our brief contact and his kind words to be valuable inspiration in my own work and martial arts training.

I am about to commence Aikido training and have just picked up *Kodo: Ancient Ways* for another reading (my third, but the first since late 2006) and was Googling the book to see if there was any new commentary on it when I came across the sad news.

Please accept my deepest respect and belated sympathies. Our world is a better place for having known Sensei and benefiting from his work.

With respect and warm regards,
Geoff Jackson

Hi Ito Sensei,

Apologies for not writing for so long. We have been very busy because in early December we made a decision to ... not joking!... move to Maine. A job offer came up within my company to start a small three-man engineering office out there and we had been looking to leave LA (cost of living for raising kids, etc.) and after doing an exploratory trip we decided to take the plunge, and that we needed to get out there ASAP to find housing before Christmas, etc. We bid on a house right about when I got this e-mail and closed on 16th of January, and since then we've been unpacking, acclimating to everything, repairing stuff, etc. It's pretty crazy.

The kids have adjusted well (never seen snow) and by and large things are well. Portland is actually a pretty great small town, not suffocating in its size or anything. But you can't go much further than the 3100 miles from SoCal to Down East Maine....

How are things with you and the dojo? I feel rather bad about not getting to say good bye but things were really hectic. And we'll be back fairly frequently so I'm hoping to say hello this July when we're out. I actually keep track of a few of the guys through Facebook; I see Mark is doing an Iaido demonstration in NYC. He seems well.

Regards,
Michael Vance

Hello Ito Sensei,

Thank you for your e-mail. These days are nice, but very busy for me. I returned from Europe at the end of January and stayed in LA for one week. We then had our company event in Orlando (Solid Works World), which was fun, but I would have preferred to stay at home (this time in LA) for some time. When I returned from Orlando I flew the following day to Japan for three weeks. I am now in Tokyo teaching seminars, then continuing on to Nagoya and Osaka towards the end of the next week. I then have a week off and will backpack around the country. I will be returning for LA the second week in March and will stay for at least three weeks; I will stop by after my return from Japan when I am back in LA.

It is pretty cold here in Tokyo and I have a cold. I hope to fight it off soon. Otherwise, I am very pleased with Tokyo; Japan is indeed a very interesting country. I am looking forward to seeing more here.

I wish you a nice day. My best greetings to the dojo.

With regards,
Jindra Novak

To whom it may concern,

I only met Sensei in person on a few occasions. Most of the time I would just read his daily messages. From time to time he would graciously respond to my e-mails.

Lately, I have been going back over his daily messages and I am deeply saddened that he is gone, but I am so happy that you have kept his messages on the site.

Please know how precious these are, and thanks.

Sincerely,
Stephen Cooper

Dear ACLA,

I am inquiring about getting the Aikido DVD set. Is this still available? I am an old student of Sensei's and trained there from 1989 until the mid 90s. I now live on an island off of Seattle where there are no dojos or Aikido. I would love to return to some form of training and would appreciate hearing and seeing Sensei again. Let me know at your convenience.

I hope all is well for all of you in your new dojo. I'm sending good wishes for the New Year.

Best regards,
Jonathan (Jon) White



Lone Sword Against the Cold Cold Sky continued from page 4 ...

When I think of Sensei, I recollect those times when he taught class. The first time I saw him make his ponderous way down the staircase I noticed how much pain he carried in his body. Yet once he stepped on the mat, something happened: he moved as lightly and easily as a bird on the wind, but with the kind of strength that can pulverize a boulder. Each step he took when demonstrating seemed to cover at least seven feet. What's more, my astonished eyes saw him accomplish these marvels effortlessly yet matter-of-factly, never as an act of ego. For Sensei, I guess, the techniques themselves harbored the miracle, and anyone's proficiency merely upheld Aikido's inherent value, and thus by extension the Founder's priceless insight, having perceived what budo could become. Sensei would cap off each technique by bowing to his uke and saying, *Hai, please try* – always gently, always softly. So I would try, again and again and again and again.

We always did our best, and always at a pace that exhausted new students and visitors, because Sensei knew time's arrow flies relentlessly forward and waits on no one's leisure. Every moment that passed had gone forever, so we had to use each moment to its fullest, because for Sensei our development – no, our enlightenment – depended on such distilled stewardship of time and attention. I know that I often could barely climb out of my car when I finally came home in those early days of my practice, but I also know how honored I felt to belong to such a tradition, especially when I saw how students from elsewhere would always lag behind us before the class even reached its halfway point. I suppose the suffering of these visitors would boost my hopes of becoming a good Aikido student, and I apologize for any fierce glee I might have enjoyed at their expense.

In the aftermath of Sensei's death, we have relaxed things a little. My own progress in Aikido remains rather modest. I try to embrace my limits and learn from them, so that they eventually soften and expand, retreating just a little farther along the path. I understand Sensei's preoccupation with money a bit better nowadays, and with the challenges of growing the student body. So much remains for us to do to keep the dojo running that I often feel overwhelmed by what we face. I confess that I sometimes wonder why I bother with any of it. Yet, whenever I begin to wallow in such dark thoughts, I hear the voice again, always gentle, always soft enough that I have to listen hard to catch it clearly. *Hai, please try*. So what can I do but say, *Hai, Sensei*. Then I try a little harder, and things always get a little better, and I begin to climb slowly again towards the light. I guess I'll keep trying then.

We made many mistakes in the early days of the dojo after Sensei, but we have learned so much from them. I feel good about our future. No matter what happened, and no matter what happens next, I know that we always act with the best intentions to preserve the legacy that Sensei instilled in each of his students. He demanded everything from us because he knew how much we had to give to Aikido, and thus to the world, and he

demanded no less of himself. If we keep this faith in what we can become – not by changing who we are, but by allowing ourselves to express fully who we are – our dojo and our lives will flourish. I know this like I know my own heart.

The weather has indeed turned chilly; but after practice on Saturday morning, walking to my car, I still feel warm and open, like I've just come from a good, long chat with an old friend. This morning something catches my eye at the edge of my line of sight – a trick of the light, perhaps. I turn and watch a sunbeam step deeply forward to touch the facade of the new dojo where so many of us have spent countless hours, bravely carrying on our teacher's memory and the arts he held so dear. It rained last night, but the clouds have scudded southward, and this single ray of sunlight glows in the porcelain blue like a lone sword against the cold, cold sky. I let the sharp air prickle my lungs, inhale until my eyes water. *Thank you, Sensei. It's Mark*. I know that for now, I'll keep trying.

Of Sensei

by Kevin Hoffer, Aikido 1st Kyu

Sensei often had groups come to visit the dojo to learn about and be exposed to Japanese culture. Sensei's knowledge and the dojo he built were not just about practicing throws and drawing swords. He created a place to learn about ideals and the arts of Japan; it was a haven of authentic discipline and respect.

On one of these occasions, a group of distinguished alumni from a prestigious college visited the dojo. Sensei did a small demonstration of Aikido, spoke of Iaido and Tea Ceremony, explained the significance of the scroll that hung in the tokonoma, and expressed the relevance of martial arts in society today. He talked about historical Japanese culture and its influence on modern thinking and society.

When he discussed Tea Ceremony, he mentioned that green tea, long seen as a boon to health, is only now being taken seriously in the West for its medicinal benefits because science has found its effects on the body through research. A man from the group challenged him that recent research has shown conflicting data on green tea's effectiveness on health. Sensei answered only that many studies have shown green tea to lower cancer rates and promote health. The man was insistent on the point that he recently read a study that may disprove that fact. I was growing frustrated, watching and listening to this rudeness to my teacher. Sensei had many things he wanted to share and this man was holding up the visit. I thought this man should understand he is a visitor, and might even deserve to be chastised. As I felt the dislike well up in me as he pressed his point, I heard Sensei explain, "Well I just drink coffee anyway, so what do I know?" The quip garnered a wonderful and light laughter from the group. They moved on to the next topic seamlessly.

Immediately I saw how Aikido can be practiced anywhere, anytime, no matter the situation.



A Perfect Environment

by James Doi, Aikido 5th Dan, Iaido 4th Dan

Time and time again, organizations lead by a charismatic leader collapse after the leader's death. Yet ACLA still exists and thrives. This March marks Sensei's second-year memorial.

Sensei once said he liked the idea that one should make one's life a *work of art*. We look at his mastery of Aikido and swordsmanship and say he was a great martial artist, that he achieved his life's work. However, I think what he really meant his art to be was to teach these profoundly difficult arts to ordinary people like us to master. In order to achieve this goal, he first built what he called *the perfect environment to learn Aikido*. The dojo was architecturally beautiful, but it also was designed with the goal of teaching martial arts.

At the old dojo's entrance, Sensei designed and built a garden. It was not just an ornamental garden; it was specifically designed to act as a psychological transition between the outside world and the dojo. Once a group of children came to the dojo for a musical concert Sensei hosted. When they were coming down the alley, they were acting like normal American children, running around and being quite loud. Once they got to the garden, they immediately calmed down and became very well-behaved. No one told them to calm down; it was a natural response to the feel of the garden.

Sensei built a traditional dojo that taught Aikido and Iaido in a physical environment that would be recognized and approved of by martial artists of a hundred years ago or more. However, Sensei had a huge problem that feudal martial artists didn't have: the cultural and social infrastructure necessary for a traditional dojo to work really didn't exist in 20th century LA, when Sensei built his dojo. It is difficult to teach a traditional Japanese martial art outside of a traditional Japanese cultural context. Japanese traditional attitudes about society and the individual are very different than contemporary American ones.

Sensei constantly thought about how to teach and what was the best way. Once I was surprised to hear him discuss the work of a Swiss child psychologist named Piaget, who studied learning in children. He was talking about learning theory and how to apply

it to teach Aikido. He said that he kept track of every student's progress and adjusted his teaching for each individual.

He used the forms and procedures of a traditional Japanese dojo, but adapted to American culture. He always talked about wanting to teach, but had to water it down to make it acceptable to Americans. I used to think that meant that training was less physically demanding than "old school". This is part of it, but I think he meant that he could not teach something in-depth that would require more Japanese cultural background. Now, in the US, knowledge has become a commodity that is purchased and delivered in information packets. Sensei always said that knowledge was precious and had to be "stolen" from the teacher.

Sensei always made a very big deal about proper etiquette, traditions and protocols in the dojo. These sorts of things made up the cultural infrastructure of traditional Japan that Sensei had to teach to build a traditional dojo. Ritualized behavior or etiquette may seem a very odd thing to modern Western people, but was essential in a feudal warrior society. The idea is conveyed by the quote, "An armed society is a polite society."

After every class we clean the mat and dojo. This is a traditional procedure in all Japanese schools (not just martial arts dojos). While this obviously keeps the dojo clean, it also teaches a way for a group to work together. For many years, the dojo would volunteer to help in the Little Tokyo Cleanup, where civic groups would provide people to clean the streets and sidewalks around the Los Angeles neighborhood of Little Tokyo. The first year we did it, we cleaned our assigned area plus two other sections. Everyone organized themselves just like we cleaned the dojo. It was surprising how organized and efficient we were.

Once Sensei was very angry because a neighbor was complaining that the dojo students were talking and making a racket in the parking lot after class. Actually, we had been very careful about not making noise after class because this complaint had happened before. Later, Sensei told me that he was mad not because of any noise we made, but that the students did not realize that any conversation was providing an excuse for the neighbor to complain. His lesson was about tactics: Don't give an opponent an opening to attack.

Sensei's personality was so strong that I didn't realize how much of the spirit of the dojo was a mix of his personality and the tradition that he created for the dojo. The dojo that Sensei created and built was so carefully designed to teach martial arts that it survived his death. It continues to teach with the same care and attention to detail thanks to Ito Sensei and Myers Sensei, and has the cultural foundation to teach traditional Aikido and Iaido properly. Sensei constructed the dojo such that it could work even after he was gone. As a result, a large majority of his black belts remain in the dojo because it is still *the perfect environment to learn Aikido*. And you can see a part of Sensei's Aikido in every one of his students.

"Respond to your mistakes correctly. A mistake is only another form of learning."

~Reverend Kensho Furuya



Tatami,

Chilled by the winter breeze,

Warmed by my students' hearts!

~Reverend Kensho Furuya

Editor's note: Sensei posted this poem to Aikiweb's *Aikido Haiku* forum on 10/13/2003



Aikido Center of Los Angeles:

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.

The Aiki Dojo Newsletter

Publisher: David Ito
Editor-in-Chief: Mark Ehrlich
Photographer: Larry Armstrong

A Man Apart

by Paul Major, *Aikido Shodan*

As we proceed through this new year and prepare to host friends from across the world at our annual seminar, I've spent a lot of recent time thinking back on Sensei. Our newest students did not have the opportunity to meet the man, which I find greatly unfortunate. And though I otherwise resist talking about him too much – I find I'm still very sensitive to memories of the latter part of his life – I thought I would share an impression or two.

I've seen it written that the Founder's art had distinct characteristics separating the techniques into a pre-war and post-war period. If a parallel can be drawn, I would be seen as one of Sensei's "post-war" students. As a younger instructor Sensei lead classes that were intense and vigorous in a way that isn't often seen or heard of in American martial arts these days. When I joined, the bright fire that was in Sensei's spirit had found a level of temperance and refinement that let him tolerate students, such as myself, with more mild temperaments.

As an Aikidoist, Sensei's technique seemed to utilize an uncanny understanding of timing and spacing. I had the honor of taking ukemi for Sensei, and I remember very clearly one time when he was demonstrating shomen-uchi irimi-nage. Because Sensei wouldn't stand for weak attacks I made it a point, out of respect, to make a committed strike to Sensei's forehead. It is difficult to describe what happened when I attacked. Sensei did not seem to move quickly, and though he made contact he certainly didn't use any significant strength I could feel, but I was in the middle of the air. When I landed I think I probably chuckled, and I know I smiled. This wasn't magic. It was the result of a lifetime of thorough study and training. Sensei showed us that it is possible to train the body and mind to transcend physical limitations, and to cultivate a great sense of character in the process.

On a daily basis Sensei would reveal aspects of his character that set him apart from others. How many people, at the age of 10, realize they wish to pursue a life in the martial arts and never significantly stray from that path? Because of this I think it's important we not beat ourselves up too much when we realize we

cannot necessarily accomplish the same things Sensei did in terms of knowledge. He was born with a unique sort of personality. He possessed a steadfastness that is inspiring and sorely lacking in today's world.

The very qualities that let him pursue an entire life in the martial arts made him a challenging and demanding instructor. A life of solitude and the demands of operating a dojo single-handedly were huge stresses. He operated on a level of pragmatism mixed with idealism that absolutely forced those around him to raise the bar in their own behavior. He had a voracious thirst for knowledge, and unyielding loyalty to the lineage he was trained in. He was never cruel but could be severe, which is an important distinction. He was incredibly mature as a human being, the proverbial sword forged out of iron ore from a lifetime of training, but was quick to laugh and almost childlike in his humor and some of his sensibilities.

Sensei was many things. Perhaps most relevant to me, he was one of the most important teachers in my life. Fortunately the qualities that Sensei demonstrated in his life make honoring his legacy simple (if not always easy): treat your life and those in your life with respect, be humble, and keep training.



Sensei with Yonemochi Sensei and Ichihashi Sensei



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
7:45-8:45 PM Fundamentals

Wednesdays

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals
6:30-7:30 PM Open
7:45-8:45 PM Weapons

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Bokken

Fridays

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

Saturdays

9:30-10:30 AM Open
10:40-11:40 AM Open

6:30 AM Instructor's Intensive: last Saturday of the month.*

* These classes are not open for visitors to watch.

Iaido TRAINING SCHEDULE

TRADITIONAL JAPANESE IAIDO SWORDSMANSHIP

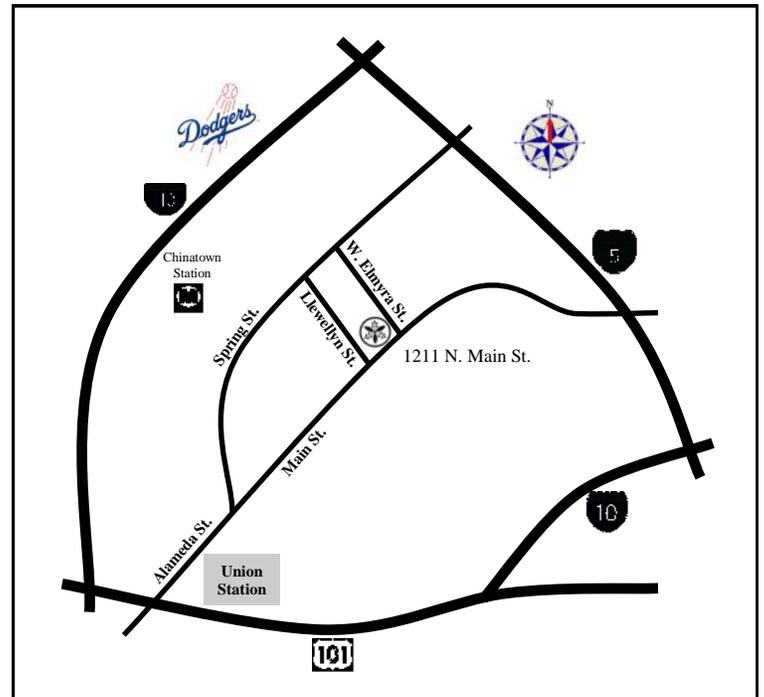
Saturdays:

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.



Meditation Class

Saturdays: 12:00-1:30 PM

(This class is open to the public and is free of charge.)

**We are directly affiliated with:
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Aikido So-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 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 ACLA 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.

Finding Our Dojo

We are located at
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Tel: (323) 225-1424

E-mail: 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 anytime during any of our Open or Fundamental classes. Please come early.