

Aikido Center of Los Angeles, LLC, 1211 N. Main Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012, Tel: (323) 225-1424 www.aikidocenterla.com



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

March 2012

Volume XXXI Number 3



Reverend Kensho Furuya

April 25, 1948 – March 6, 2007

Letter From the Editor

by Mark Ehrlich

Editor, The Aiki Dojo

Welcome to our fifth annual memorial issue commemorating the life and work of ACLA's founder, Reverend Kensho Furuya, 6th Dan Aikido, 6th Dan Iaido Kyoshi, known to his students and the Little Tokyo community as "Sensei".

Before diving into the subject of this issue, however, I want to pause a moment and observe that as I write these words, it is one year to the day since the Fukushima disaster that shocked Japan and the rest of the world on March 11, 2011. All of us at ACLA spent time, money, and energy to help however we could those who suffered loss of their homes, their families, and their livelihoods. To our readers and everyone still nursing the physical and psychic wounds such devastation leaves in its wake, please know that we keep you in our thoughts and prayers. Your courage remains an inspiration to us all.

Next to such large-scale, dramatic episodes like the natural disaster in Fukushima, the death of one Aikido teacher in a quaint pocket of downtown Los Angeles sounds like something bordering on the trivial. Sensei, larger than life though he seemed at

times, was only one man. He had a little life carved out for himself in his little dojo, and pretty much kept to himself in the last years he walked this earth. Yet as the following pages make clear, although Sensei left behind no children or surviving family of his own, he is survived by a large family of students and people who believed in him and his mission. Many remained with him until the end of his days, and some continue his work, humbly and quietly, in his beloved dojo, which I think would not have displeased him.

If we consider both events side by side, the natural devastation of a tsunami and the untimely passing of a beloved teacher, they might at first glance have little in common. Yet I like to think that human beings possess the uncanny ability to nurse breathtaking beauty and love from the seeds of bitterest loss and sorrow, whatever the form. In the wake of Fukushima, artists and others around the world reached out to connect with the people of Japan in song, story, and visual art: I heard the song that has become the anthem of Fukushima some months ago and felt deeply moved by its profoundly unselfish love. Similarly, this issue features people who volunteered to share thoughtful, personal, honest stories of a man who, by virtue of his character and relentless drive to help his students become their best, touched their lives forever. This issue is a labor of love; I hope you enjoy it.

In This Issue...

Letter from the Editor

by Mark EhrlichPage 1

It Doesn't Get Easier

by Mike Van Ruth.....Page 2

The Price of Change

by David Ito.....Page 3

My Practice and Teaching:

Then and Now

by Gary Myers.....Page 4

Mastery of the Ordinary

by Ken WatanabePage 5

Learning Sensei's Way

by Roberto Magallanes Molina.....Page 6

From Dreams to Deeds

by Paul Major.....Page 7

Polishing

by William AllenPage 8

The Art of Practice and the Shadows of Change

by Stan Sung.....Page 6

Fear and Realization

by Mike HatfieldPage 10

Gifts and Lessons

by Maria Ferrari.....Page 9

Sensei's Lasting Influence

by Santiago AlmarazPage 10

Taken Away

by Leonard Manoukian.....Page 11

Nanten: Clippings

by James DoiPage 12

The Greatest Kindness

by Jim Bassett.....Page 13

Now, Breathe

by Mark Ehrlich.....Page 14

Finding Discipline

by Maria MurakawaPage 15

A Memory of Sensei

by William D'Angelo III.....Page 9

O Sensei Memorial Seminar.... Page 16

Information vs. Knowledge

by Mohammed Anwar.....Page 17

Constant Practice

by Dr. Helen Hsu.....Page 19

Why Do We Train?

by Jeff Wheeler.....Page 18

The Gift of Practice

by Jonathan White.....Page 20

Up and Down

by Shaun Menashe.....Page 21

Fallen Leaves

by James Takata.....Page 22

The Way of Nature

by Rev. Kensho FuruyaPage 23

Two Teachers: Last Words..... Page 24

Protect with AI. Grow with KI. Never depart from DO.

– Reverend Kensho Furuya

It Doesn't Get Easier

by Mike Van Ruth, Chief Instructor
Aikido Renbukai, Surprise, Arizona

Practice never gets easier, it just gets harder. This is a statement I like to tell my students in my children's class, although I don't say this to steal any hope of being good at Aikido. I also tell them that no matter how long we train in Aikido, we never get bored of training. Just when I believe I have achieved some level of proficiency in a particular technique, there comes another level of the technique waiting to greet me with a warm hug of frustration. I am now learning to hug it right back.

When I started practicing Aikido, like many beginners I had an innocent enthusiasm about practice. I enjoyed the challenges. I had a teacher who didn't place too many expectations on me. Unfortunately I place a lot of undue expectations on myself, which had a negative effect on my practice, infusing it with unnecessary amounts of frustration and self-doubt.

As time went by, the form of the techniques became more exacting: many things that were overlooked in the past were no longer

overlooked. The tolerances in the technique become tighter. Some of the old feelings of self-doubt that I thought I had shed returned. Some of the ideas that I had about what Aikido was and of what I thought of my capabilities shattered. This was the ebb and flow of my training.



When I joined ACLA as a shodan, I knew I lacked in certain technical skills but I thought that my overall Aikido was pretty good. My first practice was an eye opener to say the least; whatever vanity I had vanished. It was a rebirth of humility in my practice. Training under Sensei reestablished my faith in Aikido and made it possible to give myself to the practice no matter how difficult it was, since it would just work itself out through training.

Just as in Aikido, life doesn't get any easier. Like each day, like practice, new situations present themselves. I can become frustrated and overwhelmed by them or I can accept these situations for what they are and work through them with humility and a calm, positive prospective. There is no right or wrong; it is just practice. This is one of the many gifts that training in Aikido has given me.

The Price of Change

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

“Freedom is not doing what you will. Freedom is the choice one makes for himself to go ahead and do what he has to do without anyone telling him this and that or picking up after him or explaining the same chore or task over and over again. To be able to fulfill one’s responsibilities and obligations on his own, by his own efforts and sensitivity and awareness is true freedom and independence. We can only achieve this or begin to see this when we finally empty our plates and begin to see other people in our lives. . . .”

– Reverend Kensho Furuya

One word comes to mind when I think about how my practice has changed and how it has changed me: perspective. I can now see myself, life, Aikido, and Sensei more clearly and with better perspective. However, this was not always the case and it took a long time for me to realize that I was simultaneously the sole problem and the only solution to all my woes in life.

When I started Aikido 22 years ago, the whole experience was a culture shock. I was Japanese in heritage, but American in outlook, which made me completely unprepared for my immersion into Japanese culture, not to mention a traditional Aikido dojo. Sensei’s dojo was run like a traditional Japanese martial arts school and it was well known for its *kibishii* or strict approach to training. In a traditional martial arts school, the teacher is responsible for the student’s development, which is taken very seriously, and students are seen as apprentices to the teacher, which demands nothing less than loyalty, respect, and a tremendous amount of hard work.

I truly didn’t know what I was getting into and I felt totally lost. There was no talking, asking questions, fooling around, or excuses. For the first six months, the senior students only spoke to me to scold me, and Sensei only spoke to me through the senior students. After about a year, I had a few sparse conversations with Sensei, and in all of them he scolded me. I couldn’t understand why Sensei was so strict and only spoke to me in order to scold me. I took his strictness to mean that he didn’t like me,

which I felt was reinforced when the seniors acted mean to me and beat me up every day. I found all the discipline and all the unstated or unwritten rules overwhelming, a feeling which was compounded by the tremendous pressure I felt to train every day. Sensei never said that I should train every day, but I thought he made me feel like I was a disappointment if I didn’t train every day like the other students. After a while, I began to break down emotionally and started to resent Sensei, the other students, and ACLA, but I still continued to train hard whenever I could. Days turned into weeks, weeks into months, and before I knew it I had been training for 17 years. The only time Sensei and I ever spoke about my treatment was one week before he passed away when we were discussing two students who had recently left. Sensei shrugged his shoulders and said, “See? I took a big risk.” I responded, “I know.” Sadly, I didn’t even thank him for what he’d done for me because I still secretly felt mad at him.



Sensei in the early 1990s answering questions about Japanese swords at a Children’s Day festival at the JACCC

A few months ago, I was discussing parenting with one of my students and I finally understood why Sensei treated me the way he did. The student told me, “Parents say ‘yes’ out of fear and ‘no’ out of love.” I was blown away and that’s when I realized that Sensei’s strictness was his ultimate act of kindness towards me. He could see that I lacked discipline and that I was a horrible mixture of stubbornness, laziness, anger, and low self-esteem, but at the same time he also believed that I had potential. I know this because another student once told me that Sensei had confided in

him that I was the student he felt had the most potential in the dojo. He then quoted Sensei saying, “The more potential or talent a student has, the stricter and harsher the training has to be.” I took Sensei’s treatment to mean that he didn’t like me but I was looking at it from the completely wrong angle. Sensei cared that I developed and had to be strict and at times even severe in order to teach me self-discipline and to get me to see things a different way. He cared, and *that’s* why he told me I was wrong; he cared and *that’s* why he scolded me; he cared and *that’s* why ‘good enough’ to me was never good enough for him; he cared and *that’s* why I am the person that I am today. I realize it now and I feel humbled by his care and concern for me.

Continued on page 5...

Copyright © 2012. All Rights Reserved.

Published by Aikido Center of Los Angeles
1211 N. Main Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012
Tel: (323) 225-1424 • E-mail: info@aikidocenterla.com

No portion of this publication may be copied or reproduced without written permission from the Publisher.

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

My Practice and Teaching: Then and Now

by Gary Myers, Iaido Chief Instructor

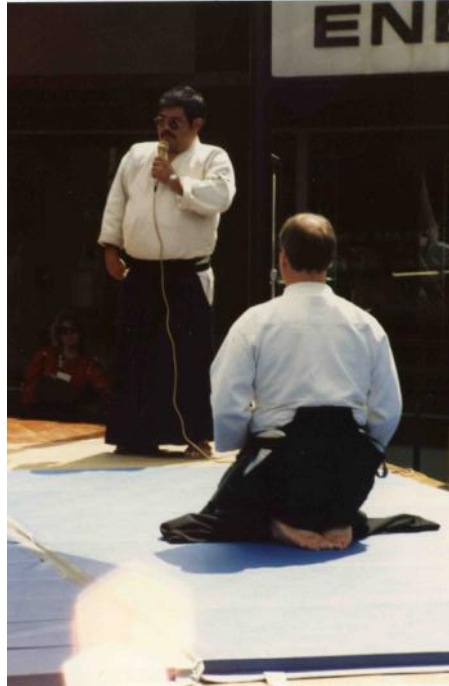
Sensei's passing has had a profound effect on my appreciation of Iaido. When I first became the chief instructor for the Kenshinkai section I felt very uncomfortable. It was a position not asked for, but I considered it to be my inheritance and obligation, under those circumstances. Of course, I was used to teaching as one of the senior assistant instructors under Sensei's guidance. His physical presence was always a reassurance that if I faltered he would be there to correct me. With his death, all of a sudden that comfort level disappeared. Doubts about my ability to carry on his teachings were foremost in my mind. (I have to believe that many dojos that lose their venerable *sensei* go through this period of uncertainty and some don't survive it.) We were and still are fortunate that the Kenshinkai section has senior students who are devoted to the dojo and who continue their practice despite all that happened. Equipped with his memory, his teachings, his writings, and his spiritual guidance, we marshaled on.

Better Appreciation

I am ashamed to say that, remembering the things he taught us, they now have more meaning to me than they did when Sensei was alive. It's hard for me to express why that is; I think, in part, now I can appreciate the teaching more from his perspective. The other part is that as I mature, the things I thought were so important when younger, such as speed and strength, are perhaps not as important, or as easily accessible. I have begun to understand what is necessary to engage the mind in our practice rather than just the physicality of it. That was something I didn't fully understand or appreciate as a student. But things he said, either directly or indirectly, seem to make more sense to me now. His words of admonishment, "You better get what you can from me now, because I'm not going to be around forever!" ring so true now; we just didn't appreciate how true that statement really was.

Of course, more teaching means less direct practice, which is mostly now confined to the warm up exercises of *suburi*, *noto*, and demonstrating specific aspects of the techniques. I do practice apart from class time, both at work and before Thursday evening classes. I miss the camaraderie of practicing with fellow students, but this comes with the territory of teaching. In thinking back, I don't remember seeing Sensei ever doing the full *kata* in front of class. He would do *shohatto* and *ryuto*, and demonstrate aspects of other techniques, but never the full *kata*.

Suffice it to say, no one can replace Sensei and his breadth of knowledge. He was truly one of a kind. In addition to what we learned from Sensei's vast amount of teachings, we try to bring our own experiences, our tips, and insights. I can't teach like Sensei did; as much as I'd like to, it is impossible for me to do it. I try to follow the physician's creed of "do no harm", take what I have learned, and try to make it better in my own humble way. We all have our own paths that are influenced by past experiences and I rely also on those to help better my instruction. I tend to emphasize body positions more than Sensei, because I feel that if they are learned, we don't have to worry about them anymore. The mechanics can fall away and a true mind, body, and sword unity can occur.



Myers Sensei demonstrating Iaido with Sensei looking on at Japanese Village Plaza in the late 1980s

How have I changed? Hopefully, I have become a better teacher over the years. But it's difficult to judge one's own performance; I can only assess it through the progress of my students. While progress is good and steady there is so much more to be learned. I never asked to be called "sensei", because it just felt strange to hear anyone else called that in the dojo. But if my students felt that that it was appropriate to call me that on their own I assumed that the instruction must be worthy of the title. Just now typing the words "my students" reminds me of Sensei: when I was an assistant instructor I was teaching Sensei's students; as chief instructor they are now "my" students, with all the responsibility that implies. One has to take, for lack of a better word, "ownership" of the students, and that changes everything. That means there is a responsibility to teach properly in a way that is safe for all students. Although we try to keep the dojo as a sanctuary apart from the day-to-day world, what is taught here should benefit the students' daily lives. I am striving to be a more patient teacher, one less apt to get angry if progress is not advancing at the rate I think it should. How can *heijoshin* (keeping a calm state of mind in all situations) be transmitted to students if the teacher doesn't demonstrate it?

How else has practiced changed? We have added forms to the curriculum that Sensei did not teach. Besides broadening our perspective on swordsmanship, I also feel in adding these forms I'm fulfilling a commitment I made to Sensei. A long time ago, we were in a bookstore in the Kanda section of Tokyo and I picked up a book about the *seitei-gata* forms of the All Japan Kendo Federation. He turned to me and said, "You should teach these to the class." I agreed at the time, but for whatever reasons time slipped away and we never did teach them while he was alive. We study them now to fulfill that pledge.

Mastery of the Ordinary

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

I am probably the worst Japanese in the world. The reason? I don't like sushi. I have never been a fan of seafood, especially shellfish, and the thought of putting something in my mouth that tastes like the ocean at low tide? No thank you!

However, there IS one place in the northern San Diego County town of Encinitas where I will fearlessly eat the sushi. It's an unassuming little Japanese restaurant tucked away in the corner of a sprawling strip mall. The place has a tiny sign, and if you are not looking for it, you'll never know it was there. In fact, the first barrier to eating at this tiny sushi bar is actually to find it.

The first time my wife and I ate there even I, the person who doesn't like seafood, had some sushi, and on later visits I bravely sampled almost everything that was offered to me – even the stuff at which I used to turned up (or away) my nose. After a couple of visits, we asked the chef, "How do you make your sushi so delicious?" and his answer surprised me a little bit.

He didn't give us a long anecdote about the art of sushi-making, nor was there a "years of training" line or the acquiring of an esoteric skill. Yes, to get to an expert level takes years of apprenticeship under a very strict teacher, and a competent sushi man can look at a fish and from that look, tell you not only its species, but also its age, where it lived, its health, and level of freshness; basically a laundry list of its personal attributes including whether or

not it is delicious. The chef's short answer? He didn't do anything special at all; he simply makes sushi the way it's supposed to be made.

This is a very Eastern way of thinking. If you're familiar with the Japanese way of instruction, a good teacher will never complement the student. The teacher will give a correction or a critique (if any) but you will almost never hear the word *good* from your teacher's mouth. The teacher is waiting, not for angels to descend from heaven singing praises, but for the student to execute the technique the way it is supposed to be executed. No more, no less. In the teacher's mind, properly executing the technique in this manner is not special or extraordinary, but normal.



In a way, mastery IS doing something the way it's supposed to be done, with nothing lacking and no

excess. Aikido and martial arts are the same way. We train and train, repeating the techniques thousands of times until, one day, our form is "the way it's supposed to be". When we first heard of Aikido, we read or heard, "Blend with your opponent's energy." It sounded like a no-brainer; that is, until we actually tried it on the mat. It sounds overly simplistic, much like, "Be a good person"; the Boy Scout motto, "Be Prepared", or Sun Tzu's "All warfare is deception", but if you stop and think about it, how many of us can ever master these "no-brainers"?

Imagine for one second, a world where everyone does their job the way it's supposed to be done? Now THAT would really be extraordinary.

The Price of Change *continued from page 3...*



Sensei throwing David Ito for Martial Arts Ultimate Warrior magazine

Recently, a student asked me, "What is true inner strength?" I used to think that strength meant having the ability to hurt others, but now I know that hurting others just shows that you are weak. True inner strength is doing the right thing at the right time regardless of the outcome or consequence. Sensei was strict with his students for their benefit, and scores of them left because they couldn't understand his benevolent act. Martial arts teachers of the past used to declare, "I am strict!" as their only qualification for teaching. Sensei's inner strength was that he cared enough to be strict for my benefit regardless of the outcome.

Sensei has finally gotten through to me so that I could empty my plate and care for others. His Aikido was amazing and he was a great teacher, but his greatest teaching is that he cared deeply for each one of us – so much so that he had to be strict even when, I am sure, it broke his heart to do so. My marriage, my college degrees, and all of my talent and abilities are a direct result of Sensei's sacrifice for me. My practice hasn't really changed, but it has changed me; or, as the writer, philosopher, and early activist Henry David Thoreau said, "Things don't change; we do." Today, I am still that person who walked through the dojo doors 22 years ago, but Sensei has enabled me to see things differently and live a different life. I didn't get it then, but I get it now: that is why I do what I do today. Someday I hope to be strong enough to care for others just like Sensei cared for me. Thank you so much Sensei. I deeply appreciate it.

“The most important thing in life is to learn!”

– Reverend Kensho Furuya



Learning Sensei's Way

by Roberto Magallanes Molina, Chief Instructor
Veracruz Aikikai, Veracruz, Mexico

Since I met Sensei, Aikido has greatly changed my way of thinking and acting. I did not get to know Sensei as I would have liked to, since he died only four years after I met him. During the annual seminars when I usually saw him, he was always too busy taking care of the organization and hosting his guests. I first met him and visited ACLA in 2002, where he honored me with his hospitality and conversation for about 30 minutes. At the ACLA 30th anniversary celebration I only had a few minutes chatting with him. Another time he invited us for breakfast so we had a little bit more time to get to know him. But I know he was totally committed to teaching Aikido and Iaido, and he left a good number of senior students who follow his teachings and keep ACLA and his Aikido style going. They are my teachers and friends now.

Reading Sensei's book *Kodo: Ancient Ways* and his articles in *The Aiki Dojo*, and watching his video series *The Art of Aikido*, I feel like I have gotten to know him better in some way, even though he is no longer with us. The most important lessons he still teaches me involve what not to do – struggle, pull, push, or use my muscle in a technique, or to avoid trying to be better than others, or selfishness, or other petty urges – as well as what to cultivate – positive attitude towards others, humility in training, awareness of my posture, balance, center, *ashi sabaki*, blending with my partner's energy, following the flow of the technique, and so forth. I try to do all these things in my own practice, in my teaching of my own students, and in my daily life. For these lessons, I feel I owe Sensei a lot, and that all of my respect, recognition, and tribute to him can barely repay.

“The student must become a true warrior in an age where there are no more warriors.”

– Reverend Kensho Furuya



Nine Stages of Man created by artist Randolph John

The Art of Practice and the Shadows of Change

by Stan Sung, Aikido Ikkyu

This sculpture represents how my Aikido practice has changed over time and how it has changed me. Naturally the focus draws on the current path where the novice leaps with all his strength to peak with grace in performance to then master a soft landing. This is what I once believed to be the path of practice.

Such dynamic bursts parallel my Aikido practice, as I had first started by focusing on the leap; muscling my techniques, I thought, would eventually produce effective execution and lead me to mastery of the art. As I kept practicing, however, my focus changed from the leap to the landing. As I shifted my focus more and more on the soft landing, the non-resistant, centered, and calm execution of the techniques, I found that my execution became more effective. I leapt higher. This is represented in the sculpture by the shadows of change seen on the wall which represents the path I was following before.

My Aikido practice has changed me into a wiser person. Now, I appreciate that truths lie below the surface. I can read between the lines. Now, I understand that some things can't be gained by thinking, they can only be gained by doing . . . by practicing.



From Dreams to Deeds

By Paul Major, Aikido Shodan, Iaido Shodan

With fantasies of myself possessing O Sensei's abilities dancing through my head, I found a place in Oklahoma that taught a martial practice that was an amalgam of Aikido and other concepts (Jodo and Judo, mainly). Though I wasn't learning Aikido in any definitive sense, there were some superficial similarities, a sense of strictness, and a community feeling that I was thrilled to be a part of. Being young and indestructible, I practiced, on my own, rolling (and even their version of breakfalls) on concrete and other surfaces. In other words: my practice was about reveling in my body and living in my imagination about what I wanted to believe I could achieve.

After eight years without training, I found ACLA and quickly began to realize the non-physical challenges that awaited practitioners. Though the physical demands were as rigorous, if not more so, than I had encountered previously, there were the additional requirements of etiquette, awareness, realism, and humility. My ego was kept in check, firmly, by more talented and stronger Aikidoists. Practice became a more multi-layered experience, and the fantasies I was living with years before quickly fell away.

When Sensei passed away, and the dojo was in flux, a new component to practice was revealed: responsibility. In addition to the normal aspects of training, there was a school and student body to assist. Aikido, then, became something for me that had more to do with being a part of a community than a way to get in shape or to learn how to throw others around.

Today I struggle with a variety of commitments and aspirations competing for time and energy (as I'm sure this is true for many of us). But I can see how, looking back, each stage of my training has revealed a deeper personal journey that helps guide my path through life. I do not know what will next be revealed within my practice, but I'm learning to accept that the lessons never stop.

Untitled

Who walks in the steps of the old masters?

Barely can you see their traces . . .

Now worn by the sun in summer,

Now covered by the snow in winter,

Now covered by the leaves in autumn,

Rediscover that Path quickly now,

Before the coming spring breeze blows them all away. . . .

Editor's Note: Sensei posted this on Aikiweb's Aikido Haiku forum on October 26, 2003



Sensei and Ichihashi Sensei



Sensei's reserve police officer identification card when he advised the LAPD on defensive tactics

Polishing

by Bill Allen, *Aikido Nidan*

I have not taken or taught an Aikido class for about six months now, and for a couple of years before that, my general attendance had diminished to just a couple of days a week at most. Before that, for almost eight years, I was at the dojo four to six days every week. For a couple of years before Sensei died, he needed a lot of assistance with keeping the dojo maintained and with many everyday tasks. In those days, going to the dojo generally entailed six hours away from home; more when seminars were being conducted, or visitors were in town.

Despite the obvious outward differences over the years, the largest changes in training have been inner changes.

When I began studying Aikido, I wanted to try it for a year, at least, to see if it was something I really wanted to pursue. It was quite difficult, and after five or six months, I felt that Aikido was an art I wanted to study earnestly. At that time, I used to study the black belts and watch their every move. We were always being told to do exactly that. I liked to practice with the senior students, but I was also a bit scared of them too. All I thought about was the techniques, and the only thing I wanted to do was get better at Aikido.

Later on, I now realize, Sensei was trying to teach us that we can carry what we are learning about Aikido out into the world in which we live. It is not that you are always thinking about martial arts, or teaching them, or practicing and getting better, and that is your life. Rather, it is that you bring to your life the mind of respect and intensity and preparedness for anything that you have been trained to bring to the mat. Realizing that was a pivotal point in my training. It happened to me a few days before Sensei passed away.

Why did I study martial arts? At first, it was because I felt vulnerable and picked-on at school and in my neighborhood. I wanted to be tougher, not to be afraid of getting the crap beaten out of me because I could take care of myself. But beneath that, there was a burning curiosity, a desire to know how things like wrestling, karate, Aikido, and Kung Fu “worked”. This is the crux of martial arts. There is a competitive and combative aspect to them, taken to a bit of an extreme, I think, by some of the modern spectator events. There is also a technical aspect to them that is fascinating beyond combat, and one can become so enmeshed in technical details, such as how to get more air time out of *uke* when we execute a *kotegaeshi*, that we forget what the technique is for. The words “martial art” imply that both of these aspects have to be taken into account, and unified.

The only thing that will allow us to reconcile the martial with the art, is that we focus our whole self to the task. Aikido allows us to do this on the mat. Especially as studied at ACLA, Aikido is highly technical, and the technical aspects of the art are always being refined to squeeze out the most harmonious and effective actions in combat. Aikido is not about fighting and winning; it is about fighting perfectly, acting in harmony with the world. Fighting in harmony is as irreconcilable as martial arts, but that’s what it is all about. Harmony does not come from perfection of our technique; it comes from being *unable* to perfect our technique, from failing to make the perfect response no matter how hard we try. In striving for perfection, everything that doesn’t work is left behind, and that is the way Aikido polishes us as human beings.

I have brought that attitude, that intensity, that reverence to the mat in the dojo. It’s one thing to bring it to the training hall. Whether I can do that with the rest of my life is another.

Myself & Others

It is easy to beat others, but not yourself,

It is easy to know others, but not yourself,

It is easy to blame others, but not yourself,

It is easy to hate others, but not yourself,

It is easy to hurt others, but not yourself.

It is hard to treat others, as you do yourself.

Editor’s Note: Sensei originally posted this poem in the dojo’s Daily Message on September 29, 2006.



*Demonstration at the JACC in the late 1990s
(left to right) Mark Ty, Gary Myers, Ken Furuya, Rey Espino, Bill Gillespie, Sensei, Raul Montolfo, Ken Watanabe, David Ito, Peo Lopansri, Andy Kissel, Norm Lew, Richard Elorriaga, and James Doi*

Gifts and Lessons

by Maria Ferrari, Aikido Shodan

I began practicing Aikido at ACLA in late 2001, right after I moved to Los Angeles. My dream of becoming a writer was commonplace, unrealistic, and provided no concrete steps to follow towards its realization. I think a big part of what I found so attractive about Aikido was its structure: every move broke down into parts, every part could be practiced, and if I just practiced enough I would probably get better. At the same time, Aikido seemed exotic and difficult, impossibly difficult, and I was very much enamored with impossible goals.

During my time at Sensei's dojo I grew up in more ways than one. I learned slowly, I began to practice in a hakama, I began to move up the ranks. I can still remember exactly how Sensei's voice sounded when he would announce, "You're promoted," which was usually as much as he had to say on the matter. I held a succession of jobs I did not care about and jobs that I did, I met my husband, I had career successes and setbacks, I got my black belt, I got married.

I can't say that my black belt led to the realization of my other goals, but in retrospect the process of achieving them was similar. Each was the result of a repetitive, frustrating, exhausting process that demanded exponentially more effort and time to reach the next level. Each was a matter of learning to use my own strength rather than just admiring the strength of others. It was a while before I would really try to get my weight behind the throws that were always my weakest moves, rather than letting my partners do the work, easing themselves into their rolls like we

all do sometimes in practice, out of habit, to be polite, to keep things moving. I had to be coaxed through a punch that might actually connect if my partner didn't move out of the way. Sensei always complained that I hit like a girl.

I remember one practice when the moves just weren't working for me. I was working against the currents of motion instead of with them. Everything felt like pushing a rock uphill, or running into the wind. Sensei sighed and asked me, with great irritation, "Where's the real Maria Ferrari?" I still think of that whenever I'm not executing something properly. The real Maria Ferrari should have been doing better. In a way it was the highest compliment he ever paid me.

I didn't learn until after Sensei died that he had video cameras trained on the practice floor, with monitors in his loft. There were months of my practice where I hadn't met him yet, wasn't totally convinced he existed, and he had been watching me every day. Only now does it occur to me that means he always knew me better than I knew him.

And I do wish I could have known Sensei more as a person. He was friendly but impenetrable; our relationship was a one-way street where he taught and I listened, where he was pleased or annoyed and I was happy or nervous. This dynamic was too entrenched to be overcome by a handful of group dinners at Paul's Kitchen, although those were enjoyable and he could really be quite funny. With his death I had to accept our very basic student-teacher relationship as the gift that it was. And it was a gift. It is hard to articulate why he meant so much to me even though I hardly scratched the surface of knowing him.



*"Practice sincerely and you become a sincere person.
Practice arrogantly and you become an arrogant person.
Your practice, more than anything, is a bright, merciless
mirror to your inner self."*

– Reverend Kensho Furuya

A Memory of Sensei

by Bill D'Angelo, Aikido 2nd Dan

Two days before Sensei passed away at the dojo, he and I went to lunch on a very sunny afternoon at Marino's Bodega, a small Italian restaurant and deli in Larchmont Village in Hancock Park. It was one of those sunny, lazy days that we often get during Spring in Los Angeles.

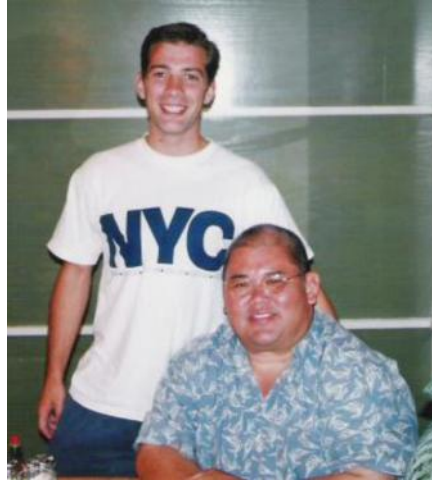
I remember, after lunch, there was a farmer's market on Larchmont and Sensei wanted to window-shop, so to speak. So we left the restaurant and strolled up and down the street, stopping whenever he felt like looking. He spoke very little, but every now and then Sensei would stop at a vegetable or fruit vendor, hold the fruit or vegetables in his hands, as softly as if they were newborns. I can't explain it exactly, but Sensei inspected the beautiful array of food much in the same way he would a fine Japanese sword, with respect, with expertise, and with an appreciation of beauty.

He ended the outing with a purchase of, I believe, some green d'Anjou pears and a pie.

Sensei's Lasting Influence

by Santiago Garcia Almaraz
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai
Salamanca, Spain

If I try to compare what I thought when I saw Aikido for the first time, and how it related to everything around me – martial arts, life, humans and their behaviors – and how I see it today, I think I have been most influenced (besides the practice of Aikido itself) by the philosophy (or, more specifically, the transmission of it) of Reverend Kensho Furuya Sensei. As a result, he made me appreciate and respect all martial arts and be more demanding in my learning and teaching of this art.



Sensei with Santiago

Sensei taught me that we come to understand this art through practice – continuous, hard practice. There are no shortcuts or “fast lanes” to mastery: daily practice will only take you the long way, slowly shaping your mind and character to prepare you for understanding. The work of practicing the *kihon*

and through his influence I can see its potential and greatness and apply its lessons to my daily life. Ultimately, Aikido brought me to Sensei, and in turn Sensei brought me closer to the heart, and the art, of Aikido.

waza over time is very important; Sensei helped me find patience and recognize that even the most complicated techniques begin with the basics. If we don't get the basics right, nothing else will be right either.

He also helped me to recognize and work on my faults and to love this art, because although there are many days that everything goes wrong, this is also a part of Aikido. He taught me that it is important that we cultivate our minds and spirits as well as our physical selves, that we have to read and write and never stop learning, and that Aikido is something which must be shared.

In my case, I think more than the influence of Aikido which I already knew and practiced, Sensei helped me to see Aikido differently,

Fear and Realization

by Mike Hatfield, Aikido Ikkyu

Sensei used to tell all of the students that we should write every day. I don't, but I do think about writing every day. Maybe that's a good enough first step, but ultimately just thinking is not the same as actually writing. I think that my not writing daily stems from my fear of exposing myself. Fear has always been a factor in my practice, and as is true in life, it's so much more comfortable just to sit quietly and watch rather than do.

When I first came to the dojo, I came for myself. As time progressed, I came to give practice for others in class. Most recently the dojo has become much like the beehive for me, and coming to practice is not just for me or the other students, but because I've become a part of the collective intelligence of the hive and its survival depends on me doing my small part.

I've also recently discovered that my teacher knows me better than I know myself. What a wonderful realization and reason for continuing to practice! And by the way, Sensei was right: writing is a muscle that needs to get exercised, it's not just a matter of thinking and then deciding to write. No matter how disjointed our thoughts may be or how insecure we feel about expressing ourselves, it's an important part of our training that we should practice daily.

(For a little inspiration, I highly recommend Seth's Blog:
<http://sethgodin.typepad.com>.)



Untitled

Sword and pen,

Hear the chirping birds?

The spring breeze and old pine are one!

Editor's note: Sensei posted this poem on Aikiweb's Aikido Haiku forum on November 15, 2003.



“In Aikido . . . we are always trying to correct and develop ourselves. This often difficult and painful process of self-reflection and constant vigilance over ourselves about how we think and behave is the basis for all spiritual training. . . .

Perhaps, in the real world it is necessary to think, ‘I am right! I am right!’ This thinking is how we survive and it comes from our natural survival instinct.

Yet, in spiritual practice, it is very different – through self-reflection and contemplation, it is often necessary to think, ‘I am wrong,’ ‘I can do better’ or ‘how do I improve myself.’ This is the nature of our spiritual training in Aikido, Iaido or any such art.”

– Reverend Kensho Furuya

Taken Away

by Leonard Manoukian, Aikido Shodan

Seldom is the reality of a thing the same as its perception. When I was younger, I fancied myself a “thinker.” I am not, of course. Please understand, I *do* think, but it’s usually at someone else’s prodding. Case in point: this article. I was asked to write an article touching on the themes of how my practice has changed over time and how it has changed me. Frankly, I haven’t given it much thought for some time.

When I initially joined ACLA, I tried to bring the “thinking man’s” approach to the study of Aikido: I read books about Aikido, visited Aikido Web sites, and so forth, the idea being that by adding all this tangential knowledge and information, my practice would, somehow, be enhanced. It really wasn’t. It was nice to know all this “stuff”, don’t get me wrong. But it translated poorly and I was still terrible on the mat.

Let me paraphrase an appropriate maxim: the practice of all good Aikidoka is similar, but every bad Aikidoka is bad in a different way! In my case, my bad-ness had to do with me putting obstacles in the way of my learning. Obstacles like ego or distaste for this person or that instructor. Obstacles like wanting to get ahead whether advancement was earned or not. Worst of all? The desire to “learn” the technique.

So what changed? A little over two years ago, I was unable to attend classes for about a month. Mind you, in the past there had times that, due to a broken shoulder or hand or leg (yes, I broke all three in one year – 2007 – my personal *anno horribilis*), I had missed class for longer periods. But, this time it affected me differently in that this absence had an actual physical effect on me: part depression, part weakened immune system, and part, a general sense of lethargy. It was horrible, until I came back to practice. Within a week I was feeling better – completely. Why? The practice; it was that simple. It couldn’t have been the learning; there wasn’t that much learning in one week! And, because I had missed practice and approached it with what Sensei called a “caring heart”, the issues associated with ego were absent.

So I kept coming and haven’t stopped. I come to the dojo with no expectations, knowing that just coming is a good thing because each practice is an opportunity for me to challenge myself physically and mentally. If I “learn” something, fantastic; if not, well, there’s always tomorrow. At least I was on the mat. Someone was having a bad day? At least I saw them. Five years ago, I decided not to come on a particular night and on that night someone important was taken away. So, seeing friends in a bad mood is better than not seeing them – possibly, ever again. Remember: every encounter is the final one! In the meantime, I’m cheerful (most of the time) and I don’t get sick (more than once a year). As for my Aikido, I just do what I see in front of me, hoping to get it right . . . one day.



The Aiki Dojo
Official publication of
the 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.

1211 N. Main Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012 USA
Telephone: 323-225-1424 • E-mail: info@aikidocenterla.com

Publisher: David Ito • Editor-in-Chief: Mark Ehrlich

Nanten: Clippings

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

*"In today's world, we always want to notice what stands out or looks like something new and interesting. Rarely do we notice what is plain and simple. Something perfectly natural always goes by unnoticed. . . . Have you ever noticed the emblem on our dojo patch? It is the Nanten plant, also known as Nandina or Southern Bamboo. Sometimes, people ask me, what is this because 'they have never seen it before.' I always laugh at this, because it is everywhere but we never take a moment to notice it. When you see it closely for the first time, you will see that in its own simple way, it is actually quite beautiful. This is why I picked it for our emblem in the first place. A truly good human being is hardly noticed by anyone because he is good. This, I believe, is true goodness... Please continue to practice hard, in your own plain and simple way!"*¹



NANTEN (南 south, 天 heaven) (Chinese; nan tian-zhu, Latin; nandina domestica) is known as "heavenly bamboo" or "southern heaven bamboo".³ Nanten is actually not a bamboo. It is related to the Barberry (Berberidaceae). It is a resilient evergreen shrub. The berry is used in Chinese medicine for sore throats and it is an ingredient in Nanten Nodo Ame, a modern Japanese throat lozenge.

*"Nanten is a plant which, according to legend, can turn any evil into goodness, and correct any mistake or fault."*⁴

In Western cultures, words that sound alike are the basis for humor (i.e. puns), whereas in Eastern cultures they are considered metaphysical insights. The phrase *nan o tenjiru* (難を転じる) would mean *to transfer difficulties away*. Because of this phrase, there is a sense that the nanten plant can protect from misfortune. If one had a bad dream (an omen of misfortune in the past), the misfortune can be avoided by whispering it to the nanten. It is believed that it is good luck to have nanten growing one's property because it would protect against misfortune and evil. We use nanten to decorate our *kamidana* in the dojo. Sensei also said that the straight, rod-like stalks of the nanten were used in monasteries to discipline and "encourage" monks.

There was a 19th Century Rinzaï priest, Toju Zencho (1839 – 1925) who was so strongly associated with nanten that he became known as Nakahara Nantenbo. In 1873, he was traveling in Kyushu when he found a large nandina growing next to a cow shed. He asked the owner: "I have searched here and there, and this is a perfect dragon-quelling training stick. If this tree goes on this way, how long will it live? Someday it will wither and die... In my hands, however, it will become an instrument of the dharma. This nandina will resound for countless generations. What do you say? Will you let me have it?" The farmer agreed. After he cut a

staff, his companions dubbed him *Nantenbo* (nandina staff). "In his determination to restore Zen to . . . purity and brilliance, he emulated the severe methods of legendary Zen masters from the distant past. The thick staff of nandina he used to 'encourage' disciples and frighten 'false priests' resulted in a great deal of notoriety." Among his many temple positions, he was Zen master at a small temple that Yamaoka Tesshu restored and that General Kodama Gentaro and General Nogi Maresuke went for Zen training. Nakahara Nantenbo is now known for the over 100,000 scrolls he painted.^{4,5}

**The Stick of Nantenbo (1901)**

Inscribed Dotoku Nantenbo dofutoku Nanten: "Speak [and you will get] Nanten's staff; do not speak [and you will get] Nanten's staff)"



*"This is our dojo crest or mon. This symbol is on our dojo patch. The middle is a plant called Nanten or Southern bamboo. The circle represents a Buddhist calligraphy circle called an Enso which represents enlightenment."*⁶

ACLA's *mon* is simple but is rich in symbolism. The plain, unassuming nanten is therapeutic, protective, and most importantly, transformative. What appears to simply be a graphic border is, in fact, the representation of student enlightenment, the objective of the dojo. The nanten also represents the fierce, determined quest for that enlightenment.



Enso
(1922)

Notes

1. Reverend Kensho Furuya (ACLA-Kodo-Iaido Yahoo group, May 10, 2005)
2. <http://blog.alientimes.org/2010/12/nandian-nanten>
3. Reverend Kensho Furuya, "Daily Message", January 2, 2006
4. "Nantenbo" by M. Welch, from *The Art of Twentieth-Century Zen, Paintings and Calligraphy by Japanese Masters* by A. Y. Seo with S. Addiss (1988),
5. <http://kc-shotokan.com/Essays/nantenbo.htm>
6. David Ito, "Our Dojo Crest", *The Aiki Dojo* (26:9:4), September 2008.



Nyozō – *Just as it is.*

“‘Just as it is,’ uncolored by our eyes of deception, bias and delusion. Aikido and Iaido practice should be ‘just as it is,’ – pure – without the color or the bias and vanity of our own ideas and guessing. Purity!”

– Reverend Kensho Furuya



Sensei demonstrating randori at Zenshuji temple

The Greatest Kindness

by Jim Bassett, Aikido Ikkyu

Sensei was a teacher’s teacher. I have a hard time writing the word ‘was,’ though. It is just simply inaccurate and Sensei would not have stood for any inaccuracies. *Was* isn’t good enough; how could it be? I think about Sensei often, maybe every day, and certainly as difficult situations arise where one looks for guidance. Sensei knew how to cut through the distractions, the fluff, the noise occluding a straightforward, clear-sighted view of things.

I cannot say this for sure, but I think it’s true: my practice has changed to become closer to Sensei’s. There is no doubt that even though I am different and what I teach is different, at least superficially, both his method of instruction and what was communicated affects my own. For example, I find it less and less

difficult to deliver what students might perceive as ‘bad news.’ When what needs to be seen is true, it is just ‘the news,’ not good or bad, and Sensei had no trouble distinguishing what one needed to hear from what one wanted to hear. What one perceives as ‘harsh’ at one stage of realization is pure generosity at another.

Sensei wrote every day, responding to questions from Aikidoists from all over the world. At times I wondered why he was so gentle with those at a distance, while the same question in the dojo might earn you a challenge to ‘just practice’ or worse, no response. But this was his greatest kindness. If you made the commitment to come and face the facts, he gave you the most generous treatment, a commitment to match and exceed your own, rather than just give you answers, in order to show you the way. Really, it’s astonishing that anyone even does this; there is so much to lose, or so we think.



Yonemochi Sensei, Ichihashi Sensei, Kanazawa Sensei, Sakurai Sensei, and other teachers visit the dojo during a demonstration in Long Beach in the late 1990s

Now, Breathe*by Mark Ehrlich**Editor, The Aiki Dojo*

In the five years since Sensei's death, my practice must have changed significantly, although I find mapping those changes somewhat difficult. Aikido demands daily attention, yet giving Aikido an equitable share of our schedule yields two somewhat immiscible byproducts: the first is our eventual improvement, while the second is our almost completely missing that improvement. Those skills which at first caused great pain gradually lose their uncomfortable feeling as we repeatedly drill them, and while we still leave the mat soaked with sweat, it has a different cause and comes from different processes than when we first began our training. Like the toddler racing around a room and vexing her parents, we probably reflect little on how just a few months ago we took our first tentative steps: in the moment, we just want to have someone chase after us and play.

When I began training, I definitely embraced that same playful attitude. I found everything about Aikido alien and intriguing. The etiquette, the training, the techniques, the language all sparked my imagination; I cared less about getting good at Aikido than just getting my bearings and figuring out how to ask my body and mind to align with what Sensei demanded from us. Looking back, I now understand that I had absolutely no idea what Aikido had to offer in any deep sense. For me, it was a workout, a social activity inasmuch as it required at least one other person, and a means to discipline myself in a way beyond my work life or my social and family circles. I had fun doing it. I felt afraid of it. I found my teacher and my fellow students kind, and intimidating. I considered myself victorious when I kept coming week after week. Being a creature of habit, I probably would have happily continued training three days a week for the rest of my life.

Sensei's sudden death changed everything in my world. Giving ourselves to another person completely places us at great risk and so necessitates a bond of great trust, as well as courage. I had given myself completely to another person once before, and Sensei's unexpected passing shocked me just as much as my earlier loss had. I wondered if I somehow unconsciously poisoned everything good that appeared in my life: *You lost your wife, you lost your teacher, everyone leaves you. You are a failure, you are worthless.* This emotional calculus never adds up, but I tried to make sense of the world this way for a long time. I hope no one reading these words pursues this line of thinking. If you do, please abandon it immediately; I promise that it leads nowhere good.



Sensei in the early 1970s demonstrating Aikido at Nishi Hongwanji temple in Los Angeles

Yet throughout all my self-indulgent turmoil, I kept training. The dojo had new leaders, and I kept training. Those leaders struggled to find the Way, and I kept training. The dojo changed its course to find the Way, and I kept training. Somewhere during ACLA's long, slow transition in the months and years after Sensei died, I changed. I no longer played; for me, Aikido became something deadly earnest, the only means I knew whereby I could do something to continue my teacher's legacy. I had no reputation; I was not and am not a teacher or even a good martial artist; but if I could catch his Aikido (I thought), I can keep all Sensei worked so hard for going a little bit longer. I began to attend every class I could. I agreed to help run the dojo, even though I knew nothing about such things. Whatever I thought would have me closely following in Sensei's footsteps, I did. Others tried to do the same, I think; some left and found other teachers, some just left. Some started experimenting

with their own ideas about Aikido and teaching and training. Some who had moved away would come back now and again to visit. Some of them talked more and better than they trained, and their talk rang hollow in my ears. I kept training.

Those with enough years in Aikido will probably agree with me on this point, which I now understand and which Sensei repeatedly emphasized in class and in his writings: we can only get the best out of Aikido – indeed, we can only get the best out of ourselves in Aikido – through training. Newsletters and cocktail party conversations and social media sound bites about Aikido are all very well, but in the end, Aikido requires us to do it to get any benefit from it. Whatever I have become as a martial artist I attribute to following this idea wholeheartedly: I wore out two uniforms preparing for a test one year, because I wanted to execute a test that I thought would have pleased Sensei, as something that he would recognized as an effort offered by one of his students – the least of his students, certainly, yet still one of his own. In the end, I felt I succeeded, and that milestone marked another change. I felt something inside of me thaw which had slept, dormant and frozen, for a long time. I began to understand self-victory, and self-love, in a higher sense. I began to view the dojo as something to tend for the future, not only for what it could offer people, but for what the people who come here could offer it. And almost imperceptibly, ACLA has become a community of wonderfully diverse students united by a common pursuit: growing their self-awareness and development through Aikido. Full credit goes to our Chief Instructor, and to my fellow students, for selflessly giving their energies to create this cultural shift, and I deeply appreciate that I belong to such a community as this.

Continued on page 19...

Finding Discipline

by Maria Murakawa, Aikido 2nd Dan

When I first started Aikido my world revolved around it. From the moment I stepped into the dojo, quite frankly, I was scared but excited, in a way you would be excited if you saw something or someone whom you know would be in your life forever. I came to see a class without having ever seen Aikido or even known what it looked like. All I wanted to do was a martial art, and reading somewhere that there was some aspect of Zen influence in the training, thought it would be what I was looking for. So there I was, knocking on the door of ACLA, with two big dogs rushing to greet me, barking in a way which would scare away even the most avid dog lover. And it did not help that I needed to go to the bathroom out of sheer nervousness, and that I was forbidden to use the restroom (at that time the restroom was upstairs literally one foot away from where Sensei would always sit and work, and students were discouraged from using it). Despite this, I managed to stay and saw *shomen uchi irimi nage*, and instantly fell in love with the circular movement of Aikido and knew that this was what I wanted to do. And then I ran out looking for the nearest bathroom. (In vain; but that story should be saved for another day.) The next day I came back, at an odd hour to sign up (It must have been after I finished school for the day, as I was still going to college.). Sensei answered the door and was nice enough to give me an application, and my training started.

I trained at least 5-7 days a week, sometimes staying for second class and even practicing after that, with other equally passionate students. Aikido opened up another part of life which I hadn't experienced. Growing up I was never into sports, and Aikido became an outlet for the physicality and spirituality that I had craved but never had the courage to pursue. I had never trained so hard at anything up until this time. The fact that Aikido and its techniques were so hard to grasp for me, and the fact that Sensei was such a demanding teacher, made me want to train even harder, to try to understand whatever was being taught within that hour of class. Because of this training I became more open to experiencing life and learning, and in the process made great friends as well.

Additionally that year I went into the second year of my college major, fashion design, in which I remember spending hours on projects I wasn't sure merited such effort, and started to become unsure of my direction in life. Which is why I made time for Aikido, and after practice I often went back to the studio to work. I think it was this balance that Aikido gave to me in my life then, and how it does now, which probably explains why I am still doing Aikido today.



Fearless dojo guardians Kuma and Michiko in a quiet moment

My practice started to suffer when I started working, due to the hours that my job demanded. I would say this is when I strayed from the Way, or at least from Aikido practice. But even if I strayed from this path, Aikido was always there, and I believed in my mind that Sensei would be there too. I suppose at the time I took him for granted. There is a saying in Japanese which goes, *itsumademo aru to omouna-oya to kane*, which loosely translates to "Do not think these things will exist forever: parents and money." This is something my parents would jokingly tell me sometimes, and it is known to instill self-reliance and independence in children as they are growing up, as well as a reminder of the natural order of things; but I guess we never know the harsh reality of this truth until we experience it. This is when I felt so thankful for Sensei. Looking back, his dedication to his path encouraged my dedication towards my own life; and seven days a week he gave of himself to the benefit of us, his students. I admired Sensei's single-mindedness in walking the path of Aikido. I had hoped for the same type of direction in my life as well, and to this day, I'm not sure if I have it. But I do know that Sensei's spirit and Aikido have become synonymous with discipline in my life and it is something which always keeps me going back to the mat to train.

Now seeing new students practicing, I remember the blood, sweat, and tears of when I first started, and they in turn inspire me to keep moving forward in my training, to work harder, and push myself as when I first started on this journey. I hope one day to understand Aikido enough to be able help others on this path, to put somehow into words what the body understands, and to remember always that rush of excitement the first time I stepped into the dojo.

"Just as the students should regard their teacher as a treasure, so should their teacher regard his students as a treasure. As I grow older and older in this cold, lonely world, there is nothing more important than my students. They are my treasure and my family. . . ."

– Reverend Kensho Furuya



O Sensei Memorial Seminar

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Friday April 27th

5:15-6:15 PM: David Ito, ACLA Aikido Chief Instructor
 6:30-7:30 PM: Ken Watanabe, Aikido 5th Dan
 8:00 PM: Welcome party (no host)

Saturday April 28th

9:00-10:00 AM (Bokken): Gary Myers, ACLA Iaido Chief Instructor
 10:15-11:00 AM: David Ito, ACLA Aikido Chief Instructor
 11:15 AM-12:15 PM: James Doi, Aikido 5th Dan
 12:30 PM: Lunch
 4:00-4:45 PM: Mike Van Ruth, Aikido Renbukai of Arizona Chief Instructor
 5:00-5:45 PM: Alvaro Hernandez Meza, Veracruz Aikikai Chief instructor
 6:00-7:00 PM: Ken Watanabe, Aikido 5th Dan
 7:30 PM: Seminar social

Sunday April 29th

8:00-8:45 AM: TBA
 9:00-10:00 AM: O Sensei memorial service
 10:15-11:15 AM: David Ito, ACLA Aikido Chief Instructor
 11:30 AM-12:30 PM: Santiago Almaraz Garcia, Aikido Kodokai Chief Instructor
 12:45 PM: Lunch
 4:00-4:45 PM: Roberto Magallanes Molina, Veracruz Aikikai Chief Instructor
 5:00-5:45 PM: David Ito, ACLA Aikido Chief Instructor
 6:00-7:00 PM: Ken Watanabe, Aikido 5th Dan

Schedule subject to change without notice

April 27-28, 2012

Everyone is welcome!

\$100.00 per person
 For more information, please contact us
 at info@aikidocenterla.com



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

www.aikidorenbukai.com

Visit us on the Web at www.aikidocenterla.com





Sensei with Councilwoman Jan Perry



Sensei with Kiyoshi Yamazaki Sensei



Sensei with Akira Tohei Sensei

Information vs. Knowledge

by Mohammed Anwar, Aikido Ikkyu

In days long past, Sensei's daily message often contained a lot of criticism about the Internet. He understandably experienced some culture shock by the lowered inhibition that anonymity and long-distance communication tends to bestow upon people, but one of his messages struck me as particularly pedantic. When writing about search engine Google, he once wrote some criticism about the ease with which information could be spread across the Internet, and stated that knowledge and information are not the same thing. *"That is really picky,"* I thought to myself, *"Sensei sounds like such a Luddite sometimes!"* While I did not believe that the Internet was a complete replacement for conventional learning methods, it is difficult to argue with the way it has spread information. However, since then I have come to understand what he was trying to say a little bit better. The old saying, "Learn the rules, then forget 'em", merely scratches the surface of the distinction between the two.

A cooking analogy comes to mind for describing the difference. When inexperienced people who don't know how to cook attempt to follow a recipe, they tend to follow each direction religiously, and the results may vary between attempts; they might have great results on one day and poor results on another. Meanwhile, experienced and professional cooks can operate fast and loose when preparing a dish, but get consistently good results each time. The difference is that the chefs have developed a fundamental under-

standing of how cooking techniques work. Inexperienced cooks may have the information in front of them that they need a medium onion and will have to preheat the oven at 375 degrees, but they may not understand what counts as a "medium onion" as the size of onions is going to be subjective across location, and before getting into how altitude affects heating times, different ovens simply behave differently. Experienced cooks have developed a deeper understanding of how cooking works and the way underlying concepts interact with each other, and through this they eventually become capable of creating great meals without even needing a recipe.

Now, how do experienced cooks get to that point? Perhaps they went to culinary school. Maybe they spent years cooking for their families. Still yet, they may have in fact taken in a vast amount of information – which they would then have needed time and experience to digest that information, refine it down to an understanding of which facts matter, and how those facts relate to each other. In all of those cases, knowledge had to be distilled from that information. One late December morning last year, Ito Sensei spoke of taking care of the *tokonoma* and recalled the finer points of maintaining it that Sensei once expected of him, and a developed understanding of the *how* and *why* that emerged from that practice. Among many other thoughts on my mind that morning, I recalled Sensei's daily message of nearly a decade past, about how information wasn't nearly as hard to acquire as knowledge was.

"As one begins to appreciate how fleeting and unpredictable life can be – old friends and students, who stay by you through thick and thin, can be so valuable and comforting."

– Reverend Kensho Furuya



Harry Wong, Sensei, Shin Koyamada, and Eric Lee



Isoyama Sensei and Sensei



Jackie Chan and Sensei

Why Do We Train?

by Jeff Wheeler, Iaido 3rd Dan

I've noticed that, particularly in the first few months of each new year since Sensei's passing, I find my mind very often wanders to memories of him and the profound influence he has had on my life. While he clearly made his life within a world built largely around the never-ending struggle for consumption, money, and fame, his core compass, course, and values were his own. I often admired how he consciously centered his own life and efforts on principles far removed from the pursuit of money or what most of us would consider success. I know he was absolutely aware that each of us individually, in each moment, actively determine our own level of happiness in life. I believe he knew that the deepest part of our humanity is nurtured and fulfilled by truly contributing to the lives of others. Sensei contributed much to the lives of those he cared about. I consider myself one very fortunate recipient.

As it happened, my own journey with Sensei began in the late 1980s, shortly after what was to have been the most devastating year of my life. Just about every facet had been affected: financial, professional, physical, relationships. You get the picture. I was a mess, adrift, and very much needing to rebuild myself – starting from within. In retrospect, Iaido it turns out became a primary tool in my restoration.

I remember quite clearly the good-natured chiding my younger brother delivered when I first began to train. "So you're on the subway and four guys jump you. You pull out your sword and . . . why are you doing this again?" I couldn't really articulate the internal spirit that Sensei's Iaido engenders and requires. At the time I'd just responded, "Yes, yes, I know, it's not the kind of martial art you would use to defend yourself on the street." Early in my training, I wrestled with the motivation to rise in the wee hours of the morning for the weekend classes. I often struggled physically and at times emotionally, yet I also learned and persevered. All the while Sensei firmly insisted to all Aikido and Iaido students that we are not to fight.

Now, many years later, I look back and recognize that the training and the environment of the dojo Sensei established has had just as profound an effect on my life as the remarkable man himself. In truth, I owe much credit and gratitude to Myers Sensei as well, without whom Sensei's Iaido may very well have withered within me. To Sensei and my fellow students, both senior and newer, also deserve true credit. The significant internal benefits I've acquired by training in the art cannot be attributed to my efforts alone. Each and every other member of ACLA has played an important part, for it is all of us together as a body who preserve, refine, and pass forward what Sensei established and what we have each gained.

Although in practice my body regularly reminds me years have passed, there are dramatic changes both on the mats and in just about every other part of my life as well. My self confidence, determination, focus, attention to detail, compassion, and tenacity are all as strong as is the internal spirit which now drives them. If as Sensei insisted, we are not to fight, surely it is the development of these qualities and others for which we truly train.



An early evening in front of the old dojo



“Morning suburi!

Cutting thru the cold air,

Old cracking bones . . .”

– Reverend Kensho Furuya

Editor's note: Sensei posted this poem on Aikiweb's Aikido Haiku forum on November 16, 2003

Constant Practice

by Helen H. Hsu, Psy.D.

In one of the funnier anecdotes that Sensei once shared, he talked about how hectic daily life can be. Sensei was driving, rushing to get somewhere, but got stuck behind a maddeningly slow driver who was holding up the entire road. Irritated, he honked – loudly. When he could finally pass the slow poke, he threw her an exasperated look of impatience (something I am sure all of us who drive in L.A. have done). Here in the storytelling, he covered his face with his hand and started to laugh in mortification at himself, “. . . and it was a nice old lady I knew from the temple!”

I’ve thought of that story sometimes over the years as I mature into my own practice. As a supervising clinical psychologist, it’s my job to be a healthy role model, communicate well, and direct staff and interns to high ethical standards. It’s my life’s work (and privilege) to care for others competently – sometimes in their darkest hours. Yet I’m still a human being who wrestles with unruly distractions and rather pointless desires, who sometimes shows up at the office cranky, late, and with bad hair to boot. Sensei’s story was a tidbit about the human foibles and petty impatience that lurk within even a priest and an esteemed master, a reminder for us all about the ongoing nature of practice. It was a brief moment when the



Master Hsu, Helen Hsu, and Sensei enjoying coffee

urgent demands of deadlines caused Sensei to lapse in his normative perspective. And this was followed by his embarrassment at being seen in that disgruntled state by someone who usually saw his kindness and wisdom. There’s a lesson in this for all of us about how practice is daily, hourly, in every moment. How easy it is for us to lapse into our lazy habits and ego urgencies! Yet this was also a lesson in accepting the normal limitations of being a human being. Even very great men and women have bad hair days, rude driving days, lazy practice days, and sweat-the-small-stuff days. Whether our practice is Aikido, parenting, teaching, painting, or programming, balancing humility and humanity with discipline and mastery is a constant practice. All our hard work is not lost despite the occasional “off” practice or angry outburst.

Those of us who spent time with Sensei saw firsthand the effort he had to exert to live his ideals, as well as the setbacks. He was not some aloof, perfectly airbrushed Sensei on a pedestal. My affection and admiration for Sensei grew as I came to see how despite his mastery, practice always continued. Our practice may be experienced as a burden or as a joy depending upon our own mental and spiritual interpretation. This is a concept fundamental within Buddhism, as well as in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). I hope that like myself, you will find the humor and wisdom embedded within even the mortifying moments!



Master Hsu, Sensei and Karita Sensei

Now, Breathe continued from page 14...

Nowadays, five years on, I keep training regularly. Training still remains the only way I know to make sense of my changing practice and my changing world. I have a wonderful woman in my life now, who also practices. People sometimes comment when we practice together that we seem to train unusually hard, but I think that’s because we give ourselves completely over to each other in the training – we have trust. I take a lot of *ukemi* for the instructors. I have the best kind of friends both in and outside of ACLA. My work challenges and rewards me. I help run the Furuya Foundation, which oversees the dojo and which will hopefully bring some of Sensei’s wishes to life that could not happen while he walked among us. I have another test to take in May, and I wonder if I can keep to my standard of making Sensei proud. I resolved once again to do my best. I help the new students more; our dojo keeps growing and every month it seems we have more students, which means I get to help them find their way through this alien, intriguing world. I get to talk with them and hear why they think they want Aikido; most offer the same reasons I had. I’m constantly trying to polish my technique and have begun to see things in the techniques that I have heretofore missed, which I find both exciting and humbling; it really is a lifetime study. Finally, I’m learning, more and more, that I can get out of my own way. I can breathe through everything. I can let go and become more present. More and more, I can appreciate how much Sensei did for all of us who train here and how much his senior students continue to do in his name. I will do my best to sustain that effort. I’ve recently discovered that it all comes from the breath. So nowadays, I breathe.

The Gift of Practice

by Jonathan White, Chief Instructor
Eastsound Aikido, Eastsound, Washington

I started training in Aikido with Sensei on May 18, 1988. I knew I had chosen the right dojo after visiting a couple of other ones.

The other dojos actually seemed more “fun”, but when I looked at the quality of the training and the quality of the students at ACLA, I knew I really didn’t have a choice. I made a pact with myself that I would train regularly, but never tell anyone that I was involved with Aikido. I wanted to protect my practice so that it remained private. I didn’t want a dialogue around it, I wanted just to practice. My girlfriend was the only one I would tell. I wouldn’t tell anyone that I trained until I became a black belt. I assumed that would never happen, so I was clear simply to practice.

I continued training and Aikido became a central part of my life. Over time, I was promoted, but Aikido remained about practice. One day in the summer of 1992, to my surprise, Sensei called me up to his office and said that I was going to test for Shodan with the next group. I definitely didn’t feel ready, but if Sensei said it was time, then it was my job to take this seriously. For the next few months the group of us trained six or seven days a week, usually two classes a night. It was an incredible time in my life.

The test was a wonderful and challenging experience which I won’t go into here; and it was a fun and odd moment to tell my parents, siblings, and friends finally that I held a black belt in Aikido. But deep down, my fear was that my practice, which had remained so private, would somehow change now that those around me knew what I was doing. To my relief, Aikido remained Aikido: I continued to train, and as Sensei made clear to those of us who passed the exam, Shodan means “to begin” or “beginner” – we had practiced and progressed in our training to a point where we were finally ready to begin training seriously – I liked that.

Although I eventually moved to the west side of town, I continued to train a few times a week for the next few years. I did begin to notice that I was experiencing Aikido in all aspects of my life. It manifested in how I negotiated with my colleagues, my wife, my friends, and others around me. My practice had seeped into my life in ways that I hadn’t anticipated.

Eventually, I realized that I had stopped my practice as a result of the combination of the distance from ACLA and being immersed

in work. I didn’t want to acknowledge that I had stopped; I assumed that I would continue, since Aikido had been and continued to be deeply important to me, but I wasn’t practicing – at least at the dojo.

Some years later, an event occurred about which I subsequently



Jonathan White pictured on the right sweeping the mats during a photo shoot for a martial arts magazine

wrote Sensei a letter. It was June 1, 2003: my wife Lynn, my 2½ year-old son Ethan, and I were at a nice part of Griffith Park having a picnic with two other couples. It was a beautiful Sunday afternoon, and we had just spent a few hours visiting. I told Lynn that I would get the car and drive it up to where we were to pack up and go. I took the path down to the parking lot. A minute or so later a young man moved in front of me and asked for the time. I knew something didn’t feel right; I remember lifting my arm, pretending to look at my

watch, at which point I saw two other guys running toward me with baseball bats. From this point on all I know was that my body took over. It was only days later that I was able to piece together the sequence of events. What happened was the man who asked me for the time had been hiding a bat at his side. As his bat was coming towards my head, I entered to block that strike when I felt someone grab me from behind. Somehow, I was able to throw him onto the man in front and turn and run for my life. After getting to my family and friends and running to the ranger’s station, working with the police, then finally getting to the emergency hospital, the X-rays showed that my arm, although painful and swollen, was luckily not broken.

I’m not sure how appropriate it is to be writing about something of this nature here, but aside from the trauma of being attacked, which I can still feel, I was completely surprised at how the practice of Aikido had seeped into my cells. I felt such gratitude towards Aikido and Sensei for sharing this with me. The letter that I had written to Sensei, sharing my appreciation and thanking him for saving my life, was never sent. I assumed that I would one day come back to the dojo and train and tell him in person. That can’t happen now, but I thought that I would share my appreciation with all of you.

Today I live on an Island a couple of hours north of Seattle. I’ve been here for eight years. Six months ago I began to teach Aikido to some students. This has been an amazing experience, resuming my practice: I can look back and see how I have been practicing Aikido in so many other ways. But now, to be back on the mats, sharing what Sensei shared with me, is a gift. As I said earlier – I never wanted a dialogue around Aikido, I wanted just to practice. That’s what I’m now finally doing, again.



Sensei studying with Dr. Trogawa Rinpoche in the 1980s

Up and Down

by Shaun Menashe, Aikido Ikkyu, Iaido Nidan

I first found the dojo in late October of 2006 and full of naïve idealism, I romanticized my training. This was certainly compounded by having a teacher like Sensei. When I reflect on it now, it seems almost ridiculous, but Sensei put me at ease and made me feel like a better person. Perhaps he was the father figure I never had, but I think I walked a bit taller while he was alive. After Sensei's passing, my training certainly changed. The enormous vacuum he left in my life brought reality crashing down. I remember feeling so discouraged that I had finally found a method to develop myself and a teacher I believed in only to have it taken so swiftly. I was forced to reevaluate my life in the wake of Sensei's death.

I think this is why I began to emulate Sensei's interests as my training continued. I read as much as I could on swords and swordsmanship, began studying *tsuba*, started practicing Iaido, enrolled in school to earn a degree in Traditional Chinese Medicine, and even began learning Japanese. I think I was really internally driven to copy my teacher. Perhaps I thought that if I emulated him, copied his interests, and read the books he read, he could still train me even in death.

Whatever romance was left of becoming an Aikidoist after Sensei's passing was completely depleted by my first knee injury. These early injuries made me distrust my body and physical ability and, overnight, Aikido became a burden to me. Every time I bowed on to the mat, I practiced in fear of hurting myself again and every physical setback I faced affirmed my conclusion. Any enjoyment of practice dropped away. I felt like a prisoner, shackled by my dedication to the dojo and Sensei's memory. However, it was this dedication and determination that helped me through the darkest hours of my practice. In many ways, the real training began when I became discouraged and disillusioned.

I think this was Sensei's true parting gift to me: the determination to practice, not just in some physical way, but to have the confidence that my training will always be there to guide me throughout the course of my life. It was the one thing that I promised him before he died: "I will always practice hard."

Life certainly goes up and down. In the end, faced with heart-break, defeat, frustration with myself and others, I always had my practice; I could always turn to it as long as I stuck with it. I think Sensei knew that if we continued to practice long enough, we had a good chance of learning that our often inflated emotional response to things does not exist like some solid, separate living entity. The hidden opponent that believes *I am angry and can't go back until someone changes the channel to something more agreeable*, always seems to be lurking in some capacity. I certainly tried the "blame others" method and instead of becoming happier, I ended relationships, hurt people's feelings, and only increased my frustration. I think Sensei realized that our practice becomes more even-tempered over time and that those skills it develops easily parley with the events of our daily lives. Although I'm sure this was something Sensei was still developing within himself, he knew this was the best chance he could give his students at facing life's problems. Perhaps this is why Sensei was reluctant to engage in talk therapy and instead left us to train while providing inspiration and guidance through the daily message, notes posted in the dojo, and the few special moments that managed to touch our hearts.

PLEASE NOTE:

I can only make one person happy a day.

Today is not your day.

Tomorrow does not look good for you either.

Please be patient & just practice.

Sensei

So even though I felt emotionally broken, distrustful of my practice, and scared, I never quit. I just tried to follow my teacher's advice.

Today, my practice is an evolving process, as I imagine it is for most people. The seeds of fear planted in years past persist, but a certain confidence and happiness is reemerging in my training and I am learning to be driven by something other than guilt. With a significant amount of guidance, I realized that training is just something I do, because I like it. It's something I do because I think it is what's best. It's something I do because I believe in it as a development method and because I believe it can help others in the same way it has helped me.

As time went on, the interests that belonged to only Sensei, the aspects of his life I was only mimicking, gradually fell away, leaving behind my true interests. At some point, this helped me uncover my individuality. Sensei showed me a version of what I was looking for in my life, and inspired me to believe that it was achievable. His life proved that I did not have to be what everyone else wanted, but that I could follow my heart and be my own person.

Sometimes I miss my old attitude. That person was motivated and hungry, while these days I often feel tired and lackluster. I suppose it is only human to look back in time and remember only the positive, but, when I give a closer look, I can see that I would never trade that person with the person that I am today. That is a credit to Sensei's inspiration, Ito Sensei's tireless efforts, Mark's periodic words of wisdom, training with all the other students at ACLA, and Aikido. It is because of these efforts that I was able to grow into a better person and have a richer and more meaningful life.



A view of my Japanese garden

Fallen Leaves

by James Takata, Aikido 2nd Dan

One of the remarkable things about the old dojo was the garden. Populated with bamboo, nandina, and ficus in a narrow space of about 15 feet, it was carefully designed by Sensei and maintained daily by the students. A senior black belt would arrive early before every class to wash down the garden, giving it the feeling of just having rained. As

we do today, students would water the garden after class and often pick up the leaves from the path by hand. These leaves were not thrown away, but placed back into the planter for nutrients. Guided by principles of Japanese tea ceremony and design, it was a perfect transition from the outside world to the dojo.

After Sensei died and we moved out of the old dojo there were some things that couldn't fit in storage or just needed a new home. Many of the plants from the garden went to the students who had space to keep them. I was lucky to take home a potted bamboo. That bamboo is now a part of my own attempt at a Japanese garden, right outside of my living room. I've managed to keep it alive for five years (a great accomplishment given my history with plants). When I pick up the fallen leaves I still do it by hand and place them in the planter.

You could even say that the bamboo has become a part of our family. On windy days it is a source of great entertainment for my daughters while we eat our meals and watch the leaves and branches whip around wildly. As babies they would both be mesmerized by the rustling of the leaves while having a bottle near the window. My cats also enjoy eating the bamboo leaves whenever the door to the garden is open. For myself it brings a little beauty and peace to the day and, of course, a reminder of Sensei and Aikido.

At this moment, I'm regrettably away from regular practice, but Aikido is always with me and on this fifth year since Sensei's death I still feel his influence in my life profoundly.

Sensei also loved poetry and these lines came to me as I thought of him:

*Wind whipped bamboo leaves
Scattered along the wet path
Too many to count*

*The old gardener
Waters, trims, and nourishes
While the plants just grow*

*The hose sputters on
Playing a tune on the fence
Rain in the alley*

Untitled

Open the Universe for you to roam,

This, indeed, is our True Home.

A quiet moon, and sea of foam,

Crying birds sing subtle tones.

The morning mist, the emerging sun,

Here it is, where man becomes One.

Here among the talk and chatter,

Quiet words without the clatter,

Running streams, a pure Spring breeze,

Whispers of a Life of Peace.

Editor's Note: *Sensei posted this poem on Aikiweb's Aikido Haiku forum on November 14, 2003.*



Tea ceremony in the dojo with Bishop Yamashita, Sosei Matsumoto Sensei, and Sensei

The Way of Nature

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

Today is my birthday so it is natural for me to reflect on my life as I do everyday and every year of my life. I suppose if I was a little more smart, a little more energetic, a little more lucky, better looking and handsome, a few more friends, a few more contacts, a few more lucky breaks, and many more dollars in the bank, I suppose my life could be or could have been much better. Yet, despite all the mistakes I have made in my life and despite my lack of talent, I am very grateful for everything that has come my way. Just to have an opportunity to practice Aikido is a great blessing in my life which I should never forget.

Human beings are funny creatures aren't they? The more they have, the less they appreciate it. The less they have, the more they appreciate it. Is this just a law of human nature? People who have so little appreciate everything so much and those with so much take so much more for granted. I was talking with another Aikido teacher the other day who travels to Eastern Europe for seminars and he was telling me how much they appreciate his teaching and efforts as opposed to other areas where there is so much Aikido. As I myself talk with so many people from all other the world, I see that Aikido is in so much demand and so greatly treasured where there is so little available.

“As great as we human beings think we are on this earth, there is a still a lot which must be corrected or improved through training.”

– Reverend Kensho Furuya

As great as we human beings think we are on this earth, there is a still a lot which must be corrected or improved through training.

Two documentaries I happened to watch on cable this week left an impression on me. One was about various snakes in Africa. I cannot recall which type of snake it was but it watches over its eggs very carefully; however, as soon as they begin hatching she abandons the nest and goes on her way. From the moment the baby snakes hatch, they are already able to hunt for food and make it on their own. In another documentary I was watching, there was a segment on a birth in a hospital and I was amazed how many doctors and nurses it takes for one child to be born. So much equipment and in this case, the baby was

not breathing and had to have a special tube inserted into his throat to begin the breathing process. It must be destiny that some animals can be on their own from the moment of birth and some animals, like humans, depend on others for a number of years before they are able to become independent. A baby snake may never need a dojo or school, while humans do need someplace where they can learn and develop themselves for their lives. To depend on others, to learn, to train, to develop one's self through others and their teachers is, I believe, the most natural way for man to live; it is, indeed, the Way of Nature.

Editor's Note: Sensei originally posted this article, in slightly different form, to his daily message board on April 25, 2002.

“The courage of the weak is more precious than the advantage of the strong. Those who play too much with power will be destroyed by that same power. This is what I think is the meaning of ‘the meek shall inherit the earth. . . .’”

– Reverend Kensho Furuya



Old, Lonely Teacher

My eyes grow faint,
My words grow weak,
Students grow so far away,
Who will hold my hand when I am old?
Rest it there, they say,
On this old, cold stone
Of those long gone.
Waiting for God another day.

Editor's note: Sensei posted this poem on Aikiweb's Aikido Haiku forum on October 14, 2003.



Congratulations on reaching the last page of this newsletter. This publication is a labor of love and something that was near and dear to Sensei's heart and that is why Mark Ehrlich and I continue it today. I am hoping you read all of the articles and found them as enlightening and impressive as I did. Sensei used to say, "A teacher can consider himself truly blessed if he finds *one* good student in his lifetime." These articles demonstrate that he without a doubt was blessed so many great students and I am sure these articles put a smile on Sensei's face and joyful tears in his eyes because, if these people could understand him and get what he was trying to do, then others can too.

How did these people get it? I wish I was enlightened so that I could give you some special words of wisdom to change your life; unfortunately, I am not. I only know what Sensei tried for years to teach me and that is, "The Way is in training." I don't know if he was right or wrong, but I do have faith in what he tried so desperately to teach us. I think he believed that the only thing which would enable us to reach higher, have greater lives, and benefit mankind was to train. Aikido training is a spiritual practice and so is inherently a statement of faith, guaranteed by our actions.

– David Ito, Chief Instructor
Aikido Center of Los Angeles
March 10, 2012

Sensei posted this Daily Message, in slightly different form, on November 16, 2002. May these words aid you in your practice.

*Practice, practice, practice
but with proper effort, right concentration, correct focus, and a positive mental attitude.
In physical training, reach for the heavens.
In spiritual training, keep your feet firmly planted on the ground.
Strength is nothing without serenity and nobility of character.
Spiritual awareness is nothing without compassion and painful inner reflection.
The higher you go, the lower you should bow your head.
Even when you are down, keep your head high.
Set the highest standards for yourself.
Accept the humblest efforts of others.
Success is not measured by money,
Money is not the secret to happiness.
Seek happiness on the inside,
extend your compassion to others around yourself.
Find God in everything,
Buddha's compassion is everywhere.
Understand Aikido through devotion, not intellect.*

– Reverend Kensho Furuya