



# The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

## 道の為、世の為、人の為 合気道

# The Aiki Dojo

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

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Ebisu, god of luck and fishermen

### A Holiday Before Halloween

Ebisu, pictured at left, is one of the Seven Gods of Fortune. He is the protector of fishermen, luck and working people. Every year on the twentieth day of the tenth month called *Kannazuki* (or “the month without gods”) there is a festival held in his honor, called *Ebisu-ko*. It is said that all the gods except Ebisu gather during *Kannazuki* and discuss important matters, but because Ebisu is deaf he never hears the summons and does not go with them. Therefore people can still come and worship at his shrine during *Kannazuki*.

### Letter From the Editor

by Mark Ehrlich  
Editor, The Aiki Dojo

fully accepted the chance to wax philosophical as the days grow shorter and the colors flare and just as quickly fade.

On behalf of everyone at ACLA, I would like to wish all of our students, instructors, friends, and readers a very happy Halloween. If you enjoy the festive diversions this holiday brings, I urge you to grab your costume and come join us at the dojo on Sunday, October 30th at the 9:00 a.m. children’s class for our annual Halloween party. Everyone is welcome to come in costume and enjoy some food and fun together. Students are welcome to bring their children and friends as well. I hope to see you there!

This issue takes up the theme of transitions, which seems appropriate to the month of October. Autumn has always been my favorite season, and October to me represents the calm, as it were, before the storm of the long winter months. This month invites contemplation, and this issue of *The Aiki Dojo* has grate-

fully accepted the chance to wax philosophical as the days grow shorter and the colors flare and just as quickly fade.

Ito Sensei examines the age-old question surrounding the value proposition of modern-day innovations in the traditional martial arts and argues for a mindful awareness of form and what led to the form’s creation. Myers Sensei discusses the importance of transitions within Iaido; while not cuts, students will never master the art unless they give these crucial moments their due. Aikido Renbukai student Allan Agapay shares with us his impressions of a recent visit to Honolulu, Hawaii and the Aikido he experienced there. Finally, Sensei visits us again from the archives to urge something his original students very rarely heard from him: a willingness to talk about problems and issues and the results of our training with each other, not to feed our egos, but to learn from others’ experience and avoid stressing about our progress in the dojo. I hope you enjoy this issue, and I’ll see you on the mat!

### Upcoming Events

**October 29th:**  
Instructor’s Intensive

**October 30th:**  
Children’s class Halloween Party

**November 23-24th:**  
Thanksgiving  
Dojo Closed

**November 26th:**  
Instructor’s Intensive

**December 3rd:**  
ACLA Christmas Party



### Are Innovations Really Improvements?

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

Recently, I saw something interesting in our children's class which made me think about innovation. One of our five-year-old boys had his belt tied perfectly. It was tied so symmetrically, almost *too* proportioned, that I had to take a closer look. Upon closer inspection, I found that it was in fact tied well in the front but had a VELCRO® enclosure on the back, like something from a costume. "How clever," I thought.

Having a belt you don't have to tie is what author Clayton Christensen, in his book *The Innovator's Dilemma*, calls a "disruptive technology", which is any invention that makes the status quo become obsolete. Obvious examples would be things like the Internet, smart phones, Starbucks, or sliced bread. Less obvious innovations might be the something like LED lights or bottled water.

So the question becomes, are innovations in martial arts really improvements? This is a hard question to answer *yes* or *no*. It depends on who, what, and why the innovation was created. Traditional martial arts have always quietly resisted change. In the martial arts, which are different from other things in regular life, rarely are lasting innovations created by someone who is a novice or beginner. This is because it takes a lifetime to understand an art form, let alone come up with a short cut. Many times in the martial arts things are done or practiced without the student knowing the true context, and a short cut might do away with an important teaching from the past. For an example of this, consider the well-known movie *The Karate Kid*: Daniel-san cleans the car, paints the fence, and sands the floor for Mr. Miyagi to learn important lessons which would have been lost if he just went right into training. This approach is not an isolated phenomenon: Sensei once told me about a lineage of Kung Fu that, for the first five years, would teach the form backwards. This method would serve to weed out the insincere or disingenuous students. The teachers had to be certain that their students wouldn't betray them or use the techniques against them later on. Once students proved themselves, the teacher would welcome them into the group of "real" students and only then teach them the proper way.

The first question might lead us to ask, are innovations in the martial arts wrong? The answer here also depends on the context of the improvement. I read an interesting article written by Issac Asimov called "The Relativity of Wrong", in which, rather than put things into right or wrong categories, he looks at things as less right or less wrong depending on the circumstance. Asimov wrote, "What actually happens is that once scientists get hold of a good concept they gradually refine and extend it with greater and greater subtlety as their instruments of measurement improve. Theories are not so much wrong as incomplete." He further stated that, "Since the refinements in theory grow smaller and smaller, even quite ancient theories must have been sufficiently right to allow advances to be made; advances that were not wiped out by subsequent refinements." Martial art experts are the same in that they must take care that what they are "creating" isn't wiping out something else essential to the art but whose context they don't fully understand.

In the past, change has always been the enemy of the martial arts, because the hardest part in teaching the martial arts is extending its longevity beyond one generation. This explains why, initially, the classes are taught in a dogmatic way to ensure or reinforce the teachings of the past. The feeling is that wisdom is gained by experience, not by cleverness. Later on, there can be more room for "freedom" but this only comes after students have mastered the form. Doing things this way gives students a base in which to start from and fall back upon and ensures that the martial art in question gets preserved from generation to generation.

Today, especially in the West, we spend a tremendous amount of time asserting ourselves as masters and searching for more market share or revenues. As we struggle to find something that sets us apart, we risk losing the very thing we are trying to preserve. Innovations are not always bad, and many are in fact examples of someone's mastery of some subject matter. Many of the fine martial arts practiced today are a result of someone's innovation. A problem arises, however, when we create in order to feed our own ego or to take advantage of others. Generally, the best innovations come from mastering the form first. Joseph Campbell put it best when he spoke about what he learned from Buddhist scholar D. T. Suzuki: "If you learn form, you can find a great deal of freedom within the form, but if you go for freedom without the form all you have is anarchy."

So how do we know we are doing the right thing when we are creating a supposed "innovation"? We don't. Yet we can ask a few key questions to guide our decision-making process. *What would my teacher say if he saw me do this? What am I trying to teach by doing this? How will future generations be affected by my creation? Is it about the student or about me?* If we honestly answer these questions, we will know if we are on the right track or not. One thing is for certain: master the form first and innovate later. We might just realize that what we thought needed "improving" is perfect just the way it is.

## Transitions

by Gary Myers, Iaido Chief Instructor

The season has turned to autumn, the leaves will turn color, the mornings feel brisk, and all signify that there is a change in the air. In Japan, fall is also a time for festivals, and like other countries, many of those are focused on harvests. These festivals are a time to celebrate. So far this year Japan has little to celebrate with more than its share of disasters. Besides the earthquake, tsunami, and resultant nuclear disasters, it has also been hit with two very large typhoons. But despite all these terrible occurrences, celebrations will take place, and will be a welcome respite from the pain and suffering that many have endured this year. It is a time to appreciate the beauty of the fall color and reap the bounty of the labors expended in the spring and summer. Fall can be appreciated as a transitional season, bridging the hottest days of summer and the coldest days of winter. It acclimates us to these changes.

With that in mind, I would like to focus on the transitions in Iaido. If you tell beginning students that transitions are just as important as cutting movements, you normally get an incredulous look or a blank stare. It is typical for the beginning Iaido student to think that the stuff in between cuts is just the filler of time, something to get through rather quickly and on to the more important task of cutting. It is helpful to think about transitions in the same way as the negative space in Japanese paintings. Even though it may look like blank space on the paper, it is there to enhance the overall painting. If the negative space were not there, then the important aspects of the painted portion would be lost. Another example is taken from the playing of the *shakuhachi*, or bamboo flute. It is not an easy instrument to play, let alone master. They say that "it takes three years to learn to shake your head properly" to get a



Autumn peaks over into the garden  
at Ryoanji temple in Kyoto

proper note played. An experienced *shakuhachi* player knows that the spaces in between the notes can have as much impact as those played. There is even a saying that "sometimes the note not played is the most beautiful." That is how transitions have to be appreciated: just as autumn acclimates us to the changes of seasons, transitional actions set us up for what is to come next.

It is easy to view transitions as just defensive. However, there are also typically found aggressive actions in the defense. Transitions give us the opportunity to proceed. Not only is the initial offensive move by your opponent negated, it also allows a more aggressive act to clear a path to advance. Rather than maintaining that defensive position, it places you in an advantageous position. That is why transitions are so important to our

practice and should have as much focus and concentration as do the cutting actions.

In Muso Shinden Ryu, *gyakuto* starts by offering your head as a target for your opponent. This is really an aggressive action, which lures the opponent to make the obvious initial attack. In Yagyū Shinkage Ryu, this is called *the attacking body and abiding sword*. The body is offered to draw in the known attack; it is deflected by the sword, and clears a path for a counter-attack. In that action the body becomes the abiding body as it moves back and the attacking sword deflects and counters. Unfortunately, many just draw their sword with their right hand directly over their head and cut, which is a big mistake and makes everything that went before wasted and meaningless effort. Some are in such a hurry that they are not thinking about the transition; they have already moved on to the cutting action. Each action has its own time to complete. So like autumn, each transition has its moment in time. Take the time to appreciate what these transitions do for you. They can turn adversity into an advantage.



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*We are a not-for-profit, traditional Aikido Dojo dedicated to preserving the honored values and traditions of the arts of Aikido and Iaido. With your continued understanding and support, we hope that you also will dedicate yourself to your training and to enjoying all the benefits that Aikido and Iaido can offer.*

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

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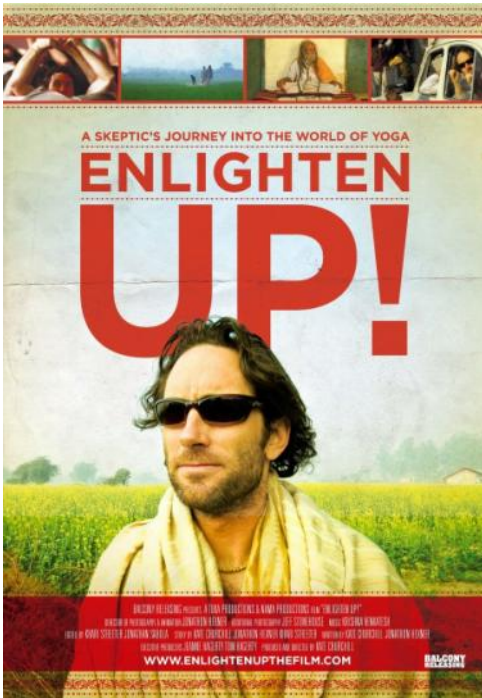
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We welcome all questions and comments. Please send us a letter or an e-mail and our team will do our best to come up with an answer. We reserve the right to edit questions and letters for clarity and length.

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



### Film Review: *Enlighten Up!*

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

I recently watched an interesting documentary on yoga by filmmaker Kate Churchill called *Enlighten Up!* It's about one man's journey into yoga training as he searches for the spiritual side of yoga. His six-month yoga expedition takes him all over the world to places like Los Angeles, New York, and India, and he meets many well-known teachers such as B.K.S. Iyengar, Pattabhi Jois, Gurusharananda, and Norman Allen, to name a few.

Here is a synopsis of the film:

*Filmmaker Kate is a dedicated yoga practitioner who insists that yoga can transform anyone. She decides to prove it. Her plan: select a subject, immerse him in yoga and follow him until he finds a yoga practice that transforms him. Her subject: Nick Rosen, a skeptical, 29 year-old journalist living in New York City.*

*Intrigued by the opportunity to peek behind the curtain of a 5.7 billion dollar "spiritual" industry, Nick signs on to investigate yoga for six months. Before he can say OM, he finds himself twisted up like a pretzel, surrounded by celebrity yogis, true believers, kooks, entrepreneurs, and a gentle teacher from Brazil who leads his classes with his feet arched behind his head.*

*The more Nick investigates yoga the more contradictions he discovers, leading him to question whether yoga is anything more than a workout. As Nick searches for concrete facts and discards the lofty spiritual theories of his yoga teachers, he strays further from Kate's original plan. The two find themselves lost in Northern India, embroiled in a struggle between Kate's expectations and Nick's overt rejection of "spirituality."*

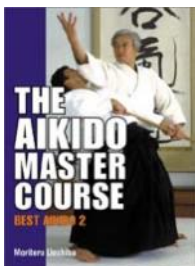
*They circle the globe talking to mystics, gurus, mad men, and saints, searching for the true meaning of yoga. Ultimately, both Nick and Kate end up in places they never could have imagined. They don't find the answers to their questions; they find much more.*

– <http://enlightenupthefilm.com>

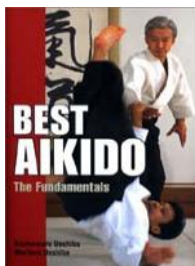
As I watched this film, I was struck by how this beginner's journey was not unlike the journey that beginning students make into Aikido. As Nick delves into yoga training he is prodded by Kate to find the spiritual side of yoga. Every time he asks about the spiritual side of yoga, he is met with laughter and gentle guidance back to the physical side of yoga. He is reassured over and over that it is okay, at this time, just to make his practice physical. This is similar to some beginning Aikido students who want to master the spiritual side of Aikido before knowing the physical side.

I found this film is full of parallels between yoga training and Aikido training. Every question, every obstacle, and every misstep reminded me of my own Aikido journey. I highly recommend this movie to anyone who wants to see their Aikido training from a different shore.

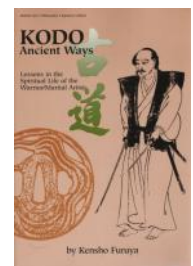
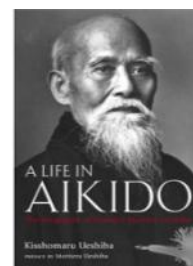
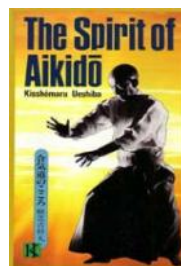
### Recommended Readings:



by Ueshiba Moriteru



by Ueshiba Kisshomaru



by Kensho Furuya

JAPANESE  
LESSON

## 日本語

**Doko no shushin desu ka?: Where are you from?**

Pronounced: Doh koh noh shoe shin deh sue kah?

どこのしゅしんですか。



With great friendliness, conversations in Japanese usually turn to where you are from or living. Talking about where you are from makes for great small talk and enables you to make friends fast. The Japanese are highly inquisitive people who are always curious about who you are and where you have come from. However, they are generally polite people who are very reserved and won't make conversation with you first.

The word *shushin* literally translates as "where did you graduate from," but is used in this context as "where are you from?" Another way of inquiring about where someone lives could be to use *sunde imasu*. A popular way of saying *Where do you come from?* is to use "kara kimashita" which is asking where someone comes from.

## Dialogue

## Other Vocabulary

Where are you from?: *Doko no shushin desu ka?*I'm from the U.S.: *Amerika kara desu.*I'm American.: *Watashi wa Amerika jin desu.*Where do you live?: *Doko ni sunde imasu ka?*I live in the U.S.: *Watashi wa amerika ni sunde imasu.*Where do you come from?: *Anata wa kara kita no desu ka?*I am from Spain.: *Watashi wa supein kara kimashita.*Country: *Kuni*From: *Kara*Where: *Doko*Japan: *Nihon*Japanese person: *Nihon jin*America: *Amerika*American: *Amerika jin*Spain: *Supein*Mexico: *Mekishiko*Europe: *Yoroppa*Here: *Koko*Near: *Chikai*Far: *Tooi*Family: *Kazoku*

## 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

Visit us on the Web at [www.aikidocenterla.com](http://www.aikidocenterla.com)



*Paradise: Just the lapping of the water on the beach and the laughter of my children*

### The Aikido Tourist

by Allen Agapay, Aikido 4th Kyu  
Aikido Renbukai, Surprise, AZ

I must admit that I do enjoy traveling and, when I can, training at a local Aikido dojo. I feel entirely free in that no one knows me and I can train with no expectation of myself or those I train with – literally train with “no mind.” Of course, one enters these dojos with the utmost of reverence and respect for their traditions; a mindset of *shoshin* – to enter with a beginner’s mind; without preconceptions or misconceptions about how *kihon waza* or any other instruction is given; a mindset without criticism, egotism, or cynicism. Enter to train; that is all.

I recently had the privilege of training with Sogi Sensei and students of the Hawaii Betsuin Aikido Club in my home town of Honolulu. I was able to do so after asking permission of my teacher and receiving the approval of Ito Sensei. I attended two nights of practice there; both times, I felt, were very enriching to my training. The

first night was a surprise treat with a visiting instructor from Hombu Dojo – Yamashima Sensei. It truly is a pleasure watching *budo* demonstrated on the mat. There was no drama or visible effort, no misuse of strength in Yamashima Sensei’s demonstrations. What I observed was fearless entry in *irimi*; the unbalancing of *uke*, the subsequent continuous movement of *uke* around Sensei’s center and resultant pin or throw. Movement of *uke* was the result of Yamashima Sensei’s continuous movement to keep *uke* off balance – *uke* made every effort to “catch up” but invariably remained “behind.” It was the continuous redirection of *uke*’s movements that resulted in the throw – when Yamashima Sensei “released” *uke* from his *tanden*, or pin, when *uke*’s movement was directed to the ground. What I witnessed was subtlety, economy of movement, and fluidity in Yamashima Sensei’s practice. Sogi Sensei was present observing the students and reinforcing the principles as instructed by Yamashima Sensei. Receiving instruction from Sogi Sensei is learning from one wizened by years of training: gentle in conveyance and firm in execution.

My second night of training was with three members for an early evening class. It was enjoyable practicing with two *yudansha* of the dojo. *Kokyunage*, *kotegaeshi*, and *sankyo* were the “topic” of the evening and I was enthusiastic to “launch” in on the discussions. Training with these members who trained with both the Aloha and Aiki spirit was truly enlightening.

It is humbling to train with those who have a greater understanding of Aikido. Relaxation and movement are essentials with which I oftentimes struggle on the mat. It is refreshing and enriching to train with others outside of one’s dojo – one’s comfort zone. What I’ve discovered is that a certain amount of freedom that can be gained, a different perspective seen when one enters another’s dojo to just train; therein lies the beauty of being an Aikido tourist.

**Save the date!**



**December 3rd  
6:30 PM**

**Dojo Christmas Party**

**Everyone is welcome!**

### Kotowaza: Japanese Proverb

**“Nukanu tachi no komyo”**

*To perform a glorious exploit with an undrawn sword*



*Takeshi Mitsuzuka Sensei*

The highest form of martial arts is when we realize that we no longer need the sword to accomplish our goals. Today we achieve everything with force. We use force to get power, and from power we think we gain respect. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Once we realize that we no longer need the sword, we have achieved true mastery. O Sensei referred to it as “*Masakatsu, Agatsu*” or victory over our self.



*Sensei lecturing during Budo study group*

### Same Light, Same Boat

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

This last Friday evening, we held one of our bimonthly study classes. This class was particularly interesting for me because I had a chance to discuss individual practice methods with several students.

One student commented that he felt confident in some techniques but not in others. This is a very typical comment from students and I understand this quite well because we all go through this at one point or another in our training careers.

In many cases, we try to learn each technique separately. If there are a thousand techniques, we learn one thousand techniques, one by one. This is not only a not-effective way to train in Aikido, but it never gives us a chance to understand the underlying principles of Aikido. For me, it is better to look at all Aikido techniques in the same light or, at least, as sharing the same basic principles. As an example, we should try to see all techniques in terms of *irimi* and *tenkan*. And *tenshin*. We should try to view *ikkyo*, *nikyo*, *sankyō*, *yonkyō* and *gokyo* as the same technique and sharing the same basic principles, not as separate and individual techniques. In all techniques, there is a sense of a big circle, there is a sense of being well-centered and grounded. There is the same feeling of lightness and freedom in all techniques, not a grinding, pulling, forced kind of feeling. There should be no sense of awkwardness or collision or being late and rushed. All techniques have the same projection of energy. All techniques share the same sense of being open and big. All techniques have the same “positive” sense, as in “positive” energy and force.

In this particular case, however, this student had a minor habit of keeping all of his weight on the back foot. Each time he moved, there had to be a body weight shift, sometimes two, before he could initiate any movement. In techniques like *katatetori*, he seemed to be able to work around this, but in techniques involving strikes and punches, where the timing is more critical, he was always late and rushed and he felt a sense of not being in control.

Basic problems, like basic principles, permeate everyone’s training. Sometimes, they seem less noticeable in some techniques than others. It is important to understand the correct execution of the basics and fundamentals of Aikido, because they permeate our training just as much as our errors. I think if this student corrects his posture and distribution of body weight (center), he will immediately notice a marked improvement in his training. He had been corrected numerous times about this, but I don’t think it had any impact until we were able to sit down and discuss this point at length. I don’t like this method because I believe we should see all of our training within the context of our training, but sometimes it is necessary to look at the techniques from a largely intellectual viewpoint. The very next day in training, this student had a hard time adjusting to a “new” stance but I see a great deal of future improvement here if he keeps at it.

Sometimes a student may feel embarrassment or shame if he discusses his problems in training or in front of others. This is not the correct attitude. I like discussing such ideas with many others because, believe it or not, most other students share the same feelings and problems and obstacles as you do. Another important idea to establish in each student is that in practice, we are all in the same boat; we are all sinking and swimming together. We should all share freely the results of our training with each other so that we can learn from each other’s good points as well as weaknesses. This is all a part of training and there is no room for shame, embarrassment, or ego.

One other student complained that he always felt stiff when he came to practice. Of course, stiffness and inflexibility is a problem all of us have. It is a modern lifestyle disease of which we are all victims. Work, social pressures, etc. all cause this. How we move during the day and how we deal with pressure and stress also have an effect, and our mental attitude during the day has a great influence on our flexibility as well. In Aikido, it is important to keep balanced and centered and always relaxed in an energetic and positive way. Go at your own pace and feel relaxed, not rushed. Do not feel pressured. Whenever you feel strain, correct your posture and balance first. Do not force anything. Finally, be very mentally aware and sensitive! More often than not, we spend a lot of time worrying and feeling stress over something which doesn’t exist in the first place. If you are going to worry, worry about something that is really important and requires your concern and attention. With all there is, it doesn’t pay at all to “worry over nothing.”

Aikido is easy because it is a very natural thing. We make it difficult and hard and impossible to understand. If our Aikido is too rough, we have made it rough. If our Aikido is too weak, we have made it weak. If our Aikido is very good, we have made it good! Please keep up your training. Even one minute of training, brings you one minute closer to all of your goals. . . .

**Editor’s Note:** Sensei originally posted this article, in slightly different form, to his Daily Message board on October 20, 2002.

# Aikido TRAINING SCHEDULE

## Sundays

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

## Mondays

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

## Tuesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

## Wednesdays

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

## Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Bokken

## Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

## Saturdays

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

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

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

# Iaido TRAINING SCHEDULE

## TRADITIONAL JAPANESE IAIDO SWORDSMANSHIP

## Saturdays

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

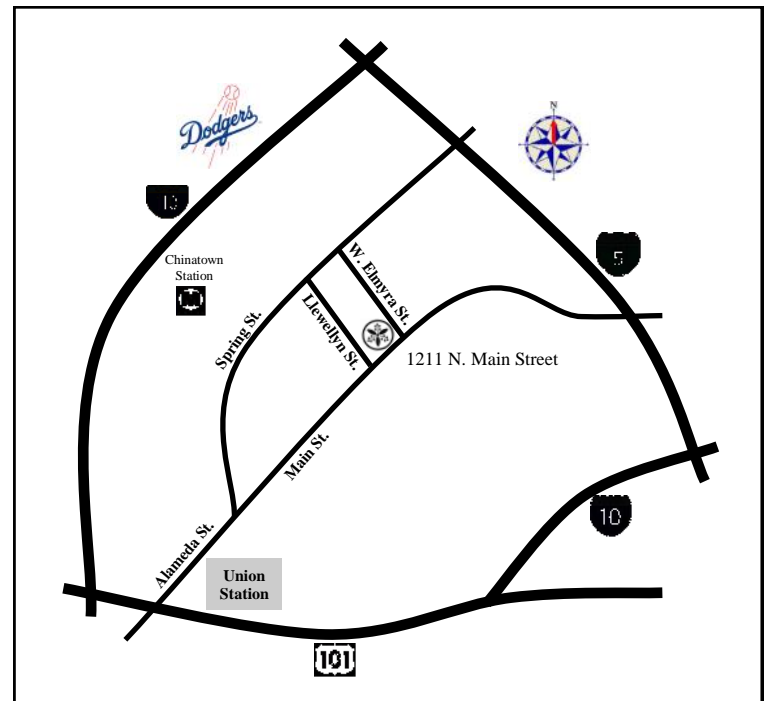
## Sundays

7:45-8:45 AM

## Thursdays

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

*No classes on the last weekend of the month.*



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

**Aikido Hombu Dojo - Aikikai**  
**17-18 Wakamatsu-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, JAPAN**  
*We are committed to the study and practice of the teachings of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba and his legitimate successors, Kisshomaru Ueshiba and the present Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba.*

The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles (ACLA) admit students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, and national or ethnic origin in administration of their educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.



## Finding Our Dojo

We are located at  
1211 N. Main Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
**Telephone: (323) 225-1424**  
**E-mail: info@aikidocenterla.com**  
We are across the street and one block northwest from the Chinatown Metro Station.

**The entrance is on Elmyra Street.**

**No appointment necessary to watch classes or join:**  
*You are welcome to visit us any time during any of our Open or Fundamentals classes. Please come early.*