

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

May 2014

Volume XXXIII Number 5

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Upcoming Events

May 26th
Dojo Closed
Memorial Day

May 31st
Instructor's intensive

June 28th
Instructor's intensive

July 4th
Dojo Closed
Independence Day

July 26th
Instructor's intensive

August 30th
Instructor's intensive

Letter From the Editor *by Mark Ehrlich* Editor, The Aiki Dojo

We passed another milestone last month with the completion of our O Sensei Memorial Seminar. ACLA hosted this event as we have every year since 2005, once again bringing together old friends and new to share good training, good food, and good fellowship over the course of a weekend. Branch dojo members from Spain and friends from across the country helped to make this a memorable and enjoyable event. I'd like to express my gratitude and appreciation to everyone who participated – and especially everyone who helped – and made this year's seminar a fun and impactful experience. It helped mark our 40th anniversary year in a positive way.

The nature of a seminar – an extended period of training that typically exceeds our usual routine – helps us learn more about ourselves,

even as we learn about each other. We may discover our limits and decide to push beyond them; we may experience a range of emotional and physical responses as our strength gets tested and our true selves emerge; we may even choose to bury our head in the sand, as it were, and stubbornly do things "our" way, despite what gets taught. Regardless, seminars like this one can serve as a useful way to assess how far we've come in our training since last year, and plot the path we'll take to move forward.

This issue of *The Aiki Dojo* considers what makes for good training. Ito Sensei shares his experience to help the rest of us improve as students. Watanabe Sensei ruminates on the basics and how crucial a role they play in our development. And as he does, Sensei revisits us from the archives to shed light on how important seeing and listening are to growing as a martial artist. I hope you enjoy this issue, and I'll see you on the mat!

Five Easy Pieces

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

In the traditional Japanese arts from tea ceremony to Aikido, the burden of learning rests almost solely upon the students, where good students merely get finely tuned by their teachers. This approach runs quite contrary to the modern belief that better teachers produce better students. I personally believe that a good teacher only brings three to five percent to the learning process and that a truly exceptional teacher supplies less than ten percent. If what I posit is true then the students become the pivotal players, not only in their own growth, but in all their successes as well.

Some of our readers might scratch their heads as they read these words, trying to ascertain just how they can make this proposition come true. As a result of my modest experience, I have relied upon five techniques to make myself better.

Learn how to steal

The martial arts in olden times were considered secret and generally only handed down through family members and to only the most trustworthy of students not related to the family. Today anyone can enjoy the martial arts, but many traditional teachers still study their students with suspicious eyes, searching for those whose loyalty matches (if not outstrips) their earnestness. Traditional martial arts education invokes the old saw that the teacher teaches nothing, but the student steals everything. Thus determined students, regardless of ability, will find a way to learn despite any disadvantages or how they get taught.



In order to “steal” something we have to develop a sense of what to steal, which usually happens once we already have a strong foundation in the basics. But what if we don’t have a strong foundation, or have only just begun our training?

I suggest you get good at pretending. What I did as a student growing up under Sensei was that anytime he corrected someone in class, I pretended he was talking to me. I tried to embody any correction or tip I heard him give as if he was talking to me directly. I didn’t know what to steal, but I figured that his corrections to others had merit. So, I stole anything and everything he gave out. *Just pretend the teacher is talking to you.*

Only make one thing better at a time

Our conscious mind can only entertain one thought at a time. Therefore, we can only focus on making one aspect of our technique better at a time. One of my pet peeves is watching students waste time during class or free practice time. Aikido and Iaido are both arts with a considerable amount of detail, so it frustrates me when I see students just showing off or lazing about when they are at the dojo. To me, this is the time when students would do well to

try and focus on improving their skills. Perhaps they don’t know what to focus on when they are presented with the gift of free practice. The teachers in class time provide students with more than enough corrections which can absorb their attention during free practice time. Easily, these are the things I would focus on first. Whenever I am practicing by myself or taking class I decide upon something I want to improve and focus on that one thing the whole time. *Just focus on one thing.*

San-bai no do-ryoku

San-bai no do-ryoku roughly translates as “triple effort”. This mantra was made famous by the legendary Judoist Masahiko Kimura, but it is actually an old martial arts adage. Sensei never used this saying, but he used to talk about it in terms of not only training but in life as well. He would say that if your opponent does 1000 suburi, you do 2000; if your rival trains for an hour, you train for two. *San-bai no do-ryoku* became Masahiko Kimura’s maxim after winning the All Japan Judo Championships in 1937; he went on to win it two more times. Who knows how many times he would have won if the conflicts in Asia hadn’t arisen. Kimura is legendary for his training regime: even in retirement, he still trained eight hours a day. Success in training and in life comes exclusively on the back of hard work – there is no substitute. *Be willing to put in the work.*

Empty your cup

Sensei said that the one thing a teacher searches for in a student is “attitude”. With the right attitude, anything becomes possible. Having the right attitude means being willing and open to learn. So many times, students come in with their own baggage and that is quite possibly the biggest hurdle not only to

teaching them, but to their learning as well. There is a famous story about the Zen master Nan-in who met with a university professor interested in studying Zen. After introducing himself and making the customary bows, the professor began to talk about what he knew about Zen. Nan-in listened and began to serve him tea and kept pouring until the cup began to overflow. The professor watched this until he no longer could restrain himself and blurted out, “It is overflowing and no more will go in!” Nan-in said, “Like this cup, you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?” This story deftly illustrates the wrong attitude students can bring into the dojo. When the teacher or anyone else teaches class, all students need to do is to receive the teaching. Don’t resist it and don’t judge it; just be willing and open to accept it and copy it. Everything else will fall into place. If we are willing then we can learn. If we are open then we can be taught. *Please empty your cup!*

Continued on page 6...

Back to the Basics

by Ken Watanabe, Iaido Chief Instructor



There is a passage in Kisshomaru Ueshiba's book *Aikido* about a very famous student of O Sensei, Admiral Isamu Takeshita. While training, he cataloged over 2,000 Aikido techniques; however, he found that he could not do any of them particularly well. He was stuck at a plateau in his training. The story goes on to explain how after several days of contemplation, he realized the importance of O Sensei's advice:

"You should study using the sitting exercise as the base." The story goes on to explain that Admiral Takeshita practiced these basic techniques, gaining skill to the point where "he could acquire the others which he had not been taught by his instructor."

A seasoned warrior like Admiral Takeshita realized the importance of the basics on his own. In fact, one of the highest compliments in Japanese martial arts is *kihon ga dekiteru*; that is, "The basics are there." However, whenever students hear "the basics" they think of plain-Jane simple techniques that are practiced almost every day in the dojo, practically to the point of boredom. They say familiarity breeds contempt and many beginners don't see the benefit in constantly practicing the same simple techniques – no, they seem more like meaningless exercises – over and over and over again.

It's natural for students to want to advance in their training. Many practitioners, once they begin to gain more experience and skill in the art, tend to eschew basic techniques and prefer to study techniques more appropriate for their level; techniques where they can express themselves more and show their own personality; techniques that seem more advanced, flashier, and more impressive to

onlookers. Students want to show their expertise and do this by expanding their repertoire and collecting a lot of different techniques. Many of these techniques are impressive to watch and are ideal for demonstrating to the easily impressed how skillful we look and how much we know. However, many times these students end up in the same situation as the Admiral; that is, having learned lots of varied and fancy techniques but unable to do any of them particularly well.

Sometimes when I'm teaching an Aikido class with intermediate and advanced students I'll introduce an "advanced" concept to a deceptively basic technique and more often than not the students will have some difficulty with its execution. I would say that in almost all cases, the main reason behind any difficulty is that students forget their basics. Forgoing the basics will cause many techniques to stop working properly. Yes, in a spastic, berserker fit we may be able to throw our opponents down or make them tap out in submission, but in the end what we are doing is only a pale imitation of Aikido, a counterfeit.



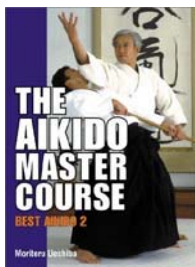
Admiral Isamu Takeshita

Wise practitioners, whether they are students or teachers, will realize that the basics are meant to be built upon, like a strong foundation, instead of being thrown away and replaced by something flashier that ultimately proves detrimental to any progress in training. Without a firm understanding of both the physical basics and mental basics, learning advanced techniques will be useless, almost impossible. The wise practitioner knows that mastery in the lowliest of basics will provide a solid springboard from which

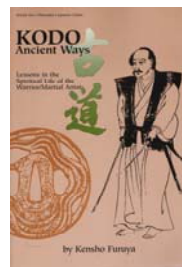
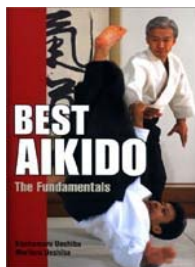
to advance, and to an expert's eye, even in "flash 'n' trash" techniques, solid basics (or a lack thereof) will become obvious.

Continued on page 6...

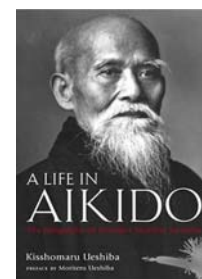
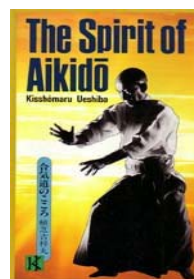
Recommended Readings:



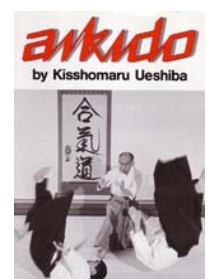
by Ueshiba Moriteru



by Kensho Furuya



by Ueshiba Kisshomaru



2014 O Sensei Memorial Seminar



A Word of Thanks

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

I would like to thank everyone who participated and made our Ninth Annual O Sensei Memorial Seminar a huge success this year. I think this year marked our best seminar since Sensei passed away back in 2007. Every day of the seminar we had almost 100% participation from everyone who signed up. That has to be a record!

I found myself pleasantly surprised not only by how hard everyone trained, but also by how well everyone behaved. There is an old Japanese proverb, *yaiba ni tsuyoki mono wa rei ni suguru*, which means that a great swordsman surpasses all others in decorum. Our manners and etiquette speak volumes about us, and I feel rather proud that everyone showed great class and manners. To that end, I would like to give a special congratulations to Dr. David Tonnemacher and Eric Mason, who displayed some truly fine manners during the memorial service. Please keep up the great work!



I would like to thank Santiago Garcia Almaraz and his students who came from Salamanca, Spain. They not only came for the seminar, but stayed another week to train as well. For those of you who don't know, Almaraz Sensei has come to Los Angeles to train with us every year since 1997. I would also like to thank James Doi, Ken Watanabe, and Brandon Ishisaka for teaching classes and lending their expertise to our students. I really appreciate everything you do for the dojo as well as for all your support.



A dojo is a community and, like all communities, it is only as strong as its members. One of our senior students, Leonard Manoukian, once told me, "There is no cause without camaraderie." This seminar everyone showed the true spirit of our dojo – community. It was truly an honor to have been a part of this wonderful event. Thank you all again for a great seminar and for all of your friendship and hard work.



Congratulations to Javier Garcia Martin (pictured right) and Jorge Gonzalez (pictured left) who came to Los Angeles to receive their Shodan certificates after successfully passing their tests on November 24, 2013.

Five Easy Pieces *continued from page 2...*

Be not only consistent, but constant

The hardest thing for students to grasp is that teachings of any traditional art are perishable. Like the beauty of a flower, the skills are ephemeral in that if we don't constantly use them and cultivate them, they will wither and disappear. Sensei once stated that if we study hard for 10 years, we can take six months off without losing too much. But, what happens if we study half-heartedly for a year and then take six months off? Most likely we will have to start all over. That is why training requires students to be not only consistent, but constant as well. To be consistent means to be regular and to be constant means to be durable. Students feel discouraged when they realize that training is a journey and not a destination. We never get to a place where we feel invincible and everything seems wonderful. Training entails putting in the work to improve ourselves, even a little bit, every day. Constancy means having the courage and determination to stay the course even when there seems like there is no hope left. *Just keep going and never give up!*

The onus of learning, as we have heard, gets placed squarely upon students' shoulders. Once we can accept this principle, our ability to learn will grow exponentially. I have personally used these five concepts throughout my life and they have benefited me immensely. When we can accept them, then we can accept that our life is our own and that every thing we do or don't do, succeed or fail at, or create or destroy results from our choices.

Stop waiting for someone else to save you or make you better and start making yourself better. Learning *is* a lifelong pursuit and the goal is the journey and not the destination. The final scroll Sensei put up before he died read, "Be strong, be humble, and always keep going." Hidden in these three statements we find the realization that we take responsibility for our own learning. This is something that cannot be taught, but can be learned: that we choose to be who we are and what we do in life. Please make your choices carefully.

Back to the Basics *continued from page 3...*

In Aikido, the techniques *shomenuchi ikkyo* and *shomenuchi iriminage*, as difficult as they are to do properly, are both considered basic techniques. In fact, *shomenuchi*, an overhead attack to the front of the head, is a very difficult attack to negotiate, yet the seated version of *shomenuchi ikkyo* – the word, *ikkyo*, meaning "First Teaching" – is considered to be one of the first techniques a beginner learns. Why such a complicated technique for a beginner? The genius in O Sensei's Aikido is that there are many concepts and skill sets in *shomenuchi ikkyo* that are applicable to other basic Aikido techniques: master *ikkyo*, and then catching on to new techniques, even those in different styles, becomes easy. Likewise, *shomenuchi iriminage* – nicknamed the "20 year" technique – is also a reliable indicator of a practitioner's level of expertise. A very good *shomenuchi iriminage* will show that the rest of techniques will also be solid. One might say that the basic *shomenuchi iriminage* serves as the alpha and omega of Aikido.

Likewise, in Muso Shinden Ryu Iaido, the first technique in *shoden* (the first level of techniques) is *shohatto*. In the past there was a saying in Muso Shinden Ryu, *shohatto san nen*, which means for the first three years the student is only to practice *shohatto*. Today that seems ridiculous, but with that kind of attention to the basics, the rest of the eleven techniques become very easy to learn. How important are the basics? Sensei used to tell us that his own Iaido teacher, Takeshi Mitsuzuka Sensei, faithfully practiced *shohatto* every day without fail 100 times, and within each practice session, Mitsuzuka Sensei considered maybe one or two acceptable. In fact, without mastering the basic skills necessary to perform *shoden*, the middle level of techniques called *chuden* will become impossible to execute, and only once *shoden* and *chuden* are mastered will the techniques in *okuden*, the so-called "inner level of techniques" seem manageable.

In the end, so-called advanced techniques are simply basic techniques executed at a very high level. The basic technique is done in such a way where "the basics" don't appear to be basic at all. Yet, as advanced as a technique will appear, our *kamae* (stance), *ma-ai* (spacing), *zanshin* (the concentration at the finish of the technique), footwork, handwork, and body movement are all building blocks of that technique. If our basics are solid, then catching on to new techniques, even in styles different from our own, becomes easy.

Furthermore, in our own training when there are problems with the technique, we can fall back on the basics and investigate where the technique went awry. The basics serve as our safety net; they are our confidence builder, catching us when we start deviating from the correct path. A wise student will learn this, a good teacher will teach this, and now we all know. Maybe not all of us can become an admiral in the Japanese Navy, but in whatever art we choose to pursue none of us will have an excuse preventing us from reaching mastery.

Congratulations!



**Michael Van Ruth and Natalie Lemire
were married on May 5, 2014.**

We wish them all the best!

Throwing in the Towel

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

I will relate an insignificant event that nevertheless attracted my attention. Something like this would escape the notice of most people (let alone students), but as the old, hardheaded teacher that I am, it bugged me a little.

The other day, my students painted the outside fence of the dojo. We couldn't finish because it began to rain very hard. We brought in the dojo sign to dry and leaned it up against a cabinet, with a towel placed there so neither the cabinet nor sign would get scratched and the paint would not get smeared. Several days later, the sign was dry and replaced on the fence, but the towel was simply left on my chair. I noticed the towel there for several days; no one bothered to put it away. After a while, I put the towel where my senior students could easily see it. There is a problem when many things get used but never properly put away. Later that day, the towel was back on my chair – only this time, neatly folded.



Ah, no! The towel gets put away where all the towels we use in the dojo go. We have the idea all right, but still something went askew here. We must think, think, think in everything we do, especially in the dojo where we have so many rules of etiquette and discipline that we must observe.

When I was a novice priest, the very first thing I wanted to do was memorize all of the sutras. All of the priests know them by heart and can recite them without looking at the sutra book. I thought this was so wonderful! When I started to do this, I was told I was wrong! The instructions say, “Read the sutras,” not recite them from memory. The original purpose of this was to read and see each word the Buddha spoke. Reciting the sutras also serves as a way of studying them. But, I thought, everyone else has memorized them and does not use a book.

It was finally explained to me like this: We all “read” the sutras, but many monks have all sorts of duties to perform during the ceremony and cannot sit in front of the sutra book and read. However, while they perform these duties, everyone still has to continue to recite the words. In the intervals the priests do not sit in front of their books; they happen to recite the sutras from their heads in order to maintain the proper schedule of the ceremony. It seemed very complicated at first to hear such an explanation, but after a while I realized that many things in life work like this. Everything has many layers of meaning and sometimes, our ignorance can become our worst enemy, especially when we think we are smart enough to know everything or able to figure everything out.

It is the same in the dojo. Many things here have important meanings but it becomes difficult to explain each detail each time. Many times, we just follow the instructions and its meaning will come out eventually . . . with practice and experience.

When I first started the practice of the tea ceremony, there was one point where I continually messed up in this complex ritual. After the powdered tea gets ladled into the tea bowl, it seems perfectly logical and common sense to me to add the hot water immediately and make the tea. However, instead, after the tea gets added to the bowl, there exists another step of removing the lid from the cold-water container. This did not make any sense to me at all and I would invariably forget this step. I thought *my way* made more sense.

One day during practice, however, the teacher said as I was making tea, “The water appears to be too hot, please add some cold water.” It suddenly dawned on me the reason why the lid gets removed from the cold-water container before the hot water gets added; it is to get it ready to make a final adjustment of the temperature of the water, if needed. Because I never had this experience before of adjusting the water's temperature, I never thought it made sense.

In one way, my thinking was correct. I thought, “add water after the tea is in the tea bowl”, but I would have done better had I thought, “be ready to adjust the temperature of the water before adding it to the tea”. My logic was not wrong, but not broad and deep enough to understand all the complexities of what I had to do and therefore – wrong. In addition, once the tea gets added, one begins to focus on making the tea and thus forgets the previous. I think the masters of the ancient times added this one step to insure that we remain constantly aware of everything around us and keep our focus centered and well directed, but broad and all encompassing at the same time. I feel this is one excellent form of training and a very good lesson for me, which I have never forgotten!

Once, years ago, I was correcting the ending form of *iriminage* with a student and saying that the fingers should extend with a strong projection of energy from the fingertips. As I was walking away, the student commented, “Oh, you mean I should look at the back of my hands.” I returned and said, “No, I mean extend your energy through your fingers, not look at the back of your hands.” He gave me a confused look; as a beginner, he had no idea of all that the art encompassed.

Many times, my students do not realize that I say exactly what I am trying to say when I teach. I am not asking anyone to sort through all kinds of BS. But, rather than accept what gets taught, they would rather sort through the BS anyway, or so I see from my own lessons in practice.

For many of us, we have to take the same number of steps and get lost the same number of times to reach the same destination, no matter how clearly the teacher may try to shine the light on the very same path.

Editor's Note: Sensei originally published this article, in slightly different form, to his daily message board on December 23, 2002.

Aikido TRAINING SCHEDULE

Sundays

9:00-10:00 AM Children's Class

10:15-11:15 AM Open

Mondays

6:30-7:30 AM Open

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals

6:30-7:30 PM Open

Tuesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Advanced*

Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 AM Open

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals

6:30-7:30 PM Intermediate

7:45-8:45 PM Weapons*

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

Saturdays

9:30-10:30 AM Open

10:45-11:45 AM Advanced*

6:30 AM Instructor's Intensive:

*last Saturday of the month by invitation only.**

* These classes are not open for visitors to watch.

Iaido TRAINING SCHEDULE

TRADITIONAL JAPANESE IAIDO SWORDSMANSHIP

Saturdays

8:00-9:00 AM

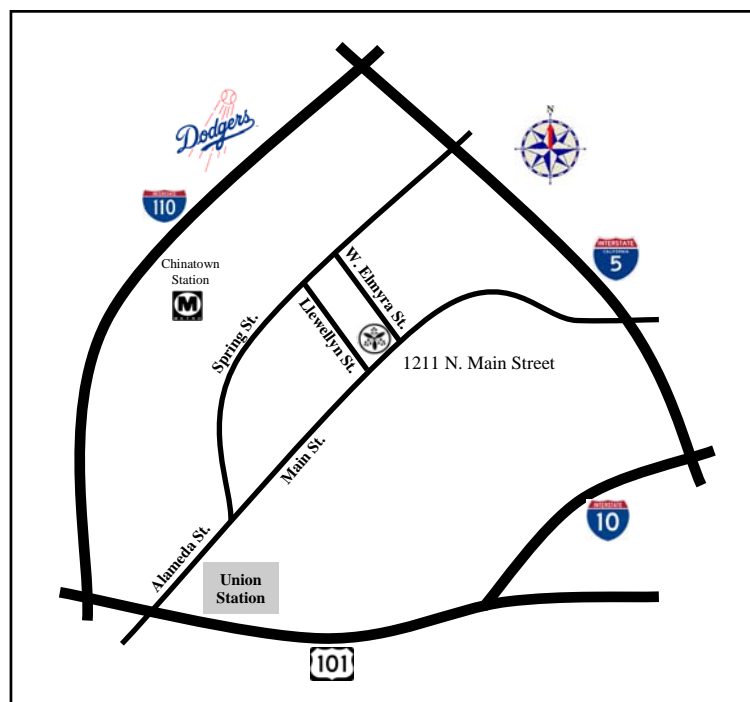
Sundays

7:45-8:45 AM

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM

No weekend classes on the last weekend of the month.



We are directly affiliated with:

AIKIDO WORLD HEADQUARTERS

公益財団法人 合気会

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.



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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.

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

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.