



# The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

2

## Why Do I Train?

by Eric D. Mason

A brand new *shodan* shares his motives for Aikido training.

3

## To Serve

by Ken Watanabe

Watanabe Sensei explains the benefits of paying attention.

7

## Greetings

by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Sensei discusses why saying, "hello" is a part of training.

何もないが  
心安さよ  
涼しさよ

Nanimo nai ga  
Kokoroyasusa yo  
Suzushisa yo

I have nothing at all  
But this tranquility!  
This coolness!

— Issa



Nikko Kegon no Taki  
Kegon Waterfall, Nikko  
by Kasamatsu Shiro

# Summer

# Why Do I Train?

by Eric D. Mason **Aikido Shodan**

This is not such a straightforward question to answer for me, in large part because the reasons why I train, such as they are, seem to have changed over time.

When I first started training, I'm not sure I had much by way of any concrete reasons to train.

When I showed up for my first Aikido class, I remember Ito Sensei asking me a variation of this question — what I knew about Aikido — which I took as an inquiry into why I was there (i.e., why I wanted to begin training in Aikido). Suffice it to say, I didn't have a good answer. I seem to recall mumbling out some vague response, something to the effect that somewhere along the line, from some unnamed and long-forgotten source, I had acquired the notion that there was something “different” about Aikido compared to other martial arts, perhaps that it was more sophisticated or deeper or somehow, well, different.

I also recall the distinct sense upon visiting the dojo for the first time to observe a class before deciding to join. That day was memorable for several reasons, including because of the sense of wonder and excitement I had while observing the class and the more specific sensation or realization, while watching all the bodies seemingly flying around the mat with a kind of controlled abandon, of “*that* is what I want to do.” I also distinctly recall how welcomed I was after the class ended, when a number of students came over to talk with me, an unequivocal and taciturn stranger at the time, with genuine enthusiasm and encouragement. As someone who has largely lived his life apart from others, the evident camaraderie among the students was something that stood out to me then, and which I am deeply and humbly grateful to be part of now, particularly given that it seems to be largely, though not exclusively, cultivated through regular, dedicated training.

Looking back, I took to the work of training somewhat slowly and reservedly — attending, at most, two fundamentals classes a week for the first six months or so after joining the dojo. A few months after I started, I was asked by a senior student what surprised me most about Aikido training to that point. My response, which surprised me as much as the senior students I was sitting with, was how much I enjoyed being dragged around or thrown down to the mat. For some reason, even though I had largely avoided any serious physical activity (such as sports) while growing up — largely because I felt clumsy or awkward when participating in such activities — whenever I was being tossed around or dragged across the mat, I would

often find myself smiling, including as I peeled myself off the ground to turn around and step in for the next turn.

Encountering the initial challenges of learning the most basic fundamentals of this martial art, and my own limitations in

facing them, was an early theme of my training experience. In particular, to say that at the beginning of my training I was highly skeptical of the concept of forward rolling, would be an understatement. The morning class about a year into my training when Ito Sensei, working in collaboration with two other senior students, tried to “beat it out of me” by spending an entire hour doing forward throwing techniques was particularly memorable, including the moments when the three of them would momentarily convene on the side, just outside of earshot, to discuss additional forward throws to use during that class, while I tried my best to discretely catch my breath.

As the basic forms of movement have begun to take hold and become less stiff and more familiar (perhaps one day they will even feel intuitive or natural), I have found

that I can now, on occasion, begin to get a glimpse of other dimensions to training. In particular, rather than merely focusing on myself and my own movement — the singular focus of the first many, many years of my training — now I have begun to try to expand or push out my awareness and movement to include additional components of the dynamic system that unfolds before, during, and after any particular technique, to see the entire mat and all the bodies flying around even as I am now one of them. And then the vision fades and I am left stumbling slightly over my own feet, or starting a technique just a second too late or too late, or losing my balance ever so slightly, or letting any of the other countless factors become misaligned; and it's back to square one. Slide in, turn, step back.

In such moments, I sometimes hear the echoes of various critiques from my teachers over the years, moments when the person I apparently revealed myself to be on the mat was as someone who was unable to connect with others or who lacked empathy (critiques that stung me more deeply than I cared to reveal). And perhaps learning someday how to overcome or more beyond such revelations is one of the primary reasons why I continue to train.

Or, perhaps I continue to train simply because it's fun, and because the more I train, the more fascinating and fascinatingly confounding this art becomes. •



## To Serve by Ken Watanabe Iaido Chief Instructor

Many years ago we had a small group of Aikido students from Kyushu, Japan visit the dojo. They stayed with us for several days practicing with us and after they returned to Japan, Furuya Sensei passed on a comment one of the students made about our dojo. This student told Sensei, that he could tell that the level of training at the dojo was high because of the careful way the hose was put away after we performed *uchimizu* or the ritual of purifying the front of the dojo with water prior to opening.

On average, a regular person might not notice how a hose is situated and after all what does how one stores a hose storage have to do with martial arts? However, to another martial artist, even a simple thing like putting away a garden hose demonstrates not only a student's level of training, but speaks to the overall level of training as well. The care and awareness a student shows when performing even the simplest, seemingly menial task can speak volumes about that person's character. This act of keeping the front of the dojo clean and orderly comes from Buddhism. As the story goes, if a priest happened upon a temple and the front was unkempt then they would judge the temple as being not very good and pass it by. In the dojo, the same holds true that if the shoes weren't lined up neatly or if the entrance was dirty, then people would think that the training wasn't good and they would pass it up. To a martial artist, a sloppy entrance means sloppy training.

When O'Sensei was alive, the *uchideshi*, or live-in students at Hombu Dojo, coveted two jobs; one, to take his *ukemi*; the second to be his *otomo*, or *kaban-mochi* which literally means "bag-holder" whenever he traveled outside the dojo. To the *uchideshi*, accompanying O'Sensei, making sure he was taken care of, carrying his money and his documents or being ready to seamlessly step in to handle his affairs was the ultimate test of one's skill or level of training.

When assisting the teacher, even the simple act of filling a guest's water glass can demonstrate someone's level and ultimately the teacher's ability to teach a student. There is a delicate balance between too little and too much and it can be very nerve wracking to do it right. Do you fill it after the guest's every sip so it's constantly full all the while hovering over them nervously, or do you observe carefully, only filling the glass when it's appropriate to do so? In the first case, the guest might feel uncomfortable and pressured; in the second case, they often may not notice that their glass is being refilled. They can enjoy the water at their leisure, but they are never left wanting with an

empty glass or made to feel rushed.

Many years ago, I acted as Sensei's main assistant for the better part of 17 years. Every little task was a demonstration of my training. When driving him, I had to give the same considerations as if I were going into battle. I had to always be on the alert. I couldn't drive too fast nor could I drive too slowly. I always had to know where I was going and, in fact, I always had to know more than one way to get to our destination. Sensei did not like to drive on the freeway and often preferred to travel on surface streets so I had to be on the ball and know several ways to get where he wanted to go in addition to what might be opportunistically on the way that he may want to visit as well. The "way" to drive Sensei had to be done by memory and this was well before iPhones or Google maps, so all of that information had to be researched or remembered prior to picking him up.

Whenever Sensei entertained a guest, the job of the assistant wasn't to show how good they were by talking and showing off. A good assistant knows that doing that would reflect badly on Sensei. We had to help Sensei save face by doing the most appropriate thing at the most appropriate time. Doing the right thing at the right time was how we demonstrated our level. This demonstration is not a form of showing off but the act of being fully present by quietly observing everything and trying to be ready for anything. We demonstrate our level by showing restraint, being patient (because their conversations could go on for hours!) and of course, physical stamina, alertness, and common sense.

This might sound like being a personal assistant, and in a way, it is. In fact, the word, samurai, does not mean "warrior". The word, samurai,

comes from the verb, *samurau* which means "to serve." There are some equivalents to *samurau* in western culture such as when some in the military reach a certain height in their careers, they become an *aide de camp* and apply the same skills they used as soldiers to assisting high ranking leaders.

To a regular everyday person, what difference does it make how a hose is put away? But not thinking of how the hose is put away is thoughtless and not mindful or caring about the next person who has to use it. How will they deal with untangling the mess you left? What about the lifespan of the hose? Will it kink? Will it spring a leak? Worrying about a hose like this might seem too much, and to a certain extent, it might be. Yet, what about the mindset behind that? Are you showing care or consideration? Are you fumbling with the hose trying to put it away, or is it done in a careful, organized manner?

*Continued on page 6...*



*Furuya Sensei and Watanabe Sensei inspecting the dojo's garden after the uchimizu ritual.*



## Stay Connected

by Santiago Garcia Almaraz Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai

Furuya Sensei once wrote, “When you think you are on the right path and doing well, watch out, you are the perfect victim for the great fall.” Sensei wasn’t being pessimistic as much as he was being pragmatic and cautioning us about the dangers and pitfalls that come with complacency.

Summertime is often seen as a time for rest and recovery as people take vacations from work and their daily routines. Obviously, there is a need to disconnect from the daily stresses of our jobs or our academic studies and this kind of disconnection is actually healthy especially in today’s era of tethered electronic accessibility. Thus it is important to find this balance and disconnect from our jobs or academic studies and spend time reconnecting with our families, friends or even our health.

Summers are also difficult in most dojos as class sizes decrease while many of students take time to “disconnect” and take a few days off for vacation in order to travel or to just take a break from their training so that they can return with renewed focus and energy after the summer holiday.

*Budo* training is slightly different than a job or one’s academic

studies and even within the context of *budo*, there is nothing wrong with taking a vacation or some time off with the goal of reenergizing one’s self or healing from an injury. The problem is that many approach their *budo* or martial arts training as a hobby or as just some activity which keeps them in shape. Thus, the danger is treating one’s *budo* training in a disposable manner like running, yoga, pilates or soccer where we only do these activities when the time or money permits or if we “feel” like doing them at all.

*Budo* training is different than these other fitness only type activities. Yes, *budo* can get us into shape, but the meaning or reason of *budo* training is much deeper than merely losing weight or improving one’s cardiovascular efficiency. *Budo* is a lifestyle or more importantly a mindset which should not be disconnected only to be hopefully reconnected later. *Budo* is a practice and a practice is defined as, “The actual application or use of an idea, belief, or method, as opposed to theories relating to it.” *Budo* is a practice because the practitioners are supposed to integrate the lessons and trainings into their daily lives like eating, washing or sleeping.

*Continued on page 5...*



## CONGRATULATIONS!



**Valencia Estrada**  
 May 11, 2019  
 Height 18.5 inches  
 Weight: 6.5 pounds



**Winifred Avery Mahn Young**  
 July 04, 2019  
 Height 20.5 inches  
 Weight: 9.4 pounds

**Congratulations to Jackie and Mynor Estrada on the recent birth of their daughter, Valencia.**

**Congratulations to Jessie and Derek Young on the recent birth of their daughter, Winifred.**

**Stay Connected** *continued from page 4...*

Today we live in an era where we enjoy much prosperity and opportunity where it is easy to want to “disconnect” and can accidentally mistake complacency for contentment. A practitioner of *budo* knows that the enemy of excellence is complacency and therefore must always keep some semblance of a connection to their training. Complacency causes us to underestimate everything outside ourselves and overestimate everything about ourselves which usually leads to miscalculations and mistakes.

There is an old samurai saying that they used to use to guard themselves from complacency: “Katte kara kabuto no o wo shime yo” or “When the battle is over, tighten your helmet strap.” The samurai knew that the most dangerous times were the times when they were complacent or thought they were safe. This admonishment can supposedly be traced back to Tokogawa Ieyasu and his victory at the battle of Sekigahara in the 1600s which literally ended the Sengoku period or the Warring States period of over 130 years of wars and strife. With his win, Tokugawa Ieyasu became the first Shogun and ushered in the Edo period which became known as a time of growth, prosperity and peace. However, despite this decisive win Tokugawa Ieyasu knew that there was much work to be done before he could unify Japan and, being fond of the Chinese classics, said, “Katte kara kabuto no o wo shime yo.”

With regards to our *budo* training, the key to staving off complacency is to maintain vigilance and thus train constantly and with consistency. However, it is sometimes necessary to take a respite from training. This too must be done with a sense of connection to the training despite taking a break from training. When we

have an injury or need to take some time off which prevents us from physically attending classes, there is always something that can be done to keep our connection to our training whether it be reading, studying or simply being mindful, which doesn't require being at the dojo or even putting on our *gi* or stepping on the *tatami*.

Some of Sensei's writings helped me to understand this need to create a connection between myself and my training:

Seriously take everything in your life to develop your martial arts mind, even in the smallest way. Even when you are changing your clothes, you should be at your greatest sense of awareness for danger. This doesn't mean that you must always maintain a negative outlook on life; it means that that you should always seek clarity in what you do, especially in this confusing world in which we are so easily confused and distracted.

*Budo*, being a practice and thus a mental state, is extraordinary and much more than a mere hobby and something less insufferable than our actual job, work or academic studying. *Budo* is something which, when done right, can enhance one's life, and therefore something which must be experienced or practiced daily in order for it to be inculcated into one's daily life. Thus, even during these summer months when it is easy to “disconnect,” please “tighten your helmet strap” and stay connected to your training while you are busy taking a break and reenergizing yourself.

Please enjoy your summer and your vacations, but don't forget your practice. •



## Volunteering at Zenshuji Obon Carnival



*To Serve continued from page 3...*

In the martial arts, the techniques demand the same kind of spirit. These techniques are lethal and therefore deserve to be treated with a certain amount of respect and attention to detail. This same care shown for something simple should be the same kind of care shown for something very important. Someone once said, "How we do anything is how we do everything." In our training, we practice intensely, so that when we are confronted by a real situation, then we can utilize our training and thus it doesn't faze us. That is why we put so much time into the care and attention to detail of even a very simple task so that this careful attention can permeate into everything we do. Being mindful becomes part of our mindset, and it is there whenever we need it.

To *samurau* means to suppress one's ego to be able to see the situation clearly for what it is and then do the right thing at the

right time with the right intention all while making it look natural and unforced. Without this deft level of awareness and subtly of action then all the strength and skill mean nothing.

Just like putting back the hose neatly, every single thing done in or concerning the dojo is a way to show one's level of training and awareness. How one cleans, how one talks to the teacher, how we bow when we enter the mat; this is the difference between the mindset of a warrior and that of a simple fighter.

One's level of training is revealed in how one approaches and executes the simplest things. That is why this visitor made the comment and why Sensei shared it with me and now I am sharing it with you. Please keep this in mind in how you approach your practice both on and off the mat. •

# Greetings

by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Have you ever noticed that what someone says to you the first thing in the morning can set the tone for the whole day? If our mate is in a bad mood in the morning and ignores us or if we get scolded by our boss, then our whole day can be totally ruined.

The “greetings” or *go-aisatsu* in Japanese is very important. How we greet our teacher when we come in to contact with them or when we leave is a very important ceremony and ritual in our training. The tone of our voice, our manner and our posture, indicates something to the teacher — a cause of relief that we are fine and doing well, or a cause for concern. Whatever we wish to convey when we tell the teacher something and when those things are seemingly negative, the teacher thinks, “what is his problem?” or “what is bothering him?”

Usually when someone skips the formal niceties of a kind “hello,” or “good-bye,” we immediately think, “Ok, now what is wrong?” Or, “Now what did I do?” Everyone does this, when we are upset, we simply don’t give our greetings our all.

In the dojo, the greeting to the teacher is very important, especially when one is leaving, the teacher should know or be assured that everyone had a good practice, and nothing went wrong and everything is fine. The purpose of our greeting is to demonstrate with our *go-aisatsu* our gratefulness and it also conveys our desire to maintain our relationship with that person.

Just like at home, we expect everyone to say something when they go out or return — not just leave the house without saying anything at all. When our family members return home and say nothing, we wonder what is wrong, it is the same in the dojo.

In the Kabuki, there is a very formalized ritual. When one of the actors enters the theater in the morning, they must visit each actor’s dressing room and give a formal greeting. With the opening of a formal *go-aisatsu* of “hello, how are you?” to each other, there is an opening and opportunity for a little conversation and a confirmation of friendship and mutual understanding which is important to the success of the performance. This is also very important for the continuation of the harmony and a friendly spirit in a dojo.



*Furuya Sensei greeting Madam Fujima Kansuma in the lobby of the New Otani Hotel at the dojo’s 30th anniversary celebration.*

In my temple, my teacher, Bishop Yamashita was always hiding away in his office so it always took a little extra effort and time to say “hello” and “good-bye” to him. Many times, just a little good-bye opened up an opportunity for him to tell me a nice story or lesson, which I always treasured.

Today, the way people rush in and out of the dojo, it is just like they are running into a 7-11 or Jack-In-the-Box, such formalities and rituals are fading

even in Japan. Today with the quickness of the internet, we diminish our human contact, we forget the niceties of etiquette and ritual and we forget how to express our hearts and compassion to others.

Once a young priest who had been under the care of a great teacher complained one day, “Master, I have been here for three years now and every day, I bring your meals, wash your clothes and keep the temple in order but not once have you ever taught me anything! What is wrong?”

The old teacher replied, “In the morning, do I not say, ‘good morning’ to you? When you bring the rice gruel for lunch, do I not say, ‘thank you very much?’ At night, when you finished your work, do I not say, ‘thank you for a good job today?’”

“Yes, you do,” replied the young priest.

“Don’t you see? I have been teaching you all along every minute of the day!”

Without a refined, cultivated sense of humanity and compassion, what is the use of fame, riches and prestige? We think that getting the better of the other person is a victory but it shows nothing more than our disregard for others.

Every time we practice, we give our greetings to the dojo, to O’Sensei, to the teacher and to our classmates. This is a very important process to maintaining the harmony and mutual understanding and gratitude within the dojo. We should never forget this important aspect of our training. Eventually, we will begin to feel the appreciation truly in our hearts. •

**Editor’s note:** *Furuya Sensei published this article in a slightly different form on his Daily Message blog on October 25, 2004.*

# UPCOMING EVENTS

行事 .....

<b>August 31 (Saturday)</b> Intensive seminar	<b>October 26 (Saturday)</b> Intensive seminar
<b>September 2 (Monday)</b> Dojo Closed: Labor Day	<b>October 27 (Sunday)</b> Children's class Halloween party
<b>September 6-8</b> Doshu seminar in San Mateo	<b>November 27-28</b> Dojo Closed: Thanksgiving
<b>September 28 (Saturday)</b> Intensive seminar	<b>November 30 (Saturday)</b> Intensive seminar

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.

## Aikido Training Schedule

合気道 時間割 .....

<b>Saturdays</b> 6:30-8:00 AM* 9:30-10:30 AM 10:45-11:45 AM	Intensive Advanced Class Regular Class	<b>Wednesdays</b> 6:30-7:30 AM 5:15-6:15 PM 6:30-7:30 PM	Morning Practice Fundamentals Regular Class
<b>Sundays</b> 9:00-10:00 AM 10:15-11:15 AM 11:30 AM-12:30 PM 12:45-1:45 PM	Children's Class Regular Class Fundamentals Open Practice	<b>Thursdays</b> 6:30-7:30 PM 7:45-8:45 PM	Regular Class Open Practice
<b>Mondays</b> 6:30-7:30 AM 6:30-7:30 PM	Morning Practice Regular Class	<b>Fridays</b> 6:30-7:30 AM 6:30-7:30 PM	Morning Practice Fundamentals
<b>Tuesdays</b> 6:30-7:30 PM	Advanced Class		

NOTE: Visitors are welcome to observe our Morning, Fundamentals, or Regular Classes.

\*Last Saturday of the month is Intensive Seminar by Invitation only.

## Iaido Training Schedule

居合氣 時間割 .....

<b>Saturdays</b> 8:00-9:00 AM	Regular Class	<b>Sundays</b> 7:45-8:45 AM	Regular Class
----------------------------------	---------------	--------------------------------	---------------



## The Aiki Dojo

is the Official publication of the  
**Aikido Center of Los Angeles**

Copyright © 2019. All Rights Reserved. Published by the Aikido Center of Los Angeles. No portion of this publication may be copied or reproduced without written permission from the Publisher.

The names, symbols, logos, and photographs and all other intellectual property of the company, brands, and people appearing in this publication are the exclusive property of their respective owners and should not be interpreted as an endorsement of or by the Aikido Center of Los Angeles. Any legal and equitable rights in their intellectual property are exclusively reserved to those owners.



### Aikikai Foundation, Aikido World Headquarters

公益財団法人 合気会 合気道本部道場

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

Contact: 03-3203-9236 | aikido@aikikai.or.jp | www.aikikai.or.jp

### The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

has been awarded Official *Konin* recognition by the Aikikai Foundation, Aikido World Headquarters.

Our dojos are committed to the study and practice of the teachings of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba and his legitimate successors, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, the present Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba and Hombu Dojo-Cho Mitsuteru Ueshiba.

### Affiliated Dojos of the Aikido Center of Los Angeles



Aikido La Gomera Aikikai  
Kodokai Dojo



Aikido  
Salamanca Aikikai  
Kodokai Dojo



Aikido Valladolid Aikikai  
Kodokai Dojo



### The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

羅府合気道学院古屋道場

1211 N. Main Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012

(323) 225-1424 | aikidocenterla@gmail.com | aikidocenterla.com

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 will also dedicate yourself to your training and enjoy all the benefits that Aikido and Iaido have to offer.

FOLLOW THE US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Ito Sensei  
@teacher.Aikido

Aikido Center of Los Angeles  
@Aikidocenterla