



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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初雪や
かけかかりたる
橋の上

芭蕉

The first snow of the year;
On the bridge
They are making.

— Basho

Good Bye 2021



In Aikido training, one of the things we are trying to accomplish is to learn how to meet any

adversity with *shitsuitaizen* (失意泰然) or “a serene state of mind.”

In the 13th Century, there lived a Chinese Rinzai Zen master named Mugaku Sogen. When Sogen was 49 years old, he was living at Nengrensi temple in Wenzhou China when the Mongols attacked and were intent on putting all the monks to death. As the Mongols laid siege to the temple, many of the monks fled to safety but Sogen remained behind and sat quietly on the floor in front of one of the temple’s main statues of the Buddha. When the soldiers stormed in and unsheathed their swords to kill Sogen, he stayed calm and asked the leader to allow him time to compose a poem to mark the occasion of his death. While the soldiers waited with drawn swords, he took up his calligraphy brush and wrote the *Rinken no Ju* (臨劍の頌) or the “Poem on Approach of a Sword.” Sogen read his poem out loud to all the soldiers, “In all this world there is no place for me to lay down my staff. Subject and object are totally empty! How delightful! The great sword of a famous warrior of the past – it is as if a spring breeze were split by a bolt of lightning.” Impressed by Sogen’s calmness and equanimity with which he faced his impending death, the leader spared his life and left the temple without killing anyone. Later on, Sogen would emigrate to Japan and become the advisor to the Shogun Hojo Tokimune and the

Calmness in Adversity



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

“When facing the realm of life and death in the form of an enemy’s sword, one must be firmly settled in mind and body, and not at all intimidated; without providing your opponent the slightest opening, control his mind in a flash and move where you will – straight, diagonally, or in any other appropriate direction.”

– Morihei Ueshiba

a lot,” The teen was surprised and said, “You’re even nice to the dishwasher?” Diaz replied, “Well, haven’t you been taught you should be nice to everybody?” Diaz then asked the teen what he wanted out of life. With almost a sad face, the teen couldn’t answer the question. When the bill arrived, Diaz told the teen,

founder of Engaku-ji temple in Kamakura.

13 years ago, Julio Diaz was riding on the subway on his way home to the Bronx when he got off early to go to his favorite diner for dinner. As he got off the subway and made his way to the diner, he saw a teenage boy walking toward him. Just as they passed, the boy pulled out a knife and demanded Diaz’s wallet. Diaz calmly complied and handed over his wallet. As the boy began to run away, Diaz said, “Hey, wait a minute. You forgot something. If you’re going to be robbing people for the rest of the night, you might as well take my coat to keep you warm.” The

teenage robber turned and quizzically looked at Diaz and said, “Why are you doing this?” Diaz replied “If you’re willing to risk your freedom for a few dollars, then I guess you must really need the money. All I wanted to do was get dinner and if you really want, you can join me.” After a brief pause, Diaz and the teen headed off to the diner. At the diner, everyone came by and said hello to Diaz who is a regular there. The teen was surprised at how many people came by to greet Diaz and said, “You know everybody here. Do you own this place?” Diaz replied, “No, I just eat here



“Look, I guess you’re going to have to pay for this bill because you have my money, and I can’t pay for this. So, if you give me my wallet back, I’ll gladly treat you.” The teen returned Diaz’s wallet. Diaz paid the bill and gave the boy \$20 but before putting the money in the boy’s hand, he said, “I’ll give you the money in exchange for the knife.” The boy took the money and gave Diaz the knife. Diaz hoped that by showing the boy some kindness that this night would somehow save his life someday.

Being able to stare adversity in the face requires training. Mugaku Sogen was a Zen monk and Julio Diaz was a social worker. Both of those professions require training. In their training, they had to learn to deal with a difficult situation and then practice it over and over again. In modern terms, this is called stress inoculation or learning coping skills to manage one’s stress and anxiety in the face of confrontation. Aikido training is the same.

In class, we learn stress inoculation because we train with many different types of people who are attacking us in many different ways. Initially, we may be intimidated or overwhelmed by certain types of people or certain types of attacks, but after repeated exposure to these difficulties, we learn to deal with them in a calm and appropriate manner. Over time, we naturally

learn to have *shitsuitaizen* or have the calm equanimity of Sogen or the compassion of Diaz when we are confronted.

O’Sensei said, “True Budo is practiced not only to destroy an enemy, it must also make him, by his own will, gladly lose his spirit to oppose you.” Neither Mugaku Sogen nor Julio Diaz studied Aikido, but by O’Sensei’s quote, they were able to “do” Aikido on the people that were confronting them.

The pandemic has been going on now for two long years and I am very grateful to have made it this far. Every day, I am inspired by the kindness, generosity and hard work that all of you have put in to keep up your training and helping the dojo stay afloat. Aikido training teaches us resilience, diligence, and perseverance but most of all how to be calm when confronted with adversity and it is obvious that you all have been able to “do” Aikido and face the pandemic with *shitsuitaizen*. O’Sensei said, “Aiki is not a technique to fight with or defeat an enemy. It is the way to reconcile the world and make human beings one family.” I commend all of you for doing just that. It took a great deal of effort to not lose your Aikido over the past two years, but the battle is not over yet. Every day is a test of our mastery or a lesson we must learn. Go forward into 2022 and face everything that comes at you with *shitsuitaizen*.•



2021 saw big changes from the year before. The dojo went from contactless training outdoors with no *ukemi*, all the way back to training normally indoors. From the standpoint of practice, was that change really that big? Outwardly yes; it seems like the complete opposite. However, from the standpoint of real training, nothing really changed.

It didn't really change because what is important to training, and what makes the practice "authentic" is the spirit that the student brings to the training. While it's understood that throwing and pinning are very big parts of the training, it is only the tip of the iceberg. The rest of the art – the real part – is not so obvious, especially from the outside looking in.

Knowing what is important in the training – what is "authentic" – only arrives with experience from the correct practice. For Ito Sensei and myself, it was how to give the student what they needed in order to keep up their skill, and maybe even make some progress in their training; giving the student not what they wanted, but what they needed.

Does practicing Aikido without an opponent or without contact stop making it Aikido? If the student's spirit and attitude is correct, then no, it is still Aikido because the practice still has Aikido's spirit. The only limits to training are the limitations the student puts upon themselves. Some students see Aikido as only throwing and pinning. For them, practicing against a stationary

Nothing Changes

pole was not "Aikido" enough nor was contactless training using the jo, or "short staff."



by **Ken Watanabe**
Technical Director

These inconveniences are all the hardships that students must overcome as part of their training. For Ito Sensei and me, the inconveniences the pandemic threw at us were simply another way to examine the technique and the practice and grow as Aikidoists and teachers.

Simply closing down the dojo and waiting out the pandemic might have been the "sensible" thing to do. It would have been the easy thing to do. However, training during the pandemic forced us out of our comfort zones. It forced us to think of ways to change the way we practice and keep the training as safe and correct for the students as possible. If it wasn't for continuing our training during the pandemic, I'm sure that neither Ito Sensei nor I would have advanced our understanding of the Aikido technique as much as we did.

The spirit of martial arts remains constant whether or not we are simply practicing the footwork or doing the technique against a strong attack. The same energy, the same focus, the same precision, the same dynamic movement. These are all parts of the training. The spirit of training should always be the same whether or not we are moving on our own or with our practice partner who is attacking us.



Just like me, people only see things from their own perspective and bring their own understanding (or lack of it) to the table, and Aikido training is no different. If a student is serious about training, whatever they do is serious; if the student is careless about training, then whatever they do is careless as well; if the student is selfish about training, then whatever they do is selfish. As someone once said, “A good student does the right thing at the right time.” This is true in the face of a pandemic or in normal everyday life.

To have continued to practice this past year, going from practicing outdoors against a stationary pole, to practicing the contactless Aikido with a *jo*, to finally being allowed indoors, is what training is about. Being a martial artist is about keeping the integrity of our training yet adapting despite the attack, attacker or circumstance.

People discriminate between what they want and what they need. Was the outdoor training satisfying? Not really. There was no way one could show how strong they were by throwing someone down. Yet, the students who continued to train, even in the limited pandemic way due to the COVID restrictions, still retained their level and some maybe even improved. If anything, the contactless training required a student to be even more diligent, and even more thoughtful about how they moved. Moving our own body versus moving our body against an attack are two completely different things, yet in spirit, they are one in the same. They are the same because even though the urgency to move out of an attack is absent, the spirit to move with that same urgency still remains.

How badly do you want to get good at Aikido? It is revealed in how a student trains. When a new student joins the practice, their idea of what makes them good often changes as their training transforms them.

Being good doesn't only mean showing how strong we are on the mat inside the dojo. Traditional training requires a strength that transcends the obvious; it is a mental and spiritual strength to continue training despite hardships and discouragement. It is trusting your teacher and what they are trying to impart to you. Sometimes it means going with the flow, while at other times it means stubbornly not giving in. How do we come to the correct response? Training. Continuing your training, whether on or off the mat. Despite what inconveniences may come our way, training is the key to mastery.

The students who continued training throughout the pandemic may not feel like they advanced much in their training at all, but to me they are a testament to the benefits of regular practice. When we look back at this past year, I hope we can continue the spirit of correct practice from the end of this year and into the next one. Thank you for all your hard work and for being good students. Seeing you all train hard makes me look forward to next year with great enthusiasm. •

After two years of the coronavirus, we are starting to get our lives back. Things have almost returned back to the normalcy that we have been longing for and have missed.

We have all had to learn *keizokuhachikaranari* (継続は力なり) or “that persevering through something difficult makes us stronger.” We have learned, albeit in the hardest and most difficult way, that life can change at any moment. This virus has impacted us a great deal and we can’t even do something normal like go into a restaurant or bar for a drink let alone go to the dojo to train.

Probably one of the most difficult things is that we cannot visit with our friends or relatives or celebrate things like Christmas or birthdays surrounded by our loved ones. Any type of social gathering becomes limited, restricted, or even prohibited because of the damage it might cause. Therefore, we had to learn to live without our “freedoms” that until then were things that we would not even have imagined that we could lose.

The pandemic I think has changed every one of us in one way or another. It has changed our personal, work and family relationships in many ways and on different levels. In my case, in many aspects of my life it has made me more tolerant and less judgmental. I sometimes even feel more empathic with people especially when it comes to trivial or mundane things like waiting in line. Most of all, I have learned to appreciate the important things in life like friends and family but above all else I have learned to value what I have and appreciate how lucky I am to not only be here but to be able to continue doing what I like. I now realize the tenuousness of life, the need to be present in the moment, and how it can all change in the blink of an eye. I am thankful for all my years of training as a martial artist because I now realize that the “effectiveness of one’s training” goes way beyond the dojo.

From my point of view as a practitioner and teacher of Aikido, I am convinced that our growth as human beings is conditioned by our practice. If we do not attend classes, if we do not put on our *keikogi* and practice, then it will be very difficult to evolve in this art. We have been away from full contact practice for a while within the dojo, but our strength of will and perseverance has made us reinvent ourselves in order to continue practicing. That will mean that now, after time, we see that the effort is worth it, and that is the correct attitude that a martial artist must have. As a teacher, it is our job to lead the classes and transmit to our



students how Aikido can have a positive impact on our daily lives. With dedication and perseverance, we have shown our students what resiliency looks like and I hope that it somehow transmits into their daily lives.

I know that as a teacher, I must lead by example. That is why I worked so hard to learn better ways to teach despite the pandemic so that I could give my best for others in each and every class. I am convinced that I can do better and that I can always improve something or maybe just infect others by having a good attitude. Being a teacher or a student is all about attitude. Motiva-

Second Chances



by **Santiago Garcia Almaraz**
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai

tional speaker John C. Maxwell said, “Your attitude, more than your aptitude, will determine your altitude.” Having a positive attitude, an attitude of daily work, and an attitude of respect for my fellow students and teachers is the key to success in overcoming this pandemic.

Furuya Sensei often quoted his Zen master as saying, “Nandemo omoidori ni ikanai” which means “Nothing goes the way you want it to.” The pandemic gave us a situation that we didn’t want but as martial artists, we never get to choose how we are attacked. All we get to choose is how we deal with that attack and thus our attitude will determine our altitude.

As things return back to a new normal, it seems that we have a second chance. We can go back to resuming our same routines, meetings with our friends and family, going out to dinner, having a drink with our friends, or back to the dojo. We do not know if there will be another pandemic or any other variant which will set us back in life and prevent us from doing everything that fulfills us. All we can do is have a good attitude and work ethic because we now know that life is not guaranteed. So, let’s not miss this opportunity, let’s take advantage of every minute and continue working with the same perseverance and enthusiasm to enjoy and share our attitude with everyone around us. I am grateful and appreciative for everything in my life, and I am especially grateful for the hard work that everyone has put in this year.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a prosperous year in 2022. •



Today, the world is so different. I remember about 20-25 years ago, gasoline prices started to rise and there was such a big commotion. I remember on the news that people were saying, "If gasoline prices go to \$2.00 a gallon, there will be a revolution!" Everyone was so angry, gasoline was rationed, everyone was lined up in the stations and so upset with each other. Last week the sign of the local gas station in downtown Los Angeles near the dojo advertised at \$2.95 per gallon. I was really surprised. A couple of days later, it was \$2.97 and soon after \$3.02 and then \$3.07. Yesterday, it was at \$3.15 per gallon and this Monday morning, it went down to \$3.12 per gallon. I never thought I would see gasoline go higher than \$3.00. Today, we are accustomed to such prices going up and down so much that no one even makes a mention of it. I suppose for most people it has become a fact of our modern lifestyle. I don't drive or go out very much, so these gasoline prices do not affect me very much, but many of my students drive very far to come to the dojo everyday so I am very concerned about their budgets and welfare.

Many people put a lot of hours and effort into training in Aikido, so when they reach black belt level or after a few years, they think, "I have invested so much into Aikido, so I should see a return now. Some think, "how can I make some money off of Aikido now and get my return?" Perhaps, this is a normal way to think in this day and age. Everything is about money, and we think that this is our reality. Indeed, with rent, cost of living, phone bills, gasoline, etc., how can we live without money? And finally, people seem to judge us and measure our success by how much money we have made. If we don't make enough money or cannot buy a fancy car like others, maybe some will view us as a failure. This is also a life problem for many. Money, money, money!

The old view of an art like Aikido is very much different. We practiced Aikido to understand O'Sensei's teachings and to pass on his true teachings to the next generation so they could benefit from his art and wisdom. It really has nothing to do with

money or how much profit we can make, it is purely the practice of Aikido. We did not practice Aikido to make money – money was not the goal of Aikido practice.

Because these old and new views must somehow or somewhere clash or meet although they are diametrically opposed to each other this is where we can easily mis-understand Aikido.

There is one reality, a newer view, that Aikido or a dojo must generate income so that bills can be paid – otherwise, there is no longer a place to practice. At the same time, there is another view, that the practice of Aikido is not a business and must always focus on practice to develop oneself and to preserve O'Sensei's teachings. To make these two ideas come together without compromise or "selling out" is the great dilemma, like a "Zen koan"

New Eye, Old Heart



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

that the teacher and students together must solve as part of their training.

It is important that everyone in the dojo think about this and understand this point very seriously. It is not simply to say, "Make Aikido a business," nor is it possible to, "Stop paying the bills." Both ideas must be understood and come together in some kind of harmony – this is the challenge we face each day.

I think if I were smarter and more talented then maybe I would be calculating every penny and figuring everything out in a business-like way. Perhaps, I should be calculating profits and future projections and growth. However, I think if I did this, I would realize what a losing proposition this all is! Instead, I continue to rely on my faith and the spirit of Aikido to keep me going. In this way, I can rest more easily at night. Our dojo exists on faith, perseverance, and diligence from not only the teacher but from the students as well – otherwise, I think, it would have been gone a long time ago!

Editor's note: Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on August 8, 2005.

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

Dojo Coronavirus update:

The current City of Los Angeles mandates are:

- Masks are still required for everyone to be vaccinated or not.
- Proof of vaccination or a 72 hour negative COVID test will be required to train for anyone under 12 years old.
- You will need to show your proof or test result in order to train.

IMPORTANT DATES

December 4th (Saturday): Dojo Christmas Party at 6:30 PM in the dojo
 December 11th (Saturday): Osoji - Dojo Year End Clean-up at 8:00 AM
 December 19th (Sunday): Mochitsuki - Mochi pounding at Zenshuji at 6:30 AM
 December 24-25 (Friday-Saturday): Dojo Closed for Christmas
 December 26th (Sunday): Special Post Christmas class at 10:15 AM
 December 29th (Wednesday): Osame Keiko - Last practice of the year at 6:30 PM
 December 29th (Wednesday): Bonenkai - Forget the year party at 8:00 PM
 December 31-January 4 (Friday-Tuesday): Dojo Closed for New Year's

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, gender identification, national or ethnic origin or sexual orientation 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

Saturdays

10:15-11:15 AM Regular Class
 11:30 AM-12:30 PM Regular Class

Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Sundays

9:00-10:00 AM Children's Class
 10:15-11:15 AM Regular Class
 11:30 AM-12:30 PM Regular Class

Thursdays No Class

Mondays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Tuesdays

No 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

居合道 時間割

Saturdays

8:00-9:00 AM Regular Class

Wednesdays

7:45-8:45 Regular Class

Saturdays

7:45-8:45 AM Regular class



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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, Nidai Doshu, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, the present Doshu, Moriteru Ueshiba and Hombu Dojo-Cho, Mitsuteru Ueshiba.

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Aikido
Salamanca Aikikai
Kodokai Dojo



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

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