



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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So Long 2023!

This year more than any other year seemed to fly by the fastest. The Japanese are fond of the proverb *Kouinyanogotoshi* (光陰矢のごとし) or “Time flies like an arrow.” Time, like an arrow, when released cannot be returned. If that is true, then we must be mindful of not only time, but how we use it.

When I was a student, Furuya Sensei would always remind us by saying, “There is no time left.” Being young, I never really understood why he harped on this point so much. Now that I am older, I totally understand.

I stumbled upon a poem which helped me to understand Sensei’s assertion. I was reading about Ota Dokan, who was an Edo era samurai lord, poet and Buddhist monk. Dokan was the architect of the Imperial Palace, and I came upon his death poem. At his death, he wrote: “Had I not known that I was dead already I would have mourned my loss of life.” Reading Dokan’s poem, it dawned on me that life is to be lived mindfully.

Thinking about Sensei’s assertion about time, I used to think that “no time left” meant that the clock was running out or that it was some other euphemism for dying. Today, I realize that no time left means that, as we get older, time seems to move faster and because it moves faster, we tend to allow it to mindlessly fly by.

Therefore, the theme of this past year seemed to be calling me to slow down. However, I don’t mean moving slower. Slowing down in this sense means to act or move more mindfully, purposefully, and more calmly. When we are young, we can get things done with speed or by brute force. When we get older or become more experienced, we realize that we can get the same result without forcing it.

Aikido is the same way. Aikido can be done brutally where we fell our partners with a lot of violence. We push them, pull them or overwhelm them with our



speed, strength or power. Doing Aikido in this way, we don’t “see” the person standing in front of us. At this stage, the person is more of an object to be manipulated and all we see is an opponent. Opponent is a word with Latin origins which means “setting against.” Against gives the feeling that the person is apart from us and is therefore someone or something to triumph over.

Later in our Aikido journey, we come to realize that the person standing before us, regardless of whether they are trying to harm us, is in fact a human being. When we can see them as human beings, and knowing that humans are inherently flawed, the desire to destroy them diminishes. This is where calmness and poise come into our movement. Here, we do not move against them but rather move with them, using the natural movements of Aikido to move in a way which doesn’t cause too much damage or harm.

The Aikidoist we begin as is not the Aikidoist we end up as. With experience, we learn to be calmer, wiser, and to move with a sense of humanity rather than with a desire to enact violence.

No Time Left



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

*Kakaru toki
sa koso inochi no
oshikarame
kanete nakimi to
omoishirazuba*

かかる時
さこそ命の
惜しからめ
かねてなき身と
思い知らずば

If there is no time left and life should be lived, as this year has flown by I can only wonder how much of it did I mindfully experience? The Japanese say, *shika wo oumono wa yama wo mizu* (鹿を追う者は山を見ず) or “The person who chases the deer does not see the mountain.” The year sped by me and I try and think about how much of it I truly lived. Most times, I was just trying mindlessly to get through the year.

Miyamoto Musashi said, “Do nothing which is of no use.” Therefore, as martial artists, we aren’t supposed to engage in waste. We aren’t supposed to waste time,

Had I not known that I was dead already I would have mourned my loss of life.

energy, relationships, or anything else for that matter. This year seemed to go by faster than any year before it. What I learned is that I need to slow down and live life and not just allow it to fly by. •

— Ota Dokan death poem (1432-1486)



There are many teaching methodologies that have been developed to instruct students over the years. Some methods are considered outdated while some others have evolved as our society has evolved. If we use the Ueshiba family as a reference, we can observe an evolution of the methods used by O'Sensei and his descendants. Evolution is essential for the survival of an organization and a school.

When I was first exposed to Aikido in the 1990's, the "sink or swim" method was the most used. I did not get injured but reflecting upon it today, it was extremely dangerous. The last time I saw this method being used was when I was visiting a dojo on the East coast, and I really felt sorry for the beginner that was being thrown. There are no right or wrong methods, but an instructor needs to protect their students at all costs and following a "sink or swim" methodology can increase the risk of injury.

Today, there are many debates about what a beginner should learn during their first few months of training. Some teachers focus on *ukemi* practice so the student can develop skills to protect themselves on the mat while many other teachers focus on the footwork and developing the body. Both approaches are right, but I suppose that it all depends on the age and the fitness of the students. However, whatever method one chooses, safety should always be paramount.

Since I started my training with David Ito Sensei, he has been

teaching me a specific teaching methodology. First, the level of the students on the mat will determine the content of the class. Most of the time, Ito Sensei will build his class from a fundamental movement towards an advanced technique and each month, we study in depth one attack and the corresponding techniques. In his methodology, each class is well organized, and the instruction is concise and well articulated so all students can follow the class to the best of their abilities. Ito Sensei also emphasizes the pace of the class; techniques should be practiced for a certain duration. If students are getting out

Teaching



by **Alexandre Hillairet**
Aikido Instructor, Ventura Aikido

of breath, slowing down the cadence is also important. Ito Sensei's class always starts with *tenkan* and ends with *kokyudosa*, which is the class curriculum taught by his teacher, Furuya Sensei.

Ito Sensei stresses all those points in his methodology to organize the instructors at the Aikido Center of Los Angeles and to help the students develop their skills safely. For everything we do in life and in martial arts, timing is everything, and it helps us to stay organized. As Ito Sensei says, the mastery of time shows the true level of the martial artist.

Teaching methodologies must evolve as society evolves. It is only natural. There was a time that the teacher was the center of the martial arts school, but this vision has changed. Now, the students are the center of the school, so the teaching methodologies need to be adapted to help each student grow. Each student is a little beating heart of the school. •

Regardless of our experience, our rank, or the number of years under our *obi*, it's important to continue staying on the Way. The longer I practice and teach Aikido and Iaido, the more continuity is apparent to me. This year was no different.

First of all, this year I was awarded the teaching rank of Shihan. For myself and the dojo, this is a great achievement. This rank is something I did not aspire to nor was it my goal to become a Shihan when I began training 35 years ago.

In many ways I still feel like the same ol' skinny kid that began training back in 1988, with the same desire to understand this martial art called Aikido. The only difference between now and then is that I know a little bit more about martial arts now. This year, although my Aikido may appear the same, I realized a little bit more about the art than I knew last year.

In traditional training, we continue on the Way until the Way itself reveals its "secrets" to us. These secrets are often right in front of us. Our training is what enables us to see them, understand them, then apply them to our training and teaching. Yet, to be able to see these secrets is why we practice the same things over and over again. The training is what enables both our physical technique and our minds to see and accept these teachings.

"Mindless repetition" is the main complaint that many detractors have about traditional training. This may seem like a boring way to train, and if one doesn't have the proper mindset, it is a boring way to train. I believe this is one reason why many long-time students quit Aikido. True mindless repetition means this: do the same thing over and over again, without any aspirations nor hunger for improvement.

Instead of mindless repetition, the student's attitude towards practice should be "mindful repetition." On the one hand we have to practice looking at one aspect of Aikido with different concepts or attitudes. On the other hand, we have to look at different aspects of Aikido from the standpoint of a single concept or attitude.

In my own practice, I took Aikido's training structure for granted. I accepted concepts like weapons work, no competitions, *tenkan* practice, or any of the other seemingly abstract things we see in the training. We continue our training, follow-

ing the standard of what Aikido should be. But the value in this kind of consistency is that we begin to truly see the technique.

This past year we began a dedicated weapons class. The old assertion is that "Aikido is derived from weapons movement," particularly sword and spear. However, weapons training has to be more than just swinging a sword or twirling around a jo or "wooden staff."



From teaching this class, I began to understand how important these weapons concepts are to Aikido, not only in Aikido's superficial movements but Aikido at its core, both as a training method and in its effectiveness as a martial art.

When we look at weapons training, it's easy to see its relationship to empty-hand Aikido technique. Both share some of the same arm movements and the same upright posture. When we see Aikido sword work, we swing a sword and try to fit its movements into as many Aikido techniques as possible. However, inserting sword movements into an empty-hand martial art is not enough. It is important to practice and understand the sword from the standpoint of a martial art.

See Differently



by Ken Watanabe
Shihan

There are important swordsmanship concepts embedded within Aikido such as timing and spacing and how to generate power, as well as swordsmanship's mental focus. In sword, you practice developing your senses to be able to catch your opponent's movement. There is also aligning with your opponent's attack and later, drawing out their power or suppressing it, using your center to control their center and balance.

Another important part of sword practice is the strength training and focus aspect. Practicing the sword cut, called "suburi" not only strengthens our legs and hips, but when combined with footwork, it trains us to move dynamically, with power, balance, and stability.

This kind of sword training enables us to make effective attacks and teaches us how to issue power from our legs and hips. Likewise, when we practice with the Aikido's short staff, we know that O'Sensei practiced and mastered spearmanship. From here we read that he developed the concept of *irimi* or "moving inward."

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See Differently *continued from page 4...*

When we see *jo* practice, we see arms and upper body, but the *jo* movements come from our hips and legs. How our feet and hips move affects the movement of our *jo*. In *jo* practice, we try to synchronize and connect our arm movement to our hip and footwork. Like in the regular Aikido technique, our energy goes to our *tegatana* or “handblade.” In *jo*, it has to extend to the tip of the weapon. From here we can see that the power in our center’s movement – our whole body – puts life and power into the *jo*’s movement.

When we strike or thrust with the *jo*, we practice attacking with our whole body, moving dynamically, yet with stability and good posture. In both sword and *jo*, we practice issuing power from our hips and legs, moving dynamically, with stability, precision, and proper alignment between our weapon and our *kamae*. Both sides in weapons technique are essentially practicing the same concepts regardless of if they are the attacker or defender.

Also, when practicing weapons work, from the weapon’s concept of attack and defense, I understood that *uke* and *nage* are one and the same. When we practice Aikido, we train not only to bring out the best technique, energy, and movement from ourselves, but also to bring out the best technique, energy, and movement from our partners.

Instead of trying to defeat our partner, we train to empower them, not with words but by practicing as correctly as our level and experience allow. This is why we move with our partner and take the correct *ukemi*. This is the beginning to understanding what “non-fighting” means.

During practice, we use the same power from our weapon-based footwork when we are attacking our partner as when we defend against that strong attack using *irimi*, *tenkan*, or *tenshin*. Essentially, just as in weapons work, this means both *uke* and *nage* are practicing the same thing.

Within a single technique, *uke* and *nage* switch between effective offense and effective defense. Both protect their respective centerlines, both practice positioning themselves in order to safely throw (or be thrown), and both practice moving with their training partner with the right energy, connection, posture, and extension. From this kind of weapons-based, cooperative training we can begin to see Aikido as a martial art, but from an Aikido standpoint.



Aikido takes these abstract concepts of non-fighting and no competition, which are seemingly at odds with what we consider “combat arts,” and then transforms it from a mental exercise to a physical reality through the Aikido practice. We learn about non-fighting from our physical practice. We learn about it through our bodies. That is the genius of O’Sensei. It enhances martial arts rather than detracts from it.

To me it seems silly to realize these things at my level of experience, but without experience and correct training, both my mind and body would have found it difficult to see. I needed that hardship of trusting and investing in the training without the possibility of a payout.

Many times in traditional training, it seems we follow blindly and repeat the same things over and over. Blind repetition without the mindset of questioning is just that; doing the same ol’ thing over and over again.

When we see how the *uke* and *nage* are one and the same, we begin to understand why there are no competitions in Aikido, and why this is correct. When practiced correctly, Aikido doesn’t need sporting competitions.

Both Aikido and Iaido are mature martial arts. It’s not about winning and losing. Competition loses value when it devolves into an ego-based, trophy-awarding exercise. In martial arts, there is no accumulation

of merit. One indiscretion in our attitude or practice and our skill could all go away. If we stray from the Way for too long, it becomes very difficult to get back on the correct path.

All of these moments of clarity do not happen at the same time, nor do they happen on the mat. They happen when I’m for a lack of a better word – daydreaming about a particular Aikido concept or a specific part of the technique. Many times they happen when I’m not actively looking for them.

From doing the same thing in our training over and over again, we begin to see different aspects of it. From watching many different, seemingly unrelated things in the training, we begin to see how interrelated they all are.

If I learned anything this year it is that it’s important to trust the training, trust the teaching from Furuya Sensei, and trust the art. I am extremely fortunate that I trained under a competent teacher. Although Sensei is gone, I am still discovering and reaffirming teachings from the art. In this way it is like the Way is still teaching me. The longer I practice and teach martial arts, the more I feel how important this is. •

It was the Roman stoic philosopher Seneca who said, “The body has to be treated rigorously, so that it does not disobey the mind.” In theory, this phrase from Seneca is the basis for achieving our goals, but it is not bad that when we start a new task or project, we often ask ourselves, will I be prepared? Will I be able to do it? Self-confidence is questioned when we face the final test. Many times there is no doubt as to whether the preparation we have will be enough or whether it will be able to overcome that challenge.

In our daily practice in the dojo, when we have to face some type of tests, promotions or degrees, doubt comes to mind. We find ourselves thinking, “Will I do it well?” or “Will I be prepared?” How many times have we asked ourselves before starting something, “Am I ready?” The truth is that most of us just tend to trust in ourselves regardless of whether we have prepared ourselves or not, but as martial artists trust is not enough.

When taking an exam, our ability to control our nerves, accept the corrections, remember the techniques and protocols, and maintain an adequate rhythm, as well as the stress of the exam, are all hard enough. Not to mention that exams are very different from daily class Aikido practice. When many of the students take an exam, they usually do it below their usual technical level or the level they usually practice every day in class. So for many, the situation of facing the examination, their classmates watching them and other factors make that situation something not only new but completely stressful. Unfortunately, every exam will be unique and test us on many different levels.

The Greek poet, Archilochus said, “We don’t rise to the level of our expectations; we fall to the level of our training.” Understanding this, our daily work or practice, learning to persevere and having patience are all very important factors in reducing all those doubts that assail us when we are preparing for a test.

In the dojo we will try to do things that are difficult or uncomfortable so that we can learn to face the difficult things that we can’t control. However, the truth is that even if we prepare ourselves every day and practice intensely, there will be factors and sensations that will only appear on the day of the exam. These unknowns are where our work as martial artists moves to another dimension. Author James Lane Allen said, “Adversity does not build character, it reveals it.” Thus, the adversity we

face reveals who we truly are as human beings.

So the question that we should be routinely asking ourselves is, “Am I prepared?” Ultimately, whether we are prepared or not is relative, based on our perception of what it means to be adequately prepared. For that, we can only respond based on the part that we can control: whether or not we did indeed put in the practice time. Because everything else is not within our control it is of no help in predicting whether we are prepared. It follows that if we can only put in the work, then the “how” to prepare ourselves is really only attending daily classes, to prepare our bodies and minds to be ready to meet adversity and the unpredictability of those situations.

When the teacher corrects us, when our classmates do not cooperate, when we are having a bad day, when we have some kind of discomfort, or injury, when we have personal work or family problems, or when the situation is not ideal, it is important to attend class. The reason is because it is all martial arts training. Absolutely everything will be part of each class, and everything we are dealing with can be practicable and internalized. When we institute this type of thinking, it can bring our practice and our level of training to another level.



Are You Ready?



by Santiago Garcia Almaraz
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai

doesn’t require the same concentration. This distorted type of practice hurts us by lulling us into complacency. In the end when the difficulties arrive, we are not prepared to face them.

On the other hand, if we delve into the concept of “being prepared” from my point of view, it does not only mean being prepared to just pass the test, do well or achieve something. Miyamoto Musashi said, “The true science of martial arts means practicing them in such a way that they will

be useful at any time, and to teach them in such a way that they will be useful in all things.” Thus, being prepared means putting in the work rather than hoping to be ready.

Be prepared to learn from defeat. Be prepared to learn from success. Be prepared to start, stop, and make mistakes, but nothing is more important than learning from them. The real asset of a martial artist is being able to start over again with a fresh outlook despite setbacks, failures, or successes.

Are you ready for the new year?•



Have you ever noticed something unusual about great discoveries in science today? We always think that we know so much that whatever we discover or add to our knowledge must be quite new and advanced. But, in reality, it is quite the opposite. I have noticed that most of the great discoveries in science, medicine, etc. actually deal with very fundamental laws in nature and mankind. Because these are revelations in the basic principles of nature, life, and mankind, they are so significant and important to us. Please take a look for yourself or think about it for a moment.

The other day, I was watching students trying to do some advanced techniques and somehow it no longer looked like Aikido to me – something mixed up like chop suey. I always tell them that advanced techniques are merely basic techniques done at a very, very high level.

As a teacher, we judge a student's skill by how well they have mastered the fundamentals of Aikido, not by how many weird and fancy techniques they have thought up. The basics are not boring or "only for beginners" as many might assume. Within the fundamentals, there are great and beautiful discoveries yet to be made! This is the meaning of training.

Many, many years ago, my first exposure to Aikido was seeing two small books on Aikido called, "Aikido" and "Aikido Giho." Both were written by 2nd Doshu. On the cover of one book was a photo of O'Sensei throwing one of his students. It is such a fantastic photo of the student flying through the air that I could never get it out of my mind. It was so wonderful! In later years however, I have chosen another photo of O'Sensei as my very best favorite. It is a photo of O'Sensei drinking tea. I think it comes from an old film and before he drinks the tea, he holds it above his head for a moment with utmost respect. Of course, this is a Japanese custom, and we also observe this gesture of respect in the tea ceremony. But, when O'Sensei showed such respect to a cup of tea, I truly felt that he was so thankful from the bottom of his heart. I always think that that cup of tea must have been so delicious!

A Cup of Tea



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

I realized that when we drink tea, we just do it as a gesture, but we don't do it with heart nor are we so sincerely thankful – after all it is just a cup of tea! This is where we are wrong, and I feel so much regret that I cannot appreciate a simple cup of tea like O'Sensei. Indeed, O'Sensei is a great teacher.

We have so much, and we take so much for granted. I think this is very bad. Even students do not appreciate the dojo or the teachings of Aikido because they think that they can just go anywhere to get it. Everything is so easy now! Yet, I hear from so many people around the world every day. Many with no dojo or place to practice. Many around the world have no teacher to study with either. Many live in a world filled with war and suffering and so each day is filled with danger. My heart goes out to them and every day I think, "What can I do to help them out?" I often think that I

am not good enough or wealthy enough and it always makes me sad. I should appreciate everything I have and so much more.

Humans are funny aren't they. To understand cold, we must feel hot. To understand tall, we must be short. To understand poor, we must be rich! If I say, "this is cold," no one will understand. If I say, "this is hot," no one will understand but, in that moment, they might begin to feel what "cold" is. Why are students so difficult to teach? It always makes my head spin!

I have new friends in a country with much terrorism, war, and suffering. As the number of my students grows, so do my feelings of responsibility and concern for them. Only with this, can man understand war, but not know peace. We understand peace but still do not appreciate the terror of war. It is not that we don't want to understand, we are just simply trying to look the other way. This is not Aikido. We cannot think of ourselves because our lot is good, we must always share the suffering of others too. Then maybe we can finally understand how O'Sensei can show such gratitude to a cup of tea. •

Editor's note: *Furuya Sensei published this article in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog March 30, 2002.*

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

IMPORTANT DATES

December 2 (Saturday): Dojo Christmas party
December 16 (Saturday): Osoji - Year end clean up
December 17 (Sunday): Mochitsuki at Zenshuji
December 17 (Sunday): Children's class Christmas party
December 22-25 (Friday-Monday): Dojo Closed Christmas
December 30 (Saturday): Osame keiko - Last practice of the year
December 30 (Saturday): Bonenkai party - Forget the year party
December 31- January 2: Dojo Closed New Year's
January 6 (Saturday): Kagami Biraki - Dojo opening class
March 8-10 (Friday-Sunday): Furuya Sensei memorial 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, 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 Advanced
 11:30 AM-12:30 PM Theory

Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular
 8:30-9:30 PM Fundamentals @Budokan

Sundays

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

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

Mondays

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

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Tuesdays

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

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

Iaido Training Schedule

居合道 時間割

Saturdays

9:00-10:00 AM Regular Class

Tuesdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class

Thursdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class



The Aiki Dojo

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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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Kodokai Dojo



Aikido Salamanca Aikikai
Kodokai Dojo



Aikido Valladolid Aikikai
Kodokai Dojo



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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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