



# The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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2nd Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba's annual memorial service.

Aikidoists understand the power of *sekizen* (積善) or the power of “the accumulation of good deeds.” In order to become successful or good at anything, we must put in the effort. A single effort alone will do nothing, but a series of efforts over time can become the stepping stones for success. In Japanese, they say *tsumoreba yama to naru* (塵も積もれば山となる) which means “Even specks of dust if piled up can become a mountain.”

Last month, we held a memorial service for 2nd Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba who passed away in 1999. As I look around the internet, I don't really see too many dojos doing memorial services for 2nd Doshu. I also don't see many dojos having services for O'Sensei either. The extent of most dojos' remembrance is that they will just post something to their social media accounts to mark the occasion. Perhaps this is just the “new” way to remember someone in the 21st century. This is not a criticism but merely an observation.

Perhaps most in the West do not mark the occasion of someone's passing because we would like to remember that person more fondly, or because death is uncomfortable and thus it is more uplifting to celebrate something like a birthday. In Japan, most Japanese don't celebrate their birthdays. In the past, one's birthday wasn't considered special as it was thought that on January 1st, everyone got one year older. It was only upon someone's death did that a significant day became special to them. This is an old custom which is losing its grasp more and more today as people become individualistic and their actual day of birth becomes more important.

One way to think about which day to remember is that your birthday celebrates the day you were born but does not celebrate any of your accomplishments because technically they haven't happened yet. By celebrating the day someone passes away, we celebrate all of that person's past accomplishments as they accumulate up to the day of their passing.

Regardless of what day we choose to remember, the significance is in the act of remembering. When I was a student, Furuya Sensei used to often talk about something he called “spiritual capital.” Spiritual capital is the act of putting forth an effort despite the fact that the act doesn't really have an extrinsic reward or a tangible benefit. Therefore, the act of remembering builds spiritual capital. I believe that these selfless acts of doing or spiritual capital accumulate over time and become the kindling



## Don't Forget



by David Ito  
Aikido Chief Instructor

for our breakthroughs or the foundations of our successes.

Therefore, it is in the act of doing for no reward which gains us the most benefit. If we spend our time having a memorial service for someone like 2nd Doshu or O'Sensei, in time those efforts will accumulate and become something. What is that something? Who knows? It could be something as indistin-

guishable as a breakthrough in a technique or something noticeable as a deluge of students who join the dojo. In Japanese, this can be considered *onkochishin* (温故知新) which means “To learn by studying the past.” This saying comes from the Analects of Confucius which illustrates the importance of gaining wisdom through one's reverence. What this means is that we gain by remembering.

Regardless, if we remember the day someone was born or the day they passed away,

the real issue is in not forgetting. If we forget the person, then there is a likelihood that we will forget their accomplishments and by forgetting their efforts, we might be doomed to re-live the struggles of their past. As the philosopher George Santayana once said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Every day, each of us will have something that we must overcome. Some days it is dragging our tired body to the dojo. Other times it is just picking up a piece of paper someone else errantly dropped. Sometimes it is just taking a moment to remember someone whose efforts benefited your life like O'Sensei or 2nd

Doshu. Regardless, if we act then we will ultimately benefit. When and what is not up to us, but it just somehow happens.

In Aikido, we often refer to our “training” as *keiko* (稽古) which directly translates as “think about the past.” Therefore, every moment we are training, we are remembering and that is how our improvements in Aikido come about and how the training of Aikido benefits our lives. Not only in Aikido but in life, grand gestures only last a short period of time. Thus, it is in the little things that we do every day, which accumulate over time to become something. There is great power that comes from the act of doing without the desire for a reward.

The reason why our dojo does an actual memorial service for O'Sensei and 2nd Doshu is so that we don't forget. If we forget, we are probably doomed. If we remember, we will most likely be ok because even specks of dust over time become mountains. •



Recently, there have been a lot of discussions about spirituality and Aikido on different social media platforms. Ito Sensei recently published his podcast: "Spirituality and Aikido" on YouTube and I also posted a translation of Kisshomaru Ueshiba's article: "Finding meaning and depth with Aikido" on my blog.

In the 90's there was already some concern that competition was destroying the traditions and spiritual aspects of the martial arts. Kisshomaru Ueshiba explained that it was important for Aikido practitioners to develop their understanding of martial arts. Unfortunately, today there is another problem, our fast-paced society creates a lack of mindfulness. Technologies have created a dependency on those technologies and people have become less mindful and less in touch with their environment and their communities. For example, some people text while they are driving, they eat while they use their phones, and they use their phones while they are walking. Sometimes people use their phones so much while they drive that they do not remember how they got home! People are running on autopilot and their minds are too busy lamenting about the past, worrying about the future and most people forget about the most important time, the present time.

In the old days, on the battlefield, a lack of attentiveness or mindfulness would have caused the death of a warrior. Because we study Aikido, we must keep this in mind and we have to cultivate mindfulness while we are training.

Dojo (道場) means: "the place of the way" in Japanese. A dojo is supposed to be a sanctuary and a safe place where people can train their bodies and cultivate their minds. Thus, it is the perfect place to practice mindfulness.

The training of mindfulness starts at the door of the dojo. The first step is our etiquette, the second step is listening attentively to the teacher, and the third step is practicing earnestly with our partners.

*Reigi* (礼儀) or "etiquette" in Japanese are the proper manners in a dojo. The new students must be initiated as soon as possible as it is the easiest part of the training. Learning the eti-

quette helps them to develop confidence and awareness. The senior students, the *sempai* (先輩), must show the way to the "juniors" or *kohai* (後輩). It is essential for them to stay sharp on the etiquette's protocol.

The second step is listening to the sensei. We cannot let our minds wander and we must leave all negative thoughts outside the dojo. The best way to be receptive is to focus on the present,

let go of the past, and stop worrying about the future. If the teacher is talking and we are listening, it is not only an act of attentiveness, but also a sign of respect.

The last step is practicing with our partners. With every technique, we must breathe and perform the movements slowly and correctly. We should not be judgmental as it creates a negative state in our minds which will affect our awareness. It is also important to practice with an open heart and with a be-

ginner's mind. Freeing ourselves from negative energy allows us to be in harmony with our partners, and it helps us to develop a certain sensitiv-

ity to our surroundings. It is vital to be in constant awareness of our position, our partners' positions, and our sensei's position. In the old days, a student would get hit if they had any openings while practicing a technique or if they were not aware that the sensei was behind them.

The dojo is supposed to be a safe place to practice but it is essential to understand that there are consequences to all the things that we do

or say in life. We must be sharp and live in constant awareness to avoid any opening which could harm us. In Aikido, we must protect ourselves from potential aggression and in our society, it means to avoid doing things that could harm us or cause trouble in our daily lives.

Mindfulness is the way to cultivate the present time and to protect ourselves in our daily lives, and it is also the prerequisite for the development of spirituality. Being mindful is a shift from materials or physical things to the metaphysical, however we should not be dissociated.

Training hard is the key to transforming our bodies and our minds and this form of "purification," or *misogi* in Japanese, shapes us to facilitate the study of spirituality and it ultimately deepens our understanding of the philosophies of Aikido. •



## Mindfulness



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



In Aikido training, we see one student in the role of defender, or *nage* (投げ), and the other student in the role of attacker, or *uke* (受け). The word *nage* translates to “throw.” The word, *uke*, translates to “receive.” The act of being thrown or pinned is called “ukemi.”

The word *ukemi* (受け身) generally means “rolling,” but in terms of the *ukemi* Aikido it is more than that. The word, *ukemi*, can be broken down into *uke* (受け) or “to receive”, and *mi* (身) or “body.” Therefore, the student who takes *ukemi* is receiving the power of the technique. In essence, the attacker becomes the defender and *ukemi* is the act of safely negotiating the throw or pin.

Most students enjoy being the *nage* and it’s natural to assume that being the thrower is more important than being the attacker.

For beginning students, *ukemi* training is almost more important than the throw or pin. When we think of *ukemi*, we usually just think of falling, but being an *uke* is more than just being someone’s punching bag. The act of “taking ukemi” encompasses everything the attacker does from establishing proper spacing, attacking strongly and effectively, moving safely within the technique, to finally positioning oneself so they can be thrown safely without injury.

Correct *ukemi* enables the *nage* to throw or pin the *uke* without fear of injuring them. A good *uke* helps to bring out the energy of the *nage*. Without *ukemi*, strong Aikido would be impossible.

Although the throwing part of practice seems the most important to beginners, *ukemi* training has many important benefits. As you train and practice and begin to understand Aikido, you will see that these points are deeply interrelated to one another. Here are some basic ones:

**Ukemi trains us in the basics of self defense.** This is how we move and position ourselves in order to be protected from further attack. The *uke* moves “with” the technique to hide their centerline from the *nage*. The *uke* positions and protects themselves in a way that the only choice *nage* has is to throw or pin them. The interesting part of O’Sensei’s genius is that the technique is designed to be the most effective

## Ukemi



by Ken Watanabe  
Technical Director

when the *ukemi* is correct. In fact, a good *uke* has a very thorough knowledge of the technique and good *ukemi* brings out the power in the technique.

**Ukemi trains our durability.** *Ukemi* toughens and strengthens our bodies. In Japanese, *utarezu yoi* (打たれ強い) means “a boxer has to be able to take a hit.” For Aikidoists, it’s the same. *Ukemi* trains us how to get used to the impact of being thrown down onto the mat and get up quickly to attack again. *Ukemi* is the strength training for the muscles needed to do strong Aikido. *Ukemi* also strengthens our joints whenever we practice pinning. *Ukemi* training is supposed to strengthen our bodies in a balance and natural way.

*Continued on page 5...*



*Ukemi continued from page 4...*

**Ukemi trains our footwork speed.** *Ukemi* teaches us to move our bodies effectively. Moving our feet is how we position ourselves safely so that we can receive the throw or pin without injury. We should train our feet to move very fast to keep up with the *nage's* movement. This footwork is also how we make a strong attack.

**Ukemi trains our connection.** Connection is how to follow the *nage's* movements. A big part of *ukemi* is keeping the connection with the *nage's* movements. This is not the same as doing the technique for them or throwing ourselves. Once we get used to following our opponent's movement, we can begin to see how to read their energy and anticipate their movements.

**Ukemi trains our flexibility.** Proper *ukemi* means how well we move with the technique, how our feet move with the technique, and how our bodies correctly stretch with the technique's movements. Instead of being brittle or stiff, we bend and stretch with the power, going with the impact rather than resisting it. This helps protect us from the technique's impact.

**Ukemi trains our confidence.** *Ukemi* teaches us how to overcome the fear of falling and how to position ourselves properly to fall safely. No matter how strong we attack or how strong the *nage* throws or pins us, proper *ukemi* teaches us how to protect ourselves while taking *ukemi*. In this way, the intensity of your practice increases in a safe and balanced way. This body and mind understanding is what breeds confidence.

**Ukemi teaches us spacing.** Our bodies learn how to manage the *maai* (間合い) or "spacing" which is how close or how far we are from our opponent. *Ukemi* teaches us the correct footwork and body positioning for both attacking from the correct distance and making sure our attack reaches the target area. We also learn to control the spacing while moving with the technique.

**Ukemi trains our attacks.** Learning the proper *ukemi* teaches us how to move our feet and center strongly and attack effectively with our whole body. A strong attack also helps the *nage* practice how to neutralize the attack's power, position themselves properly, break the *uke's* balance, and it helps to refine their timing. As the attacker, we must practice grabbing, punching, striking, and cutting effectively and with power so that the *nage* can learn to defend themselves effectively. Without a good attack, a student will never learn Aikido as a martial art.

If a student's footwork is weak when they are attacking, their

footwork will be weak when it's their turn to throw or pin. The footwork in an *uke's* attack is directly related to how strong their technique will be when they are the *nage*.

In short, *ukemi* skill directly influences our Aikido skill. This is why *ukemi* is emphasized for the kyu grade or "white belt level" students. All the skills needed for good Aikido are revealed in how a student takes *ukemi*. In Aikido, an apprentice instructor's potential is not determined by technique, but by their *ukemi* skill.

At higher levels, *ukemi* trains our martial arts or *budo* instincts. A good *uke* is also a good martial artist. We can learn as much about martial arts, maybe even more, being the *uke* and receiving the technique than being the *nage* and applying the technique.

When a teacher demonstrates the technique to the class, it must be as correct as possible because proper *ukemi* brings out the proper technique. The student taking the teacher's *ukemi* actually experiences how the correct technique feels and applies it to their own training.

When O'Sensei was alive, the students were desperate to have the strength, skill, and sensitivity to be his *uke*. I heard a story about students who made a mistake when taking his *ukemi*. They knew that O'Sensei wouldn't use them for at least six months, which brought tears to that student, because he knew his progress was set back.

When 2nd Doshu Ueshiba Kisshomaru, taught class, he expected the student coming up to take his *ukemi* to instinctively know what attack he wanted just by his stance. When I took my teacher's *ukemi*, I was expected to know the attack as well as instinctively know the lesson plan based on what was being taught at the moment. In essence, being a good *uke* is essential to teaching Aikido, learning Aikido, and practicing Aikido.

How do you know you are a good *uke*? Everyone will want to use you for *ukemi* and will love practicing with you. How do students become good at Aikido? From the standpoint of teaching, the teacher uses them for *ukemi* when teaching class. In traditional martial arts *kata* which is different from Aikido, the senior is the one who is in the *uke* role. The teacher attacks, the student demonstrates the technique. This is because the teacher knows the technique better and can control the timing and spacing more effectively. The teacher also knows how to react in the correct way and can hide the student's mistakes.

The secret to good Aikido? Good *ukemi*. The secret to good *ukemi*? Good Aikido. Good luck!•



January has flown by and it seems that every year the months pass by faster and faster. With so much happening, it seems that we have more plans and less time, and that makes our days seem even shorter than they actually are. I am told that this is a function of getting older. Understanding this, we should not allow the stress of life make us lose our focus. We need to concentrate on being aware of what we do at every moment.

In the dojo classes, it is easy to carry the feeling of stress and the hurry of life into the dojo. Therefore, in our training, we need to be vigilant so that we can be present, and we have to learn to be aware of what we are doing as we are doing it. Sometimes this is difficult if we run from work or any other place with a thousand things on our minds. When we enter the dojo, we are supposed to clear our minds and enter the *tatami* with our heads centered and prepared for practice. From my point of view, this is practically impossible.

That is why we need to center ourselves well before we enter the dojo.

The dojo is supposed to be a respite from the outside world so we should not bring our issues into the dojo. Furuya Sensei used to say, "Cut off your head and leave it by the door." Many people see the dojo as a place to relax or disconnect from their problems. However, it is my opinion that it's not exactly the best idea of training. The training has to teach us to dominate and overcome our feelings and stresses and not just run to the dojo to avoid them for 60 minutes. This does not mean that we won't have a difficult time on the *tatami*. Being angry or stressed is part of the training and we have to strive to be attentive and work through our issues. Training teaches us to be conscious and present in each class and at every moment. If our heads get full of problems and stresses this will cause us to lose concentration. When this happens, we can get hurt or injure our partner.

I think that there is some confusion regarding how the classes should be focused. Having a relaxed atmosphere or having fun is not at odds with an intense and focused practice. We can have both if we arrive at the dojo with sufficient time to clear our minds, change our clothes and prepare our bodies for a physical and mental practice.

Focusing our minds begins well before the class begins. We can't clear our minds if we use the dojo as a place to socialize. I am not against socialization and there is something to be said about "getting things off our chest," but there has to be a limit to socializing. When we talk to others, we run the risk of robbing

them of their opportunity to clear their minds. Then, we realize that we didn't have a good class and they didn't either.

Training doesn't begin when we pass through the dojo doors. It should begin when we leave our house, get into our car or even the moment we wake up. Training is an all-the-time thing, not just when we are in the dojo and ready to train.



When we get to the dojo, we should try to put ourselves into a place where we are ready to learn. As we change and warm up, the whole time, we should be focusing our thoughts on listening to our bodies and focusing on the things our bodies and minds need to have a good class.

When we are warmed up and mentally prepared, then, if possible, we can get a partner and start working on some basic *kihon-waza* techniques. Going through these basic moves will further help us prepare our minds and bodies to learn faster and have a

good class. This will also help us to determine things we need to focus on improving in class.

## Concentration



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

A few minutes before class, students should take a moment and go inwards to further focus their minds. They should sit quietly in *seiza* off to the side with their eyes closed and allow their minds to prepare to start.

Being able to concentrate means that we correctly follow the techniques and directions of the person who is teaching class. During the course of the class, when we are focused, we can see the details of the instructor's hands and feet, and we can

make note of any explanation that they make. A good idea is that if the instructor makes a correction to another student, then I will take that correction as mine. Being able to focus also means to be able to practice with intensity but without hurting my partner because I am able to regulate my strength and match it to the level of my partner. Once class ends, our concentration shouldn't end as we extend this focus to the cleaning of the dojo, changing, folding our *hakamas*, and ultimately everything in our lives.

In order to be a good student, we need to have the right focus and concentration. To do this, we must have our minds centered and focused on everything that happens before, during and after the practice. This is where the training begins to benefit every aspect of our lives. There are many things which enable us to have good concentration during practice. Most depend on our attitude and our behaviors. So, the next time that you are running to the dojo slow down, breathe, and focus, and don't forget to enjoy the practice. •



The other day I was observing my most senior students and actually began to feel sorry for them! I felt like this because I could see that they are finally approaching the stage where I used to be – actually where I still am.

We like to think that as we become a “senior,” “black belt,” or “sensei,” there is great status and privilege which accompanies it. I guess there are certain “perks” to the position but from where I stand they certainly do not compensate for the time, effort and energy to reach it. What we begin to realize, I think, is that in real life, the higher we go in something like Aikido, the harder and dirtier the jobs get and the burden of responsibility only becomes heavier and heavier. Whatever little advantages we may get from such a position certainly is not worth it. Someone bows their head to you and calls you, “sensei!” is NOT the big deal that most people would like to think. Please imagine the great burden of responsibility that accompanies such an “honor.”

For example, every day, my senior students must clean the front garden. I remember, many years back, one black belt laughed at this task and called it, “grunt work” and felt that it was entirely beneath him. He cruelly told one of my other black belts who was trying to teach him how to clean the garden, “What are you training for? A black belt in gardening?”

When I heard this, I thought to myself, “How strange to be born in such a democratic society as America and yet hold such feudalistic views of the world!” We may look down on cleaning as “grunt” work or work for “lowly” people, but in the world of a dojo and one’s training it is not. In the old temples in Japan, only the most senior and experienced students can take care of the garden and some temple gardens are over 500 years old and are still beautiful today. Some are National Treasures and demand expert and loving care everyday.

Our garden and gate is not a National Treasure but it is still the “face” of the dojo. This is what people first see when they visit us – it is their first impression and it is what determines if they think we are a good dojo or not.

Every morning, a senior *deshi* is supposed to clean the front of the dojo. If the front or “face” of the dojo is unkept or sloppy, we used to think, “Oh, this is not a good place to train, there is no discipline here.”



## The Higher You Get, The Lower You Are



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

It is funny, but I still think this today when I visit someplace. It is even so with a doctor’s office, restaurant, supermarket, even a parking lot – my impression is different if it is clean and neat or dirty, sloppy and unkept.

The pre-practice clean-up of the dojo is reserved only for my most trusted students, but only because it is such an “important” job. It is not grunt work at all. It is actually an

honor! When I was at Hombu Dojo, I woke up every morning at 5:00am to clean the front of the dojo before the students arrived. Actually, because of its design, it seemed to cause a little breeze which blew dust and dirt into the front and inside into the “front hallway” or *genkan* (玄関) at every other moment. I used to clean it once as early as possible and then again a little before 2nd Doshu arrived at 6:20am, just ten minutes before class.

Maybe, people thought I was crazy

but I loved this job. I thought it such an honor to be asked to clean the front of the dojo to welcome the first students for practice – how differently we think today!

When six young people came the other day to be introduced to Aikido for the very first time, I thought that they would object to the after-practice clean-up but actually they did not and seemed to like the job although, for

the first time, they were not good at it at all! I guess they have been living together for this program for several weeks and because everyone has different ideas about “what is clean” several remarked that “overall cleaning was such a good idea and made sense!” Haha!

Several weeks ago, my senior students and I had spent several months cleaning the 3rd floor and my office for a photo shoot for a book. My office is always cluttered with so many papers, notes and books. How refreshing it is now that my office is so neat (as it can be) and clean! I can see that the order and cleanliness even affect my overall mental wellbeing. It is like taking a nice, hot bath. How nice it feels to be clean afterwards!

Anyways, such jobs are important for those as they progress in their training. The higher one goes, the lower the jobs seem to get. I feel sorry for my students sometimes because it never seems to get easier for them but, please believe me, I know this best of all! The true inner spirit that we are trying to cultivate in Aikido begins when we do things for the benefit of others and without the desire for reward. •

**Editor’s note:** *Furuya Sensei posted this article in a slightly different format on his Daily Message on June 21, 2004.*

# UPCOMING EVENTS

行事 .....

## Dojo Coronavirus update:

Currently, the City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles has lifted the face mask mandate for all persons vaccinated or not. Anyone who still wants to wear a face covering in class is welcome to do so. There is also no vaccination requirement to attend classes.

### IMPORTANT DATES

**February 20th:** Closed President's Day  
**February 25:** Senior's Intensive Seminar  
**March 3-5:** Furuya Sensei Memorial Seminar  
**March 25th:** Senior's Intensive Seminar  
**April 22nd:** 11:30 AM O'Sensei memorial service  
**April 29th:** Senior's Intensive Seminar  
**July 8-9:** Zenshuji Obon volunteering  
**October:** Dates TBA - Spain 25th anniversary 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

6:30-7:30 PM Regular

### Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

### Tuesdays

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

8:00-9:00 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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2 minute aikido technique