



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Welcome to 2022!



Studying Aikido is a process of developing oneself through subtraction rather than through addition.

Michelangelo's David is probably one of the most famous sculptures in the world. However, most people don't know that David was made from a single piece of marble that was leftover from a previous project and discarded because the marble was thought to be too inferior. The marble was thought to be so inferior that two other sculptors were commissioned to carve David from it and tried to but quit after discovering the inferiority of the marble. The project fell into Michelangelo's hands 37 years after the project was commissioned. It took Michelangelo three years to extract David from the marble in a process known as *subtractive* sculpturing which is the oldest form of making sculpture. In subtractive sculpture, the artist removes unwanted parts of the marble to reveal the sculpture's true inner greatness. When discussing David, Michelangelo famously said, "Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it."

The process of making a Japanese sword is similar to subtractive sculpting. From a rough piece of *tamahagane* or "steel made from iron sand," a beautiful sword is forged. Essentially, there are three steps in the making of a sword: *uchi-oroshi*, *shitaji* and *shiage*. The first step is *uchi-oroshi* where the swordsmith forges the basic shape of the blade from a piece of *tamahagane*. After the forging process, the blade is still only a piece of metal but now it is in the shape of a sword. After the forging, the sword undergoes a type of subtractive sculpting in the *shitaji* stage

where the polisher begins to reveal the greatness of the sword. *Shitaji* literally translates as "ground work" and requires the most skill as the polisher strips away any flaws, corrects the shape of the sword and gives it its fine cutting edge. In the final step, the polisher does a *shiage* or "final polish" and this is where the polisher brings out the true beauty of the sword.

Subtraction



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

"It takes 1,000 days to forge the spirit and 10,000 days to polish it."

– Miyamoto Musashi

Furuya Sensei often likened the process of making a sword to the process of developing oneself. He once wrote: "This process of *shitaji* and *shiage* can be easily related to our Aikido practice. If one masters the fundamental techniques of Aikido, it is rather easy to perform advanced or very difficult techniques because everything is based on the groundwork of our practice. Even if we try to do difficult or fancy techniques, if we do not master the basics, these techniques will never be executed expertly. Like polishing a fine sword, or applying lacquer or creating a beautiful patina to metal such as a sword guard, everything is based on the initial groundwork (*shitaji*). If we think of ourselves as a sword to be polished, focus on the *shitaji*, and realize the beautiful finish, *shiage*, in the future."

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Nobel laureate Alexis Carrel once said, "Man cannot remake himself without suffering, for he is both the marble and the sculptor. As long as you have the willpower to never give up, you'll always be able to rebuild. Life is built on second, third, limitless chances."

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Subtraction *continued from page 2...*

From a training standpoint, we are both the marble and the sculptor. We forge ourselves through training to become not just better fighters but better human beings as well. O'Sensei said, "The Art of Peace begins with you. Work on yourself and your appointed task in the Art of Peace. Everyone has a spirit that can be refined, a body that can be trained in some manner, a suitable path to follow. You are here to realize your inner divinity and manifest your innate enlightenment. Foster peace in your own life and then apply the Art to all that you encounter."

In terms of subtractive sculpting ourselves, we have to unlearn patterns of behavior and conditioned ways of thinking. Someone once said, "We must let go of one thing in order to pick up another." For each person the stripping process will be a little different. Some students need to unlearn violence or give up the desire to fight. Other students will need to give up fear and learn to stand up and find their voice. Regardless of what it is we need, we have to learn to let go of whatever that thing might be. If a person needs to let go of violence and aggression then they should focus their training on using less strength and focus more on using technique. If a student needs to let go of fear then

they should learn to be more assertive.

Regardless of what is we need to let go of, letting go takes courage. Poet William Butler Yates said, "It takes more courage to examine the dark corners of your own soul than it does for a soldier to fight on a battlefield." It can be scary to leave and let go of that which we know but we can't change one thing while holding on to another. Therefore, the process of learning a martial art is about subtraction or letting go rather than addition or holding on.

2022 is the Year of the Tiger. Tigers are lauded as being the king of all earthly animals. They are a symbol of strength and bravery. To change requires just as much strength as it does bravery. In ancient Japan, a samurai warrior would write the kanji for tiger on his hand before battle and then swallow it. This was done because the samurai thought that it would give them the courage and prowess of a tiger to be successful on the battlefield. Go forth this year with the courage and strength of the tiger and develop yourself because the Art of Peace begins with you.

Happy New Year! I wish you all the very best happiness, health and wealth in 2022. •



We made it through 2021 and, despite the expectation that perhaps this Christmas would be normal, the truth is that the situation today still feels a bit uncertain and is still a bit dangerous. Although the pandemic has improved, it is still not over and many of us are waiting for that great day in which we can resume the path that we left at the beginning of 2020.

However, the truth is that that path that we left a few years ago has been transformed and it is no longer the same one we left. Regardless of how that old path ended or was disrupted, we have to follow a new one which has a new way of working, practicing, socializing and ultimately living a different way of life.

This “new” way of living is not new. Throughout history, the way we live our lives has been routinely transformed. In this specific case, it has been globally transformed because every person in every country has been affected by the pandemic. If there is one thing which hasn’t changed it is that all growth requires change.

We as human beings are hard wired for change. Each and every one of us will undergo many changes throughout our lives. Like a wound, sometimes the changes are subtle and other times the changes are deep and more profound. Some wounds can be insignificant, like a slight scratch that heals after a few months; other wounds are deeper, like a heartbreak. Some wounds heal without leaving a visible trace, but other wounds leave a mark on us for life, like after surgery or when we lose a family member, friend or teacher. Change is part of our lives, whether we like it or not, since we do not get to decide. Largely change is relative,

but we usually think it is unequal. When we believe that it is disproportionate, we give in to pessimism or defeat and feel like throwing in the towel. Other changes transform us with each defeat or setback in life, and we learn something very profound about ourselves and about life.

Kintsukuroi



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

The way I look at it, change is about the Japanese practice of *kintsukuroi* (金繕い). *Kintsukuroi* is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery by fixing the breakages with a kind of glue that is made of lacquer mixed with gold, silver, or platinum. This aesthetic practice doesn’t hide the errors but embraces the errors by embellishing them with a fine metal. This is the same challenge that we as human beings are faced with. No one is born with scars from their mistakes, but these errors in life shape us and those scars make us something more beautiful.

This morning thinking about this article I remembered Furuya Sensei and his perseverance despite numerous difficulties. He said, “dojos are built upon many more failures than successes.” No matter what happened or what he was doing, Sensei tried to study Aikido and Budo and apply it in his general everyday life. He would even be reflecting on Aikido while he was driving in the car!

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Kintsukuroi *continued from page 4...*

Earlier, I heard a news program that had nothing to do with the world of martial arts but had many similarities with our philosophies. It made me reflect on how if we are passionate about something, it tends to occupy our whole life, and we continue thinking about it even when we are no longer doing it. The program was about organist Monserrat Torrent who received the 2021 national music award at the age of 95. Monserrat was born in Barcelona in 1926 and began her musical training on the piano at the age of 5, under the direction of her mother, Angela Serra, who was a student disciple of Enrique Granados. The civil war interrupted her formal training but when the war ended, she traveled to France, Italy, Portugal, etc. to continue her training. In the 1960s, she pioneered the revival of organ music in the world. This was especially difficult because at that time people weren't interested in organ music and especially being a woman, it meant swimming upstream. Recently, Monserrat both teaches and performs all over the world in places like Europe, the United States, Canada, South America, and Africa. She also regularly teaches beginners and master courses at an international university. In 2008, Monserrat received an honorary doctorate from the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Throughout Monserrat's long career, she has also helped to fix many organs that were destroyed during the war and helped to restore numerous unpublished scores of different Iberian authors.

Interestingly, Monserrat can no longer hear the spoken word as she is now deaf, but still continues to play the organ deftly. However, Monserrat keeps going because, as she put it, she is "willful and tenacious" and persists in the "defense of old age and life." Monserrat believes that she has reached the moment



of "absolute symbiosis" and has become one with the organ. For many, it is difficult for them to understand how she can interpret Bach when she cannot hear while most of the people on the planet who can hear can't. Monserrat assures her students that she "listens to the organ" and can differentiate different tones, voices and notes. When Monserrat is asked if she is too old to continue playing, she replies "When I am in front of the organ I am again 25 years old and what makes me grow old is when I don't play it."

In the interview, Monserrat commented that she gets up every day at 5:00 in the morning and practices for three hours, but that she only plays the music with the organ's sound disconnected since at that time it would bother her neighbors. In the middle of the morning, Monserrat said she practices another two hours with the sound of the organ on. Monserrat has many "resignations" "with which it is necessary to "learn to live with." She has lost her hearing, was recently widowed, has overcome cancer and is still recovering from a fractured femur from a fall, but she believes that these life experiences have improved her playing and made her who she is today. In short, Monserrat's life is full of awards, but she wouldn't be anywhere without her life experiences, good and bad.

Every day in training, we learn to pick ourselves up after being thrown down. It is not the successes which make us who we are. It is the failures and the mended scars which truly make us who we are today.

I hope that in 2022 we will fulfill all of our dreams with enthusiasm, heal the scars from battle and transform ourselves into something better than we have ever dreamed of. Best wishes to everyone in 2022!•

Life is a balancing act. We can't work all the time and we can't play all the time either. Yet, what is balance? Does it mean to achieve a state of perfect equilibrium? On one hand, yes; that is balance, but as we know in our own lives, nothing remains in perfect balance. The problem is that there are many external forces trying to upset this sense of peaceful equilibrium.

In practice, what this means is that we need to find balance between the two seemingly opposing sides. In Japanese, this is called *inyowago* (陰陽和合) or when "a person's yin and yang energies are in balance." There are so many aspects of training which can seem contradictory. We are supposed to be hard, but yet soft at the same time. We are also supposed to move precisely but also move freely. We are also supposed to be clever, but yet still maintain a *shoshin* (初心) or "beginner's mind." All of these concepts seem at odds with each other and it can be quite confusing. They are like the confusing Zen *koan*: what is the sound of one hand clapping?

The key to understanding balance is most likely the basic way: making our bodies understand it through practice. Instead of beginning with thinking, begin with moving. From this understanding of balance in the practice, we can apply that balance to everything else we do.

This doesn't mean we are balanced all the time, there are many things that will come at us and cause us to lose our balance, but it is through our training that we learn to center ourselves and recover our balance when it is disturbed.

What helps our understanding to see that not everything is black and white. We don't have to use a lot of strength to make the technique effective. We can practice softly yet practice the technique correctly. With the proper focus and energy our partner can still be thrown or pinned without using excess force.

When we train it's important to find a balance between training hard and enjoying practice. At one extreme, training can start to become too careless and dangerous, while at the other extreme, the technique loses its edge and effectiveness.

We should practice at our own level yet at the same time we should try to challenge ourselves. As we practice, we try to find our own balance between doing the technique correctly, finding the enjoyment in the training, and living our own lives. Life and Aikido training are all about finding balance.

We now know that in the future, anything can change. Whatever kind of Aikido training we practice in class, whether it's solo movements, non-contact training, or regular Aikido, it's impor-

tant to practice with the right energy. This doesn't mean only going fast and strong.

Using too much power while hurrying through the technique might satisfy us for the immediate present, but without the correct focus and the right spirit of training, understanding this balance will be impossible.

It's important for the technique to be hard, yet soft. It's important to enjoy the training while practicing hard. It's important to temper force and power with practicing the technique correctly, with the proper focus and energy. It's important to practice moving freely yet precisely; practice making our movements light and quick yet move with stability. There are many ways to practice this type of balancing act.

For example, in Aikido, we have *irimi* and *tenkan*. *Irimi* contains a little bit of *tenkan* and *tenkan* contains a little bit of *irimi*. They are kind of like the yin and yang symbol or two sides of the same coin. One is not charging straight ahead, and the other isn't simply spinning in place. Each movement is balanced appropriately for its role in the technique. Sometimes the situation requires more rotation and sometimes the situation requires a more direct movement. Each movement is balanced within each scenario.

It is said that "every martial art technique has an element of offense and an element of defense within it" and Aikido is no different. Both elements balance each other out depending on the technique. We cannot expose ourselves to our opponents attack as we attack. Likewise, when we defend against an attack, we cannot simply protect ourselves without a way to counterattack.

It's important to be balanced as individuals, but it is also important to be balanced with our surroundings. We must be correct as individuals, yet we must also be correct in relation to others.

These past two years, it feels as if our lives were thrown completely off balance. There was, and still is, so much uncertainty. Yet, the dojo came together, adjusted and adapted, and survived. As we head into the new year, we should continue training with the same spirit and practice developing a sense of balance.

As we handle the things that life throws at us, we learn how to keep our balance. We practice how to regain our balance, so we always appear to be in balance. To outsiders looking at us, we may seem stable, but it is only our training that enables us to appear that way.

Happy New Year!•



Balancing Act



by Ken Watanabe
Technical Director

I saw a very interesting documentary on TV the other day. It was about two warring stone-age tribes who were about to make peace after hundreds of years of fighting. The warriors were dressing up with many various head bands, beads, and flowers. I think for modern people like us it must all look very strange and very primitive. However, as the documentarians interviewed a few of these warriors, they each discussed how the various primitive ornaments in their costumes all had very specific meanings and significances. There were also elderly women doing a very simple dance and one old woman seemed to wail loudly at different times, but these were all supposed to be meaningful symbols to prepare the tribes for the upcoming peace ceremony. At one point, everyone put their hands on a large rock. It seemed to be just a simple ordinary rock and then the rock was buried in a simple hole. All this, again, as simple, and primitive as it looked, was supposed to be very significant to all of the participants in creating a new age of peace and harmony between these two warring tribes.

Such ideas of peace and harmony, battle – almost everything in our lives which is abstract or conceptual in our minds – are given symbols to emphasize and give a “reality” or “presence” to their meaning and existence. Rituals give us a sense of meaning to what we do, otherwise the movements can become meaningless and too abstract for us. I think that ritual and form give meaning to what we do in an otherwise meaningless and chaotic world.

In the simple act of preparing tea for the guest in *chado* (茶道) or the Japanese tea ceremony there is a great deal of formality and ritual that need to be performed. These rituals, as inexplicable as it may look to the inexperienced eye, all have meaning and purpose. The rituals and the formalities give these actions a sense of meaning and significance which otherwise is hard to conceptualize in each and every moment.

Just as these ancient tribesmen who went to so much trouble to adorn their bodies with symbols and the women dancing and singing – all of this was to prepare each and every person for the final ceremony of peace and reconciliation.

In the tea ceremony, one doesn't simply sit down and order from a waiter or waitress. In the ceremony, there is a long ritual with many formalities involved such as assessing the quality of the tea ware or admiring the flowers or scrolls. All of these acts are mainly to bring everyone in the tea ceremony into the proper state of mind so that the final experience of drinking the cup of

tea will have its greatest effect of creating a harmony of aesthetics, beauty and enjoyment.

When one enters the *roji* (路地) or “tea house garden,” one is supposed to enjoy the fresh air and the beauty of nature within the garden. In the garden there is a *ryoutei* (涼亭) or a type of Japanese “garden gazebo” where one sits and enjoys a smoke (in ancient times, smoking was a forbidden luxury) or a simple cup of warm water that has been infused with flowers. This is to calm the mind and whet one's appetite. At this time, one enjoys the company of the other guests, and together they wait for the host to come to greet them and escort them to the tearoom. All

of these rituals or formalities are to prepare the guests' minds to enjoy the moment when the tea is finally served.

In the dojo as well, in our hectic day-to-day schedule of modern city life, we rush into practice and rush out again to our next appointment. I often see that some students do not have time to catch their breath as they rush in or rush out – it's a shame. At our dojo, there is a nice garden for everyone to enjoy as they enter the dojo, a new scroll in

the *tokonoma* to admire, and sometimes there are fresh flowers below O'Sensei's photo. Each day, students should come in and calm their minds and focus on their practice. Students should change their clothes as quickly as possible and then can sit quietly for a few seconds to gather their energies and thoughts before practice, before beginning to warm-up. The idea of all of this “ritual,” if you want to call it that, is to prepare one's mind and concentration for practice.

Like the primitive tribesmen preparing for their ceremony of peace, to the guests lingering in the garden to prepare to enjoy a cup of tea, to the students coming into the dojo to get ready for class - there is a great deal of ritual and form in our lives – all to enjoy and appreciate the beauty and meaning of the moment.

In practice, there is physical preparation but there is also mental preparation too. Many times, we do not prepare ourselves mentally for class, even though we never forget to stretch or arms, legs, and bones. Just like burying a stone or sitting in a garden, students should focus on the ritual of preparing themselves for class. •

Editor's note: *Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on July 23, 2004.*



Rituals



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

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 31-January 4 (Friday-Tuesday): Dojo Closed for New Year's

January 5 (Wednesday): Aikido classes resume

January 8 (Saturday): Kagami Biraki - Dojo opening class at 10:15 AM

January 8 (Saturday): Kagami Biraki party at 11:45 AM

January 16 (Sunday): 2nd Doshu meinichi - memorial service at 11:00 AM

March 4-6 (Friday-Sunday): Furuya Sensei memorial seminar

March 5 (Saturday): Furuya Sensei meinichi - memorial service at 10:15 AM

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 | | Wednesdays | |
|-------------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|
| 10:15-11:15 AM | Regular Class | 6:30-7:30 PM | Regular Class |
| 11:30 AM-12:30 PM | Regular Class | | |
| Sundays | | Thursdays | |
| 9:00-10:00 AM | Children's Class | | No Class |
| 10:15-11:15 AM | Regular Class | | |
| 11:30 AM-12:30 PM | Regular Class | | |
| Mondays | | Fridays | |
| 6:30-7:30 PM | Regular Class | 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 | | Wednesdays | |
|--------------|---------------|------------|---------------|
| 8:00-9:00 AM | Regular Class | 7:45-8:45 | Regular Class |
| Saturdays | | | |
| 7:45-8:45 AM | 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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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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