



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

2

Remember

by David Ito

Ito Sensei explains how training never ends.

4

Persistence

by Ken Watanabe

Watanabe Sensei discusses the value of being persistent.

6

Commitment

by Santiago Garcia Almaraz

Almaraz Sensei illustrates how to approach one's training.



WELCOME TO 2023!



As the year begins, it is good to remember that training never ends.

No matter who we become or what heights we reach, there will always be something to work on.

Aikido is a *do* (道) or a “Way.” The kanji 道 implies that studying an art like Aikido is a journey rather than a destination.

In the beginning of our Aikido career, we focus our attention mainly on physical attainment. How we move our bodies is of considerable importance at this level. The techniques we are learning are used to fell others. By focusing on the “other,” the focus of our training is external as we develop ourselves to defeat others. In Japanese traditional arts, this beginning level is considered to be something called *shu* (守). *Shu* translates as “protect” but in this context it means to protect the art by learning the *kihon-waza* (基本技) or “basic forms” as flawlessly as possible. This flawlessness ensures that the art will carry on into the next generation.

Later on, we carry our *shu* skills into the *ha* (破) stage. *Ha* means “to break.” Breaking in this context means to look into the infinite details of one’s movement and the art. Here we examine the minutest details of the movement and try to understand how they factor into the bigger picture. Here, we also begin to look into the mental aspects of the movement and thus the journey begins to go inward. This is also where we start to inculcate O’Sensei’s philosophical teachings into the mental and physical aspects of Aikido.

The final stage or *ri* (離) means “to separate.” Here we transcend both the physical and mental facets of Aikido and our training becomes more spiritual; hence the usage of the transla-

tion “to separate.” At this stage, we reach a sort of enlightenment, but to understand we should look at it from the perspective of balance. Our training takes on a spiritual quality as we “separate” from the form of Aikido. When I say spiritual, I don’t mean religious. Spiritual in this sense means a sort of transcendence of both the physical and mental and where we aren’t trying to beat people up nor are we trying to outsmart people either. In his book, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, D.T. Suzuki discussed

this high level as *myou* (妙) which can mean “mysterious”, but I think in this sense it means “transcendence” of the form both physically and mentally.

Here, we are Aikido and Aikido is also us. This unification comes from the “unity of mind and body” or *shinshin* (心身) in Japanese. Thus, we transcend as we become whole. 2nd Doshu, Kisshomaru Ueshiba once wrote, “Ultimately, physical, psychological and spiritual mastery are one and the same. The egoless self is open, flexible, supple, fluid and dynamic in body, mind and spirit.”

Remember



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

People often think that *shu ha ri* are three distinct stages or steps. However, once we reach a certain level of experience, we realize that *shu ha ri* are at every level of our training. Understanding this, the learned practitioner realizes that at every level of their training, there will be physical, mental, emotional and spiritual challenges that will require our attention.

Once we understand that there is a physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual component present at all times, then we realize that there is no difference between a beginner and an expert. If we think that there is an end to our training, then in that moment our training has ended because we can no longer learn. Until the moment we die, every person has something thing to work on. Thus, training never ends. •



2023 (Reiwa 5) is the year of the Rabbit and specifically the Water Rabbit. His qualities are to provide opportunities to restore peace in the world, promote friendship and build new relationships. In the fable of Aesop written about 2,500 years ago in Greece, it was noted that the rabbit can be a little hasty and has a competitive streak.

In summary, the fable goes as follows: Once upon a time, there was a rabbit that was extremely competitive, and he boasted about his speed in front of other animals. He wanted to challenge everyone, but no one was interested. One day, the tortoise accepted his challenge and, of course, the rabbit laughed and made fun of his friend. When the race started our competitive rabbit ran as fast as he could while the tortoise was moving at a pace, steadily and remained focused. Halfway through the race, the rabbit was bored and tired, so he decided to eat and take a nap. The tortoise was pacing himself and he stayed on track, and at some point, he passed the rabbit who was still sleeping. Finally, the tortoise was crossing the finish line, and the rabbit woke up suddenly, so he started to run as quick as possible, but it was too late, he had lost the race.

The moral of the story teaches us to be persistent, steady and focused. It also teaches us how to behave in the world. Today, people rush for immediate gratification, and they cannot find satisfaction in long term goals. They become bored like the rabbit from the fable.

For the last decade, there have been discussions in the Aikido community about improving Aikido and making it more effective. Teachers have blended different martial arts with it, creating something completely different. This impatience, the lack of focus and immediate gratification can lead to more issues than

providing benefits to Aikido. People can do whatever they want in their dojo but if they are mixing Aikido with other martial arts then they should state that they are practicing mixed martial arts and teaching Aikido.

Looking Ahead



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

I wish that Aikido will be looked at with a new and refreshed eye in 2023. Aikido has everything to offer from the principles to the training and it really teaches us how to be better people and as I heard recently, it has saved many lives. The training provides an application of the principles leading to a deeper understanding of Aikido. The secrets of Aikido can only be revealed to those who study and train steadily, diligently and in the correct way. Ueshiba Morihei, O'Sensei, revealed modestly, towards the end of his life, that he had only mastered a third of what Aikido had to offer. There is no time; we must make the best of our time to improve ourselves and our skills, not to master but to be good students of the Way.

The beginning of the year is always a good time to make a synthesis of what we need to work on and what we need to improve on. It is important to make small and reachable goals that will eventually lead to larger goals. Please, don't run like the rabbit or you will run out of energy in the middle of your training. Being like the tortoise teaches us that small steps and small goals can be summed to larger goals. Therefore, take your time, train slowly and steadily to develop a better understanding of the fundamentals and your aikido practice will improve. We should always remind ourselves that Aikido is a non-competitive martial art so we should not try to compete on the mats, or elsewhere and we need to stay humble, focused and make ourselves better people every day.



First of all, I'd like to wish the students, instructors, and friends of our dojo a happy and healthy New Year. The past few years have been challenging to everyone, including the dojo. Like Charles Dickens wrote, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...."

For sure we can understand the meaning of "worst of times" when we think of the past few years, but the best of times? For training, yes. Training requires hardship. Not the kind of hardship that would break most people, but just enough to make something good; like an oyster's pearl created from the discomfort of a grain of sand.

Training through hardship is almost a rite of passage for a student, whether it's completing a black belt exam, going to the dojo when you aren't feeling 100%, or maybe you're having a little trouble understanding a technique. Training will throw many things at a student; excuses to stop training. It could be something as simple as being tired during practice.

In short, training is simply not giving up. Of course, one can be headstrong and stubborn but it's more than that. It's also being able to adapt to the situation and being able to change. When we have trouble with a technique or maybe your partner is too

strong, it's a chance for real training.

When I began training, many things about aikido were difficult to do. I was out of shape and wasn't particularly athletic. Aikido is also a very sophisticated martial art. My mind may have understood what I needed to do, but my legs, arms, balance, posture, and center?

They did not.

On the mat, everyone had more experience than I did, and everyone seemed stronger than me. I could not do many of the techniques expertly. In fact many were difficult to do and hard to understand. And even with the instruction, I still did not know why I couldn't practice then correctly.

What I did was I listened to the instructions and trained every day. In my case, I had many things to fix, like moving too stiff, being out of shape, relaxing my shoulders, to name a few. I had to work on my own technical issues, but at the same time, I had to deal with my partner attacking me or throwing me down. I was trying to manage attacks on two fronts.

Persistence



by **Ken Watanabe**
Technical Director



Of course, my hardship is nothing unique; it's what most of us go through when we practice. The main thing is not giving up, but also, to be both curious and clever about practice. Just repeating the movement dogmatically, over and over, exactly how the teacher tells us to, is important, but just as important as that dogged persistence is also how to be thoughtful about it.

The more we do the same movement everyday, the more we begin noticing the small things about it. After we feel we can copy the movement, then we go back to practice and test it out to see how it works. Whether or not we are successful, we still need to go back and figure out why it worked, or why it did not work. Lather, rinse, repeat. Eventually, we train like this till what we have is experience.

Persistence through this challenging time is important because many of these skills and concepts require a very long time to marinate into our body, mind, and spirit. In the beginning, depending on how much ego we have, the instruction will bead then roll off like rain on a windshield. And some students don't spend enough time softening up enough to absorb anything.

Without persistence, talent will mean nothing. However, any talent a student might possess, along with how well they can see, copy, hear, taste, smell, the technique, along with an ability to

be thoughtful and analytical, and be honest with your own level, will only develop over time.

The past few years have been hard on everyone, but the only way to get the benefit from the training is to be persistent. Keep going. If a student feels they are having a hard time, practice is one of the best things that will help them get out of that funk.

Before, I used to think this "Just train" concept was some hippy-dippity spiritual line; the martial art equivalent of the "Hang in There!!" poster with the kitten dangling from a tree branch, but as I continue practicing and teaching, I really believe that many problems can be resolved through training and practicing correctly. It is only through consistent and persistent thoughtful practice that I've come to believe this.

Persistence, experience, thoughtfulness, adaptability – These are some of the things that are important to your practice, but these are also the same things that enabled our dojo to survive these past few years. I hope that this coming year we can continue to work hard together, have a good practice, but also give a good practice. •

Each year, we start the new year with enthusiasm and resolutions. I suppose that, like every January 1st, each one of us will have our list of resolutions for change or goals we want to accomplish for this year.

With each year that passes, we try to make an effort to “get things done.” With the best intentions, each of us try to fulfill our projects, and meet our objectives that we set for ourselves at the beginning of the year. Most of us start out with an honest effort and we believe that by just wishing, thinking or just by simply getting started, that things will work out during the first months of the year. However, largely, the goals that we set will not be met. This is the unfortunate reality that happens because we did not put in effort or commitment and only tried to succeed based upon our “desire” for change or improvement.

The desire to improve comes with the commitment to change comes. Committing to something gives us the power to believe that we can do better, that we can be better than we are today. Believing that we can do a better job, have better health habits or have better personal relationships enables us to achieve our goals. True change takes time. Sometimes, I wonder if change is slow because the process of change puts our commitment to the test to question whether or not we really want that change.

In our daily practice, we live this commitment constantly as we go to the dojo and attend classes with the purpose of improving and becoming better people. Seeking to advance technically or becoming better people does not happen in one or two classes perhaps. Nor does it happen in the first part of the year. The dictionary defines commitment as, “The state or quality of being dedicated to a cause, activity, etc.” Thus, true change is a daily practice and reinforces my theory that it is just a test of our commitment.

Commitment is a maximum effort. When we give in to laziness, selfishness, ego, or envy, we move away from our objective and giving in to the idea of “minimum effort.” Minimum effort is the idea or feeling that something can just be achieved by doing as little as possible. The problem with doing the minimum is that when we fall, we fall short. Rather, if we put in a maximum effort and fall, we might not fall short.

When I was young, whenever I would get hurt, my mother used to clean it roughly which made it hurt. I am sure she didn't

want to hurt me. When she would see me in pain as cleaned it, she would say, “If it doesn't hurt, it won't heal.” I always remembered this. The same thing goes for achieving our goals. For there to be change or improvements, there must be a price to pay. In the case of my injury, it was the pain of her cleaning

it. In Aikido, we learn that it change is a process of perseverance and dedication. In the martial arts sense, the price we pay is not just physical pain or sweating, but in putting in the time. The process of putting in the time taxes us not only physically but mentally and spiritually as well. Every time something doesn't work out for us on the mat or we get correction of the teacher, it tests our commit-

ment. Every time, we get off the couch or leave the house, it is a test of our commitment. With each test, we overcome negativity to create a habit and habits are how goals are achieved.

Commitment



by Santiago Garcia Almaraz
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai

Furuya Sensei used to say “only the bad days count.” What he meant by this is that anyone can achieve something when they feel good or the circumstances are right but how many of us feel good every day? That is why the bad days count so much more. The way to counteract bad days is by making something a habit.

There is no use in practicing all January with a high level of motivation and then give up the first week in March because we lost motivation due to being “busy,” or becoming bored.

Therefore, it helps to look at the little things. By making something a habit, we can revel in the victory. This attitude of appreciation helps to create habits and habits are what achieve goals and achieving our goals creates good feelings. Sensei used to say, “You have to make training just like brushing your teeth.” If we can make training or anything else a daily habit like eating, sleeping or brushing our teeth, then there won't be anything that we can't achieve.

There are no easy ways. Every way, goal or desire requires effort. Thus, my advice is to start the year off first by giving thanks for being able to enjoy practicing. This appreciation will bring the enthusiasm, motivation and joy which will make creating a habit much easier. Everything is possible with commitment. I wish you all the best this year and hope that you make all your dreams come true.

Happy 2023!•



I read several posts on the internet today in regards to questions about *mushin* or “no-mind.”

I think this is a very interesting discussion. Several points I think we have to be aware of is that in Japanese, we do not really have an equivalent term for “ego.” There are terms for “self” and things like that but nothing which carries the same range and depth of meaning as the English word “ego” and I think this is where we may have problems in finding direct correlations of such terms as “self,” “ego,” and “I.” In one post, the terms “mushin” and “zanshin” were also brought up. Another point, I think is that, even in Japanese philosophy or martial arts, etc., there are no neat categories for each of these terms nor do they fit into a rational and empirical system of Western thought. One has to understand each term in the situation, time and circumstance in which it was used. The meaning also varies greatly between one master to another, and between one school or another.

Actually, *mushin*, *yushin*, *zanshin*, etc. all have the same meaning and really refer to the same mental state. I think we are also caught up in this discussion without realizing a very Eastern custom of referring to abstract ideas in the negative. As an example, when we speak of “self,” we generally refer to it as “no-self,” in a sense meaning that “self” itself is difficult to define. This is a very common practice in Eastern thought, so we must not get too caught up in positive and negative dualism. In Japanese, for instance, infinity is “mugen” meaning “no limit.” I don’t want to go into this too much but there is no “positive” word for infinity. It is this similar practice to refer to such “difficult to define” things in the negative. Much like an ink painting which is defined by the blank spaces as well as the brush strokes.

Someone mentioned that “There is no self without the center.” Actually, in Eastern thought, it may be more the idea of “there is a center, but the self is insubstantial.” When they speak of “no self” – it is often in regards to finding one’s center and disregarding or not focusing on the “bias” self which we identify as ego. In Eastern thought, the ego is not the “true self” which exists and is undeniable. I think there is a danger of mixing up this idea of true self which we seek as *mushin* or “mind” in our training. Also, our true center, and this other idea of an “imaginary” self which is that part of our personality which is made up of discrimination, bias, duality, chaos, confusion, doubt, hate, etc.



No Mind



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

In Buddhism, the “self” is definitely recognized and it is easy to say, “destroy or disregard the self” but this may be just sloppiness on our part to define such terms so superficially. Again, in Buddhism, they are not referring to the real or true self of the individual but perceptions, bias, etc. which we create as an image of one’s self. Especially, in Zen, if I were to ask my Zen teacher such questions as “What is *mushin*?”, I would probably be smacked real hard! What his hit means is to not concern yourself with such definitions or categories. In other words, “see mu-shin with mu-shin.” Mu-shin is mind but, for Easterners, “no-mind” describes this mind better than “mind.” Haha! By now, you are probably ready to beat me with a stick along with my Zen master!

We often define *zanshin* as a mental state of focus at the end of the technique. This can also be misleading, I

think. This particular focus at the end of the technique is actually what connects one to the following move-

ment. *Zanshin* is a strong mental focus which connects one movement to the next, to the next, etc. In this respect, as in Aikido, there are no separate, distinct movements or techniques, but one technique that flows and is well connected with the next, and the next and next, etc. What keeps this flow continuous, is the state of *zanshin* which keeps the mind from breaking off this flow. Just as in traditional Japanese calligraphy, one stroke of the brush may end, but it actually continues into the next stroke, it is merely that the

brush is lifted slightly off the paper. The end of one stroke is actually the beginning of the next. This connection is extremely important in good calligraphy. *Zanshin* keeps this mental flow going and connects each physical movement or technique, as the case may be, with the next. In this light all movements and all thought is one flowing process and really does not break up into separate or distinct segments – this one grand process of movement, physical activity and mental focus which is *mushin*. It is the “smaller” self or biased mind which says, “ok this is finished,” “ok, let’s start the next technique,” and on and on. *Zanshin*, *mushin*, *yuushin*, etc are simply looking at different sides of the same coin.

And speaking of coin, with one more, you have my “two cents” here. . . .haha! That’s all it’s worth! Ouch! I think my dear, beloved late Zen master just reached down from Paradise and gave me a smack on the head!

Editor’s note: *Furuya Sensei* posted this article in a slightly different format on his Daily Message on October 29, 2003.

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

December 31- January 3: Dojo Closed New Year's

January 4th: Dojo unofficially reopens

January 7th: Kagami Biraki - Dojo official reopening

10:15 AM: Regular class

11:30 AM: Lunch

January 14th: 11:30 AM 2nd Doshu Memorial

March 3-5: Furuya Sensei Memorial Seminar

April 22nd: 11:30 AM O'Sensei memorial service

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



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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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