



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Congratulations!



Be Prepared by David Ito Aikido Chief Instructor

“We fail to the level of our preparations.” – Unknown

People often asked me, “How does *budo* influence a person in their daily life?” To some, it might seem funny in this modern age to think that something like *budo* or the martial arts can have any merit or use in our technologically advanced society. Every person is different so it is hard to pinpoint exactly how *budo* changes us or has any influence on our daily lives.

Long ago, when I was just a student, I learned that to be a student of *budo* meant that I had to be well prepared at all times. I learned this lesson the hard way but it wasn’t overnight because I had to keep making mistakes until I realized what I was doing wrong. When I realized why I had repeatedly been getting scolded, it was like a light bulb going off. I liked our newsletter but I thought there could be some things done that could make it better. On a whim, without an appointment or any planning, I asked Sensei if I could help out with newsletter. He said, “Ok, what are your thoughts?” I wasn’t prepared to talk about out my ideas so I just started to blurt things out. I was so nervous that I literally couldn’t stop myself from saying things that I knew were ridiculous as I was saying them. Within a few minutes Sensei was chastising every one of my ill-informed ideas that I came

up with. I learned from that day forward that whenever I engaged Sensei that I had to be well prepared and had to know exactly what I wanted to say because he was going to hold me to a higher standard.

A while back, in what seemed like *déjà vu*, someone asked me if they could help out with managing some dojo projects. We are always cash strapped and in dire need of help so I jumped at the chance to get some fresh eyes on a problem. I am sure like everyone else, this person didn’t really think about “how” things get done in and around a dojo but I am sure he didn’t think that because things run smoothly that it was magic or something. I also don’t think that this person understood how working directly with the teacher necessitated a certain amount of preparedness and focus unlike any other interaction. When we met, I gave this person a project that centered around a problem we were having in the dojo. Right away, this person started to come up with a whole bunch of solutions. I kept saying, “no” to all of his solutions and tried to tell him that this was not the time for solutions because we didn’t really understand the problem. I wanted this person to take on the project and do research so that we could

“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” – Benjamin Franklin



come up with solutions which fit a theory or logic so as to not waste time, money or manpower. This well-meaning person said, “Gosh you are so negative, why don’t we just try some things and see what works?” Needless to say, this person just got frustrated and I just got mad because neither of us could get our points across.

Aristotle once said, “Well begun is half done.” In warfare we don’t have an unlimited amount of manpower, supplies or money. When facing an opponent we sometimes only have one chance at an opening. In order to be successful, our training or a campaign has to be well thought out and thus a good beginning is more than half done. Most dojos aren’t million dollar enterprises who can just “try” a whole bunch of things because money and manpower are at their disposal. All martial arts are practiced as a set of contrived context-based movements that came about as a result of a well thought out solution to a problem that someone was having. A practitioner of *budo* understands that there is a thin line between life and death and because the techniques we train with can be fatal it requires or necessitates a certain amount of thoroughness.

Today, we live in such a disposable fad-driven society where nothing is built to last. With the advent of social media and the internet, so much of what we do ultimately results in nothing. It is easy to disregard something like *budo* training as it seems out of place.

A person who trains in *budo* is usually a person who has gravitas

but not in a rigid or overly intense way, but also not in a frivolous way either. A person who trains is usually a person who carries themselves mindfully. This mindfulness has a certain care and concern about it because the martial artist knows that with one’s life on the line, haste makes waste and thus they must be efficient and effective.

What I learned that day as a young twenty-something person was that Sensei would not stand for flippant superficiality filled with affectation or, as Sensei put it, “just talking to talk.” From that point forward, I always thought out what I wanted and what I wanted to say before I engaged him. I hope that students who engage me understand this same point.

In *budo* training, we learn that when we are faced with a problem we must execute with efficiency and effectiveness. Being concise is a skill that usually only comes about as a result of a prior mistake. Once we learn to be prepared then we can be concise and thus we can be successful. True *budo* training teaches us that everything matters and that we cannot be wasteful no matter if it is people’s lives or their resources. Today, I strive to be concise and ready and I always remember my interactions with Sensei and how I learned that “Well begun is half done.” Sensei said, “At its highest level, mastery can only be achieved when the training has become part of one’s daily life.” It is hard to say exactly “how” *budo* becomes part of one’s life and I am in no way a master, but one of the ways in which training has changed me is that I now know that “we do fail to the level of our preparedness” and that thoroughness is a necessary part of liv-

Steven Shaw Memorial Seminar



Steven Shaw 1974-2019

"It's amazing that life provides us with what we need. I am humbled by the generosity of life and its gentle guidance from strangers and friends. To all my teachers, thank you for lighting the way."

- Steven Shaw



Steven Shaw Memorial Seminar



"I haven't had a moment of enlightenment, yet. Maybe I'll never have one, but I will keep training. Perhaps, someday, a biography will be written about me and my moments of enlightenment, or my genius, but I'm not counting on it, nor is that my goal. I'll be long gone and forgotten, but the training will go on."

– Steven Shaw



Steven Shaw 1974-2019



"Reflection is an integral part of life. Being able to change our actions based upon reflection on our past experiences is what enables us to grow and develop into more productive workers, more articulate leaders, and better people. This is ultimately the goal of Aikido and our training in it. [Furuya] Sensei taught that Aikido was more than a martial art, it is a way of life. For me, it's the way."

– Steven Shaw



Overnight Successes by Ken Watanabe Iaido Chief Instructor

In response to a music critic, the famous Spanish violinist, Pablo de Sarasate once said, "For 37 years I've practiced 14 hours a day and now they call me genius!" It's easy to think that someone special becomes successful seemingly overnight. It seems as if, in an instant, there they are, being awesome. While it's true that one thing can change a person in an instant, we never hear about all the time and effort that that person put in to get to that moment of success; to prepare themselves for that moment.

In terms of our own practice, change seems to come so slowly. Whatever it is, we practice the same basic techniques over and over again, but to what purpose? To weed out the unmotivated? Because there's nothing better to practice? Perhaps the teacher has run out of things to teach?

In order to attain any level of success in any particular endeavor, a person needs to build up a certain amount of time and/or experience. Coincidentally, this accumulation of training is created with consistency. Why? If our practice is consistent, then it will be easier to tell when something is amiss. If we practiced the technique differently every single time or only occasionally, how can we tell whether anything is wrong at all?

When we say consistency, what we are talking about is repetition. Constant and consistent repetition is what gives us our "form" or base. In Japanese, this base is called *kihon*. Without constant and consistent practice, it is hard to build *kihon*. It's kind of like a chef who always changes the base of their famous chicken soup – sooner or later the soup will taste differently than originally intended. Without constancy and consistency, how will we know what the "form" of the technique is supposed to be?

Having the ability to do the same technique over and over in the same way not only improves our skill but also it teaches us resilience, perseverance and the value of hard work, which are all important parts of training. This consistency is what opens our eyes to the technique's teachings. Once we can master the form or shape, then we can begin to truly understand it.

In the beginning, sometimes we accidentally focus on the wrong things, mistaking the decorations without regards to the structure beneath it all. This is typical of the uninformed who mistake looking good for actually being good. This is a trap that everyone at some time or other falls into – the trap of our egos. Once we realize we have gone down the wrong path we can change and begin to look at our practice more objectively.

We should ask ourselves, am I actually moving my body far enough? Are my movements actually round? Am I pushing too much? Or any other self-analytical question. Constancy and

consistency reveal to us the numerous amounts of information and enlightenments.

One by one, by focusing on the *kihon* of our art with constancy and consistency, we recognize these problems in our practice, we fix them, and thus evolve our technique but yet keep it the same while moving our technique closer to perfection. This kind of change is true advancement.

It's important to recognize what we are doing correctly and reinforce it, but it is also important to see how we are doing things incorrectly – it is the cycle of learning. Whenever I find myself struggling with a problem in the technique, I go back to the basics and I hear Furuya Sensei scolding me, "It's just as easy to do something right as it is to do something wrong!!"

If we keep doing the technique improperly at its basic level, no secret or trick can help us improve our technique. Like a house, no amount of paint or decor can save a faulty framework and foundation.

We are all a "work in progress" which means that we try and see if things "work" and add something new or adopt a new bit of instruction. Sometimes, these things work out, but

sometimes the changes do not and then everything stops working. When this happens, all we need to do is go back to the basics and wipe the dust off our forgotten foundation. The fact is, these fine points are meant to be built upon an already strong foundation. They can't be tacked onto to us, only to fall off right afterwards. They are not a substitute for the skill we get from regular practice. Likewise, only through regular practice can these fine points eventually reveal themselves to us. When we try to practice the technique in a consistent manner, the teachings reveal themselves to us.

In Aikido, no one is an overnight success. In the founder of Aikido's case, Aikido did not happen overnight. Yes, we hear about these few crucial moments where the founder of Aikido received some kind of supernatural insight into *budo*, but a moment only came after many hours of constant and consistent practice. Someone once said that there may be people who may be as talented as O'Sensei, but no one will ever practice as much or as hard as O'Sensei practiced.

As we advance in our Aikido training, we must always remember the foundation of the basics that we put so much time into. Aikido is not a destination, but a practice and thus something that has to be done constantly and consistently. We will only reach the mountain top with assiduous practice, but like the iceberg people will only see us reach the top but miss the journey down below and think that we are an "overnight success".•



*"For 37 years I've practiced 14 hours a day
and now they call me genius!"*

– Pablo de Sarasate



Empty Spaces by Rev. Kensho Furuya

During class, we always concentrate on the Aikido techniques or “moves” being taught. This is only natural. Instead we should also pay attention to the “empty” spaces between each movement, however tiny or minute. Connecting these empty spaces is the way that we begin to create the “flow” of our Aikido movement. This understanding of connecting the empty spaces is similar to the understanding of spacing in *shodo* or Japanese calligraphy. In calligraphy with each stroke, whether the brush is touching the paper with ink or not, each stroke is leading that one stroke into the next stroke without a break in concentration or flow, mentally or physically.

Sometimes we refer to these spaces as “breaths” where we are breathing (in between the movements) but, if you notice very carefully, even our breathing is continuous without a stop or break whether on inhalation or exhalation. In the same way in Aikido or Iaido, our movements must have this strong connectedness even if it may not appear so to the observer.

We need to connect each “stroke” of our Aikido movements like a flowing brush or the flowing movement of a sword cut without hesitations or gaps. To move without spaces is not to simply move quickly or hurry our technique or take short-cuts – but to

connect each move with each of the other movements strongly with consciousness and awareness. This connectedness should be in everything we do.

In Zen, this connectedness or lack of gap is called “mindfulness.” In Iaido or Japanese swordsmanship, this lack of gap or connectedness is called *sukima ga nai*, or to have “no openings” in our movement physically or mentally whatsoever.

In Aikido or Iaido training, please be careful in practice not to “imagine” or fantasize about this flow as I often see in today’s martial arts. It has nothing to do with imagination and fantasy. Closing one’s space or gaps – as in closing all of the gaps and creating “no openings” takes a great deal of time and practice by focusing in on the correct execution of not only the techniques but each movement itself.

Please slow down and take the time to study this well and be mindful of the empty spaces or openings in not only your training, but in every aspect of your life as well. •

Editor’s note: *Furuya Sensei published this article in a slightly different form on his Daily Message blog on June 3, 2004.*

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

July 4 (Thursday) Special Holiday Class 9:30 AM	August 31 (Saturday) Intensive seminar
July 11-12 Zenshujii Obon Carnival Set-up	September 2 (Monday) Dojo Closed: Labor Day
July 13-14 Zenshujii Obon Carnival Dojo Volunteering	September 6-8 Doshu seminar in San Mateo
July 27 (Saturday) Intensive seminar	September 27-29 Dojo Closed: Non-Dojo Special Event

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, and national or ethnic origin 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 6:30-8:00 AM* 9:30-10:30 AM 10:45-11:45 AM	Intensive Advanced Class Regular Class	Wednesdays 6:30-7:30 AM 5:15-6:15 PM 6:30-7:30 PM	Morning Practice Fundamentals Regular Class
Sundays 9:00-10:00 AM 10:15-11:15 AM 11:30 AM-12:30 PM 12:45-1:45 PM	Children's Class Regular Class Fundamentals Open Practice	Thursdays 6:30-7:30 PM 7:45-8:45 PM	Regular Class Open Practice
Mondays 6:30-7:30 AM 6:30-7:30 PM	Morning Practice Regular Class	Fridays 6:30-7:30 AM 6:30-7:30 PM	Morning Practice Fundamentals
Tuesdays 6:30-7:30 PM	Advanced 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

居合気 時間割

Saturdays 8:00-9:00 AM	Regular Class	Sundays 7:45-8:45 AM	Regular Class
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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, 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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