



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Have a Great Summer!



One of the main differences between Aikido and other martial arts is our care or consideration for others. In Aikido, we understand the lethality of the techniques that we are employing. At the same time, we also understand O'Sensei's philosophy of non-violence. Marrying those two understandings enables us to actively choose not to injure our opponents. We keep the injury or damage to a minimum because we understand humanity and that requires us to have care and consideration for those who attack us.

To have consideration for others in Japanese can be *kikubari* (気配り). *Kikubari* means to "to distribute your energy." This could be implying that to care is to distribute our energy in the service of others and for the benefit of others.

The other day, we were discussing the difference between Aikido and Aikijujitsu. On a basic level, based on translation, *do* (道) means "way" or "path" and *jitsu* or *jutsu* (術) means "technique." This is the most common way to characterize the difference between the two as *do* is a lifestyle and *jitsu* is a skill. Another way to look at it is based on the ethical component. *Do* has an ethical constraint and *jitsu* does not. The ethical con-

straint is the care and concern for the opponent's wellbeing. For instance, we can just break the person's wrist and that would be *jitsu* but to show restraint and not break the wrist because of the possible moral and physical consequences is *do*.

To Care



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

To follow the Way of something like Aikido is to care about something deeper than the skill of the technique. It is said that a good martial artist demonstrates physical dominance while the best martial artists exercise restraint. To show restraint is way harder than domination. We don't need to care to be dominant, but we do need to care to have restraint. We understand that there is more to it than someone just attacking us and to care is to demonstrate that understanding about something other than ourselves.

Learning to care about something other than ourselves or in essence to be less selfish requires a certain amount of *seijuku* (成熟) or "maturity." None of us start out mature and some think that it takes around 30 years to reach maturity. Once we do mature, we grow up and learn to care about things outside ourselves like family, friends, or duty to name a few.

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Here is an old Zen story which might help to illustrate this idea of maturity and care. Long ago, Zenkai was the son of a well-known samurai. Throughout his life, he enjoyed the wealth and status that his father's position had afforded him. When he was of age, he too became a retainer for a high-level official in the capital city of Edo. There, Zenkai continued living his lavish lifestyle attending parties and living beyond his means or ability. At some point, Zenkai fell in love with his official's wife. One night, he and the official's wife were discovered and in self-defense, Zenkai killed his lord. Fearing for their lives, Zenkai and the wife ran away. Without any way to make a living, the pair became thieves. However, the woman turned out to be very greedy and Zenkai became disgusted with her and his new life. To get away and change his life, Zenkai traveled far away to the province of Buzen, where he became a beggar as a form of atonement for killing and stealing. Pondering his life, Zenkai resolved that he wanted to accomplish one good deed in his lifetime. One day while out begging, Zenkai learned of a dangerous road that skirted a cliff that had caused many deaths and injuries to the local townspeople. "Aha, this is my good deed," he thought. He devised a plan to dig a tunnel through the mountain. In the daytime, Zenkai begged for food and at night he dug the tunnel. After 20 years, he had dug a tunnel 2,280 feet long, 20 feet high, and 30 feet wide. However, two years before the work was completed, the son of the official he had slain found him. This young samurai grew up to be a skillful samurai and threatened to kill Zenkai for his past misdeeds. Zenkai was heartbroken that his life was to end before he finished his tunnel. After explaining the situation, Zenkai made a deal with the young samurai. He said, "I will give you my life without any struggle if you let me finish this work. On the day the tunnel is completed, you may have my life." The son agreed and waited. Day in and day out, the son would visit the tunnel and wait, checking on Zenkai's progress. Day after day for several months, Zenkai kept assiduously digging. Growing bored and hoping to speed things up, the son began to help. For more than a year, the two ate, drank, and dug and at some point, the young samurai began to admire Zenkai's character and his desire to work hard to atone for his wrongdoings. After two years, the tunnel was completed, and the townspeople happily thanked

them and walked through to the other side safely. Feeling satisfied, Zenkai bowed down and said, "Now, please cut off my head. My work is done and I am ready." With tears in his eyes, the young samurai got down on his knees and bowed down saying, "How can I cut off my own teacher's head?"

One interpretation of this story could be that the young samurai came to understand humanity. The desire for revenge pushed the young samurai to develop himself and he had to gain the courage to track Zenkai down and confront him. So, in a sense, Zenkai made him. However, by watching and helping Zenkai, the young samurai came to understand humanity and that people make mistakes. Growing up is a process and most of us make a lot of mistakes en route to becoming mature. Some of those mistakes are catastrophic and how we manage them demonstrates our level of maturity. It takes time to mature and learn how to have care and consideration for others.

One way to say selfish in Japanese is *kimama* (気まま). *Mama* means "as it is" implying that our energy is for ourselves. As previously mentioned, *kikubari* (気配り) means to "to distribute our energy" as in the service of others. Understanding this, with time, training, and maturity our selfishness at some point becomes selflessness. It is the job of Aikido training to teach us that so that we can incorporate it into our daily lives.

Aikido is a Way of life. It is an effective martial art, but it is also much more than just physical skill – it is a lifestyle. Aikido is a way of looking at and understanding the world. Aikido teaches us that all beings suffer, even ourselves. Understanding this, we can't just indiscriminately break someone's arm or wrist. Breaking someone's arm or wrist impacts them on levels that we may never know. We understand this and that is why we learn to exercise restraint. To exercise restraint requires us to care about others. To care about others requires that we understand humanity. Humanity requires more than just one person. The moment that we show others kindness, compassion, and care, we are living the Way of Aikido and that's why the best Aikidoists care about others. •



All martial arts are about timing. Timing means that when the opponent attacks we want to be in the right position at the right time doing the appropriate action. In our normal lives, when we think of timing for something like going to a party, we think of getting there too early, getting there too late, or arriving just in time.

In the beginning, younger and stronger students assume speed is important. Of course, speed and the ability to move quickly, decisively, and powerfully can be important in a technique. However, timing is not all about speed. We can move slowly and still arrive at our destination “on time,” or we can rush and still be late.

Usually, when we think of timing in Aikido, we think of our opponent and how we move against them. However, there is also the timing in our own body movement - an internal timing.

In Iaido training, the techniques in *shoden*, the first level of training, are practiced slowly and deliberately. When I began training in Iaido, I practiced the techniques too fast. This is only natural for beginners. For ages, it was understood that beginners tend to hurry through the technique because they don't understand the importance of timing. When I was young, I thought martial arts was supposed to be fast and strong - it was what I knew from action movies.

Whenever we rushed through the exercises, Furuya Sensei would always say that we were “going too fast for our ability.” He would

scold us and say that it was about timing. We all would reply, “Hai,” but inside I would think, “Timing? But I'm doing the technique alone?” Iaido training is done solo, like as a *kata* (型) or “a predetermined set of movements.” The movement of Iaido is a solo form where the opponent is imagined, but it is still a fighting art. Then, why go slow?

Timing



by Ken Watanabe
Technical Director

Over time, I came to realize that Sensei, of course, was absolutely correct: It's all about timing. In swordsmanship, they say, “one sword, one step” or *Itto issoku* (一刀一足). In swordsmanship, this implies that we step and cut in one movement, but when we use it in an Aikido technique, it means that every step we take has to have meaning to it. In the most basic sense, there is a technique happening every time our foot moves. In Aikido, our arms and hands don't move independently from our hips, legs and feet. Everything moves in unison.

For example, in Aikido practice regardless of whether we are *uke* or *nage* we are trying to develop this one step, one cut timing. In the role of the *uke* or “the one attacking,” we attack with a sense of timing with our partner's movement, but even with the physical attack, we are still practicing our internal timing. When we attack, we don't step forward and then punch or grab; we step and punch or grab at the same time.

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When we are in the *nage* role or “the one throwing,” we are also practice timing. As the *uke* strikes us, we are trying to use timing and movement to neutralize their attack and power. With every step, whether we are moving *irimi*, *tenkan*, or *tenshin*, our hands and arms are completing a meaningful movement in time with our step. In short, everything moves as one unit. Hands and feet move together. At the same time, we are internally timing their attack.

When we watch a beginner practice, they might stick their fist out first and then step forward, or they would step forward first and then strike. In both cases, the student will never understand how to use their center in coordination with the attack. Doing it this way, their internal timing is off. In other words, they won’t understand how to use their whole body.

In our internal timing, we try to time our footwork with our hand movement, and when we can move our hands and feet together, we can begin to understand how our footwork and handwork connect to our center. When we begin training, many of us like to use the strength in our shoulders and arms. It is what we know. It is what feels “strong” to us.

When we begin training, trying to coordinate our hands and feet doesn’t feel strong or second nature at all to us. It doesn’t feel strong because our body doesn’t know how to move in a unified manner. Our footwork lacks power, focus, and clarity. Our right hand does one thing, our left hand does another; one foot steps this way and our other foot steps that way. Our center isn’t even in the picture at all. There is no teamwork. There is no timing. There is no connection. Either the hands arrive to the fight late or the feet arrive late. Instead of a well-trained fighting unit, our body and our movements are like a ragtag group of undisciplined conscripts.

Although initially this kind of practice might feel weak to us, it is important to develop this internal timing. Everything – hands, feet, hips – move together and are coordinated to complete a specific part of the technique.

In Iaido practice, the internal timing is more complex. For example, in Iaido, when we practice *noto* (納刀) or “the practice of

re-sheathing the sword,” we practice drawing and cutting in one smooth movement.

When we *nukitsuke* (抜き付け) or “draw the sword and cut, we are supposed to pull the *saya* (鞘) or “scabbard” off the sword and we time this pull, or *sayabiki*, so that at the precise moment our sword clears the *saya*, our right hand cuts with the sword. If our timing is off, the best-case scenario is that we will not be able to cut with it correctly. The worst-case scenario, our sword is still inside the *saya* as we cut and we will probably cut through our own hand!

In the actual Iaido technique, we also factor in raising our hips and placing our feet into attack position as we draw our sword and cut. Because of the nature of the Japanese sword and the sword technique, our internal timing needs to be very precise. This is why we practice so slowly – to develop our awareness of this timing.

The reason this internal timing is so important in Aikido is because when we begin to move stronger and faster, the technique doesn’t break down. If we think of our internal timing like a race car engine, each step in the engine’s power cycle requires a particular step to occur at a precise moment. When an engine’s timing is off, even by a little bit, the engine’s power output is inefficient and it doesn’t move fast.

In the case of Aikido, if our internal timing is precise, we can naturally begin moving stronger and faster while retaining the integrity of the technique. Once we understand our internal timing, when we face our opponent, our own technique will be that much more effective.

When we realize how important this timing is, then the training and practice methods for many martial arts become very clear. Both the internal timing between our hands, our feet, and our hip movements must be well-practiced before we begin understanding the external timing between ourselves and our opponent’s attack. As we refine both our internal timing within our own movement and the external timing with our opponent (or opponents), then we can begin to understand what timing means in our practice and our technique. •

“Protect with *Ai* (合), grow with *Ki* (氣), never depart from the *Do* (道).” – Furuya Sensei

In life, more sooner than later, each individual will have to start to walk alone and find themselves. It is during this journey that we will discover for ourselves who we really are. But we will need help.

When we are small and we are learning to walk, talk, and function, our parents are there to help us to avoid any potholes that we might encounter. Their guidance gives us the tools so that we can solve any problems that might arise along the way. Most of the time, we accept advice, limits, and corrections to our behavior. Generally, we accept the corrections because they come from someone who loves us, and we appreciate that someone wants to help us to become good people.

When we get older and are our own person, we sometimes don't want someone else's advice. In time, another less forgiving and more critical teacher appears to teach us, and this teacher is called the “real world.” In the real world, mistakes are not solved with “sorry,” “I won't do it again”, or “I will try to do better next time.” Here the mistake could be that we get fired from a job, get into an accident, or get a divorce, just to name a few. When something bad happens, we can always resort to complaining but it won't work because there are no words of comfort or votes of encouragement.

The truth is that although this way is the “hard” way, it is the way most people learn. These lessons can be painful, but they are lessons that we will never forget, ever. It is also how we come to understand and value all the advice that we did not want to hear from our parents when we were growing up.

As teachers in class, the same thing happens. Many of us spend our entire lives and class time repeating the same things over and over again. We find ourselves repeating the same details, principles, and corrections. Most of the time it seems that students don't seem to be listening. It is easy for a teacher to think that the students are taking our advice for granted and that they think that those corrections are not for them because they have been practicing for many years and already know how this “works.” Or, maybe since my teacher is here every day for me, they will pay more attention tomorrow.

A dojo is based upon some very simple, very clear, and very concrete values and principles that are essential to maintaining a high-level martial art. Traditional dojos demand a high level of etiquette and require a lot of hard work. This is something that I noticed at Furuya Sensei's dojo. Seeing his dojo and experiencing it as a traditional dojo made me feel proud, and although in reality all these principles are easy to understand, they are hard to maintain. The reality is that over time it is human nature to

begin to relax and make these rules, principles and values a little more “user friendly.” Everything that goes into making a dojo “traditional,” like respect for its values and rules, is getting harder and harder to maintain.

Students have to understand that these principles and rules are for everyone from the person who teaches the class to the student who takes the class. Every person has to follow the rules, etiquette and values of the dojo. The only difference between a student and a teacher is the level of responsibility for each value, rule, or etiquette. For instance, the teacher's job is to show the students how to properly clean the bathroom based upon legal and ethical standards and ensure that it is done in a shared way with a sense of teamwork. It is the student's job to work together and do a good job as an extension of their practice.

When one starts training, if they forget to greet the teacher or other students or don't follow the proper etiquette, it is understandable since they are a beginner. Beginners aren't experienced and don't understand or haven't been shown the right thing to do. Over time, if those same mistakes are still being made five or ten years later, then it demonstrates a failure of the senior students to teach them. As a student trains more, the responsibility becomes much greater, since it is assumed that they know and have mastered all the etiquette and proto-

col of the classes.

If the student doesn't know, then it is the teacher's inability to teach the students because teachers lead the classes and are supposed to be the model demonstrating the best behavior and etiquette for the students to follow in each class. Thus, the teacher's responsibility is infinitely greater.

A dojo is like the family. The teachers are like parents trying to help the students be better and teach them how to walk “through” the dojo properly. It is the job of the teacher to instill in the students the proper values, protocols and etiquette because they know that one day, sooner than later, they will be gone. Only when the teacher is gone will we know if we have learned what they were trying to teach us. When they are gone, all we will have to correct ourselves are our memories. The teacher's job is to guide the student the best that they can. The student's job is follow as best as they can. With the two trying their best, it cannot help but create this symbiotic energy that is creating something great – you. However, if we are careless or lazy, then those lessons from our teachers will fade away in a few years and we will lose the greatest treasure that they gave us – their time. Protect with *ai*, grow with *ki* and never depart from the *do*.•



Learn to Walk



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

There is a saying in the East: Look at difficult matters very simply, and look at simple matters with great detail and depth.

Sometimes, we might tend to oversimplify Aikido techniques.

However, in practice, it is really important to go into each movement with great depth and try to understand its meaning. It doesn't mean that all movements are complex and difficult. What it means is that we need to explore seemingly simple, basic movements and try to understand them as they should be understood. Over the years, I have found that kihon-waza (基本技) or "basic" Aikido techniques are much more complicated with many layers and have broad spectrums of meanings and applications. That is why I see that it may take years to fully understand them. This, I think, is the great challenge that the "art" of Aikido presents to us and also what makes this art so fascinating and interesting. At the same time, seemingly "advanced" or complex techniques are actually quite simple.

Strangely, many things in this world are like this as well.

The two basic ideas which I have the most trouble conveying to my students in practice are "what is relaxation" and "fullness of movement." If we refer to "relaxation" we generally think relaxation means to go limp or lose energy or lose our strength or not to apply strength. I think many of us assume that it is the opposite of strength. In Aikido, I think we refer to a more "natural" form of relaxation which is, indeed, our "natural," basic, state of existence. Aikido relaxation means to be alert, but at the same time not tense. It means to be strong, but not stiff and awkward. It means to be fast and awake, not sleepy and unaware. Sometimes, if I tell a student to relax more, he goes limp and powerless. This is incorrect. What I mean is to take away or lose all of the "unnecessary" tension or strength – especially in the shoulders, neck and back. "To relax" also means not to force the situation, and not to apply extraneous strength. To relax means to apply just enough strength, to be natural, and not to be too aggressive, but at the same time not being passive or overyielding as well. The best possible explanation for the meaning of "to relax" is "to be perfectly natural." This may seem easy and this why it is also difficult to understand for many of us.

It is much like breathing. The lungs move very naturally and effectively. If they stop or go limp or collapse, we will not be able

to breathe. If we force them, they can become overstrained and we immediately feel it in our ability to perform well. When we are feeling well, we do not notice the process of breathing at all. When we are sick or have a cold, or there is an infection in our

lungs, we notice it quite a bit with coughing, etc. When our lungs are operating normally and we don't notice our breathing, our breathing is in the perfect state of relaxation and that's what we are trying to achieve in practice. We should not be like lungs that are collapsing or weak, nor like lungs which are infected or clogged, nor like lungs which are overstrained beyond their limits. Can you understand this a little?

Like our hands, for instance. If I let it go completely limp, we cannot do anything, even hold up a single toothpick. If we make our hand into a tight fist, our hand also becomes useless. When the hand is normal, it is relaxed and free to move as we like, picking up a thin toothpick, making a strong fist, threading a needle or typing on your computer. This "normal" or

"natural" state is the relaxed state that we are seeking in our techniques.

Simply



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

In Japanese martial arts, there is a teaching called, "heijo-shin" (平常心) from Zen Buddhism. This means the "everyday" or "normal" mind or the mind which is not sleeping or dead but also not too tense or too tight. The Zen priest, Takuan Soho, in his letter to Yagyu Tajima no Kami, the swordsman, talks about "mujuu shin" (無住心) or "non-residing mind" which is the same as the normal, relaxed, natural mind. The mind does not settle or focus anywhere but is allowed to move freely as it likes. Takuan's example is the 1,000-armed Kannon who can operate all of her 1,000 arms just as we manipulate both our right and left hands. She can accomplish this because her mind is free to move to each hand as she requires, freely, naturally, and normally. It is this state which, in Aikido, we call "relaxed."

In all things, not just Aikido, we should "look at difficult matters very simply, and look at simple matters with great detail and depth."

Editor's note: *Furuya Sensei posted this article in a slightly different format on his Daily Message on April 19, 2002.*

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

- July 4th:** Closed 4th of July
- July 8-9:** Zenshuji Obon volunteering
- July 4th:** Closed 4th of July
- July 21-23:** Dojo Camping trip
- July 29th:** Intensive seminar
- September 30th:** Watanabe Shihan celebration
- October 13-15:** Spain 25th anniversary seminar - Travel dates TBA

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	Advanced	6:30-7:30 PM	Regular
11:30 AM-12:30 PM	Theory	8:30-9:30 PM	Fundamentals @Budokan
Sundays		Thursdays	
9:00-10:00 AM	Children's Class	6:30-7:30 PM	Open
10:15-11:15 AM	Regular		
11:30 AM-12:30 PM	Fundamentals		
Mondays		Fridays	
6:30-7:30 PM	Regular	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	
9:00-10:00 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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