



Aiki Dojo

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Welcome To Summer!



There was once a farmer whose horse got loose and ran away. All of his neighbors came over and said, "Oh, this is bad." The farmer merely replied, "How do you know?" A week later, the horse returned with other horses in tow. Again, all his neighbors came over and said, "This is great," but the farmer again replied, "How do you know?" The next day while trying to tame one of the horses, the farmer's son fell and broke his leg. Again, all of his neighbors came over and said, "Oh, this is bad." The farmer again replies, "How do you know?" A little while later, soldiers came to the village to conscript soldiers for a battle, but they didn't take the farmer's son because of his broken leg. Happily, all the neighbors said, "This is wonderful" and again the farmer replied to his neighbors, "How do you know?"

Nobody could have guessed that 2020 would have turned out like this. The coronavirus hit and everyone was ordered to stay at home. During that time, people passed away, friends and families were tested, finances were stretched, parents had to teach children, jobs were lost and to top it all off people protested for social change and I am sure that I have missed a lot of other important things that happened.

How Do You Know?



by **David Ito**
Aikido Chief Instructor

In the midst of all that has happened and still is happening, the question is "During this time, did you practice Aikido?" I don't mean physically. I mean did you "practice" it? A practice is defined as, "The actual application or use of an idea, belief, or method, as opposed to theories relating to it."

I can only speak for myself when I answer, "A little." The thing which I feel that I truly learned during this quarantine was that Aikido is really a practice. I know it seems obvious, but sometimes the simplest things are the hardest to embrace.

It is easy to harmonize with our opponents as they strike us or grab our uniform. It is entirely another thing to harmonize with one's self. It is my opinion that if we are not harmonizing with ourselves then we are not really practicing Aikido.

Albert Einstein once said, "In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity" and he was totally right. Being isolated from others created many learning opportunities. I spent my quarantine reading, doing yoga, meditating and sleeping more than

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How Do You Know? *continued from page 2...*

I had in two decades. As I sat with myself and tried to practice Aikido, I noticed that I began to become healthier and that is when I began to see the many holes in my armor, so to speak.

If we only think of Aikido in a physical sense where we are lauded for our strength, athleticism and youth, then it will be very painful when our physicalness fades. I realized this when Watanabe Sensei and I shot the videos for the dojo's home workouts. It had only been a couple of months, but I was horrified by how out of Aikido shape I had become. That coupled with nursing a decades old shoulder injury that had gotten worse in the last two years made me begin to doubt my future path in Aikido.

At the same time, I was attempting to act as my daughter's kindergarten teacher, and I found myself getting mad when she struggled to figure out her homework. I got mad, she got upset and I felt like a horrible parent. It was at this point that I realized that, despite having celebrated 30 years in Aikido this year, I was not in fact really following the way of Aikido.

When I realized that I was not practicing Aikido, it was kind of an interesting moment. I was writing one of the Dojo Messages and I came across the Japanese proverb *kishi kaisei* (起死回生) or to "Wake from death and return to life." I didn't use it in a message, but something in my mind kept making me think of it. Then it hit me, this quarantine was not the worst thing that ever happened to me but was in fact a wonderful gift.

This separation and the change it created was sort of a reset. It really did feel like I was waking from death and returning to life.

Initially, the quarantine felt like everything that I had tried to build or accomplish in the last 13 year since Furuya Sensei had passed away was changing and was somehow spiraling out of control, but then as I took an inventory, I realized that was really benefiting my physical and mental health.

While discussing Aikido on our dojo's nightly Zoom chat, Watanabe Sensei reiterated something that he had said many times before to me. He said, "The martial arts are about bringing order to chaos." When our opponents attack us, we take their negative energy in the form of an attack and change it into something positive and redirect it. In Aikido, we realize that our opponent's salvation is somehow tied to ours and so to destroy them is to destroy ourselves. With that understanding, we come closer to realizing O'Sensei's philosophy of non-violence.

It is easy to look back on the last few months with disdain and rightfully so, there was and still is a lot of tragedy, uncertainty and uncomfortableness. It is true that those difficulties have occurred but the reality is much more complicated than we can imagine and so we don't know how they factor into our lives going forward. It is like the farmer in the story who said, "How do you know?"

How we deal with the ups and downs of life is a matter of perspective. Many times, we don't really know where the road or our decisions will take us and so the only thing to do is to be open and vulnerable to the possibilities of what can be. Aikido is much more than a means to destroy those things which confront us and I am grateful for what this quarantine has taught me. I now have a better understanding of what it means to truly practice Aikido or anything for that matter. •



by **Ken Watanabe**
Technical Director

There's a story about the great swordsman, Miyamoto Musashi. The story isn't about a duel or his skill as a swordsman, but him as a painter.

When Miyamoto Musashi was a guest of the Hosokawa Daimyo, he was requested to paint a portrait of the Daruma (also known as Bodhidharma) who was the patriarch of Zen Buddhism. In addition to being a famous swordsman, Musashi was also an expert painter, calligrapher

and craftsman.

As requested, Musashi sat down and painted a picture of the Daruma. Although Musashi was a skilled painter, he was never satisfied with his own attempts at painting the Daruma and this time was no different. Later that night, an alarm went off that an intruder was in the lord's private quarters. When the guards came in, they found Musashi sitting there. When the lord asked him what he was doing there so late at night, he held up the paper on which was painted a masterful depiction of Bodhidharma. Musashi said, "When you first asked me to paint I held the brush like a painter, but I am not a painter so this was a mistake. This time, I held my brush like a swordsman, so now you can see my true art!"

A martial artist approaches everything from the standpoint of the martial arts. A martial artist reveals their level in many ways, not only through their skill as a martial artist. How we deal with this pandemic and the stay-at-home is no different.

The philosophy of Aikido teaches us that we should have compassion for our opponent. This is why we don't think of fighting them, but rather in saving them. When attacked, we reconcile their attack by moving our body in a way that protects us but also neutralizes the attack (and any other follow up attack), and puts us in an advantageous position. From this position, we can choose to either destroy our opponent or be merciful.

During this quarantine, the same applies. We protect ourselves through spacing and timing by being at the right place at the right time. We remain mindful of both ourselves and of other people. Yes, we have no choice whether or not to be in this current situation. However, the virus can be anywhere so it's also important to still try our best to protect ourselves and all the other people who we may come into contact with.

Without a sense of caring, controlling the spread of this virus is almost impossible. This is where our training comes in. Yes, we may resent the fact that our lives have been disrupted and yes, we might want to resist anything that inconveniences us, but despite this, we do our best not to contribute to the chaos, but instead, bring order to it.

In Aikido, training the body is easy; anyone can gain physical strength. In fact, the physical movements in the technique are actually very easy to do! It is the mental and spiritual aspect of the training is where most people stumble.

It's like wearing a mask. How difficult is the act of putting on a mask even though we feel perfectly healthy? Yet, we see how difficult it is for many people to accept the idea of wearing a it to protect others. The physical part is easy – putting on a mask. It is the mental part which is more difficult – actually wearing one.

When we think about it, this virus spreads through our behavior. Like physical strength, physical immunity is relatively easy compared to restraining ourselves from behaviors that keep this pan-

demic going. Simply put, to deal with this virus, all we have to do is wear a mask, wash our hands, and be mindful of personal space.

The way we train in Aikido helps us understand this. We don't resist, nor do we give in. One is to use too much strength and the other is to be lifeless. In Aikido, we use our energy and movement to absorb, neutralize, and align with our opponent's energy and in turn move in a balanced way.

This virus is not our opponent no more than the rain is. We have choices when it rains. We can go out with an umbrella, go out and get wet, or simply stay home. It is, of course, not that simple; yet, it is that simple. We accept and adapt to the best of our experience and abilities.

Ultimately, as an Aikidoist, we go with the flow, yet we do not allow ourselves to be thrown about like a dinghy in a stormy sea. In Zen they say, "ichini ni-chi ko nichi" or "Every day is a good

day." They also say, "Things will never go the way you want them to go." Which is right? Both are.

As Aikidoists, this is where our level is revealed. The martial artist thinks not only of themselves, but the other person, yet the martial artist also thinks about perfecting themselves to the highest degree. Do we care enough to wear a mask? Are we mindful enough of other people? Can we weather a little bit of inconvenience for the safety of our neighbors? Are we doing everything we can to stay safe without going overboard?

In this time of what feels like the world has gone seemingly topsy-turvy it is easy to get lost in not maintaining our balance, our center, and our stability, not just physically, but mentally. These things are not easy, as we have seen from current events.

A student's level of training is often judged not on the mat, but off the mat too. Anyone can become physically strong and throw someone down, but how many of us can simply wear a mask and stay home because we care about other people? It's times like these when we should ask ourselves which kind of martial artist we want to be. Do we want to be the martial artist who paints like a painter or the martial artist who paints like a martial artist?•

Like A Martial Artist





Editor's note: This is the second part of a three-part series on atemi or striking techniques. The first article on atemi appeared in the May 2020 issue.

In order to practice or utilize *atemi* (当身) properly, we need to understand how *atemi* is used in conjunction with the techniques of Aikido.

When we talk about the practice or execution of *atemi* in Aikido, there are two ways to look at it. The first way is when *atemi* is used in an attack. In this case, *atemi* is being used as an attack by the *uke* or the one who “receives” the technique. Secondly, *atemi* can be used by the *tori* or *nage* or the one who is “taking” or doing the technique and so it is used for a specific purpose which is specific to the technique.

In Aikido practice, when *atemi* is used by the *uke* from the point of view of an attack, there are three basic *atemi* used: *shomenuchi* or “frontal strike,” *yokomenuchi* or “side strike” and *tsuki* or “thrust.” In more advanced stages of training, students can practice other variations of these three attacks such as: *munetsuki*, *gyaku yokomenuchi*, *nukiuchi*, *mae geri*, *mawashi geri*, etc. In reality, the three angles these three basic strikes provide are more than enough training when we are engaged in serious *kihon-waza* or “basic” training. The intrinsic relationship between Aikido and the sword is apparent when we study these three basic attacks and the direction of these attacks.

How To Atemi



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

Shomenuchi – frontal strike or any type of cut or blow that originates at the top and moves toward the bottom. *Shomenuchi* can be done with an open hand or “shuto uchi,” with a closed hand or “tetsui uchi,” with a forearm or “wanto uchi,” or with a weapon. It is not necessary to practice all of these variations of *shomenuchi* because they all have a similar movement and the *shomenuchi* strike is practiced regularly in class.

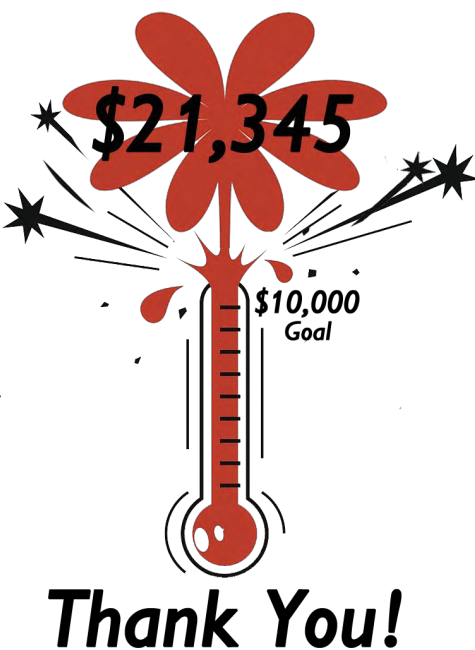
Yokomenuchi – side or oblique blow that goes from the outside to the inside. Most times *yokomenuchi* is done with the *tegatana* or “hand blade” where the side of the hand strikes the target. Like *shomenuchi*, it can be done with an open hand, closed hand, forearm or with a weapon. *Yokomenuchi* training is the study of all similar side or angled attacks.

Tsuki – straight blow or thrust. Everything that comes directly toward us falls into this category. A *tsuki* is generally done in a straight line from start to finish while *shomenuchi* and *yokomenuchi* are attacks which are more circular in nature. The different names of the *tsuki* strikes depend on their intended target. *Mae tsuki* or “front,” *jun tsuki* or “middle,” *koshi tsuki* or “hip” or *gyaku tsuki* or “reverse.” Any linear thrust falls into the category of *tsuki*.

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Last month, a donor, who wished to remain anonymous, presented our community with a challenge. This donor would match all donations made in the month of May up to \$10,000.00. By the first of June, we were not only able to raise the \$10,000.00, but we were able to raise \$21,345.00. The fact of the matter is that a dojo is a community and without the kindness and generosity of its members, it would cease to exist. We are truly grateful for everyone's support, especially during this unprecedented pandemic. Thank you very much!

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Atemi from the *nage* or *tori*'s point of view have many different purposes. Most obviously, *atemi* can be used for hitting, but hitting for solely the purpose hitting is not the intention of the *atemi* in Aikido. Nidai Doshu, Kisshomaru Ueshiba said, "The basic technique during practice include an *atemi* to the unprotected and vulnerable point of one's adversary." *Atemi* in Aikido is used in a more sophisticated way than to just hit someone. *Atemi* can be used in terms of *kuzushi* or to "take the balance" of an opponent. It can be used to strike some vulnerable, vital or exposed point. *Atemi* can also be used more abstractly as it can help to change or ensure one's position, to nullify the speed of an opponent, ensure the success of the technique or break an opponent's strength, to name just a few. Something distinctive to Aikido is that *atemi* can transcend the physical and be used mentally. By mentally, I mean things which are not physical like balance, timing or focus.

The timing of *atemi* is based upon the *nage*'s intention and is therefore crucial to its application. An *atemi* can be administered before the attacker has grabbed or struck. *Atemi* in this sense mainly influences the "spacing" or *ma-ai* of the encounter. Controlling the spacing enables us to change or influence our opponent's rhythm and helps us to create or influence the movement of the technique. In addition to spacing, *atemi* at this stage enables us to change



the attacker's speed, alter their intended target or for *kuzushi*. Employing an *atemi* in the middle of the technique enables us to stop the advancement of our opponent, create openings or up-end their balance. It is also not uncommon for an *atemi* to be used in the middle of the technique to help facilitate the technique. In olden days, *atemi* was also used in almost every technique as a coup de grace after the *uke* had been pinned or it can be used as an actual pinning technique. Today, we still see *atemi* used in the pinning of *shihonage*.

How we apply *atemi* varies depending on the intended purpose. If we want the *atemi* to be more of a concentrated blow then we would use the fingers, elbow or *teगतana*. For a more percussive type blow, we would use a quick snapping or whipping motion so that the power is more spread out over the surface. If we wanted a heavier strike then we would use the back fist, forearm, palm or fist. For a more piercing strike with a sharp weapon, we would use a *tsuki* where the energy of the movement is transferred to the object that is piercing.

How we use or apply *atemi* in Aikido is very important. Morihiro Saito Sensei has said that O'Sensei said, "Aikido is 99% *atemi*." However, an *atemi* in Aikido is much more than just a strike. To be more than just a hit, the how and why an *atemi* is used in Aikido is very important. Thus, the use of *atemi* is a very sophisticated concept. •



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Reality Checks

I was reading an article about Aikido the other day and it was all about “reality checks” and what is the most effective way to beat one’s opponent and what they should do to take the victory and on and on. As I read more, I suddenly began to think that the article was very odd.

However strong and great we become in Aikido or in handling the *katana* or “Japanese sword,” it is really, at best, not very effective in this modern world today. What would an Aikidoist do against a sniper in a tree 100 yards away and ready to put a bullet through our heads? What do we do if our opponent wants to do away with us by planting a bomb in our car? As soon as we turn on the ignition then “bye, bye!” Or what if they wanted us to die a painful death and put poison in our water supply. It seems laughable, but this is the reality of today and things like this happen all the time.

In *budo* or “the martial arts,” the most effective technique is the one that does away with our opponent quickly and effortlessly. In one split second, our opponent will be dead on the ground – that is good martial arts technique. This is the True Reality. It has always been this way.

However, I can’t speak for others, but I don’t want to take the life of another. I don’t want to injure anyone; I don’t want to injure anyone as well. More than spending my life thinking about how to kill all my opponents, I am more concerned with the quality of my own life. I want to focus on harmony, respect and respect for others, peace in the world, higher awareness and fulfillment of life, the end of suffering and so many other things. These qualities of higher living are all more important to me than, and I am sure I am not alone, killing another person.

Besides, killing someone, no matter the reason, brings so much bad karma and human suffering all around. Incidentally, when something like this happens, our whole family is shamed, and we would spend the rest of our lives in jail – maybe even be executed like a common criminal. What good is all this killing going to do me? Sounds like a big waste to me.

In Aikido, if we think about it “realistically,” killing or harming others is very inefficient because the value of human life is so much - or rather - too much. I don’t even want to injure or hurt

another person in even the smallest way. Aikido talks about peace and human balance and mankind as being one family. In this way, Aikido is not an inefficient martial art at all and this is what I like about Aikido very much.

Some people only aspire to “realism” and they focus mainly on the “effectiveness” of the techniques. This is fine, but those people never reach the “killing” mode and this is a good thing but without killing the other person, it actually will never be the “most” effective!

I prefer the art of Aikido, because in its philosophy there is a desire to not hurt anyone and I know that this is the way I want to live my life.



I have a love of Japanese history, the samurai and samurai swords, but I realize what a messy process it is to kill someone with a sword! All the blood and guts spilling out with all the screaming. It is definitely not like the movies where after you “kill” the bad guys, they walk off the set and get a cup of coffee until it is time to die again or get ready for the next take.

We all like to think that we are so “effective” and so “strong” and that what we do is “real” but humans are not really strong because they can throw very hard or break someone’s arm or kill them. This is not what humans do best as history proves over and over again. Humans are known for their human spirit – which Aikido polishes and allows to shine. Violence will never be the answer to our problems – in reality it could quite possibly lead to our end.

What is effective is really an improbable and highly impractical proposition. To expand on my little essay here, I was reading that they used to employ cyanide, a deadly poison, to leach the gold from the ground. This was considered the “most effective” way to mine gold – yet look at the consequences which lead to the poisoning of the land and waters. Companies used to dump toxic wastes into rivers as the “most effective” way to eliminate their garbage and thus so many people died or suffered. Sometimes, the “most effective” is not really the best. Being the best depends on how high we hold ourselves to our values and principles. Aikido does not kill and so it can be criticized for this as being an ineffective martial art. However, Aikido allows us to live noble, and beautiful lives and ultimately this sophistication makes it the highest martial art of all. •

Editor’s note: *Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on September 28, 2004.*

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

The city of Los Angeles has cleared us to open. However, the number of coronavirus cases is still high and has not tapered. For the time being, we will only offer a limited schedule and all classes will be outside.

Please maintain social distancing and wear a mask when you are not able to maintain social or when you are inside.

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

10:15-11:15 AM Regular Class
11:30 AM-12:30 PM Regular Class

Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Sundays

9:00-10:00 AM Children's Class
10:15-11:15 AM Regular Class
11:30 AM-12:30 PM Regular Class

Thursdays

No Class

Mondays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Fridays

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

8:00-9:00 AM Regular Class

Mondays and Wednesdays

8:00-9:00 PM Regular Class



The Aiki Dojo

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The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

has been awarded Official *Konin* recognition by the Aikikai Foundation, Aikido World Headquarters.

Our dojos are committed to the study and practice of the teachings of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba and his legitimate successors, Nidai Doshu, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, the present Doshu, Moriteru Ueshiba and Hombu Dojo-Cho, Mitsuteru Ueshiba.

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