



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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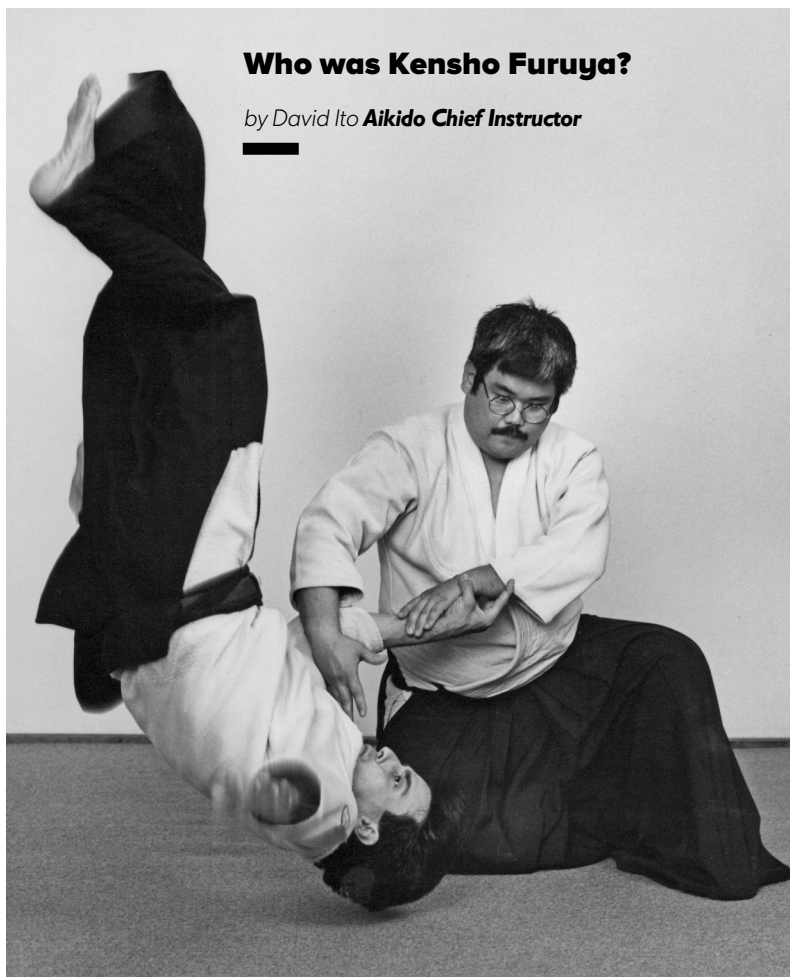
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Rev. Kensho Furuya
1948 - 2007

Who was Kensho Furuya?

by David Ito **Aikido Chief Instructor**



Untitled

by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Who can know Sensei's heart and soul?
 When everyday he gives it away to others?
 Forty-five years of teaching and I am weary,
 This Path without an end. . .
 The moon makes its way across the nightly skies,
 Not heeding the cries of the lonely fawn,
 Who can cure this loneliness?
 When they leave at night,
 The dojo is cold without the sounds of students?
 My home is not here with me,
 But in the hearts of my students,
 Who come another day. . .

Most only know of Rev. Kensho Furuya from his appearances on TV, his book *Kodo: Ancient Ways*, his 9-video series, *The Art of Aikido* or his brief stint on the internet. Over the years, Sensei has become somewhat of a legendary figure rather than a human being while his acumen as a martial artist and teacher has become the stuff of myths. The truth about Sensei was that he was just a human being who worked very hard at being the best teacher, martial artist and person that he could be.

Sensei was, from childhood, very serious about *budo*. He would often sit and bask in astonishment as his grandfather told stories about their family's samurai past. Sensei was so into *budo* that he got his first black belt in kendo at the age of 10 years old and first black belt in Aikido at 15 years old. He loved anything samurai-related and used to save up his allowance and go by Japanese swords and sword guards at pawn shops.

Sensei was also a serious learner who got a joint degree from University of Southern California and Harvard University with a scholarship from the National Defense Education Act in the mid-1960s. He loved Japanese swords and sword guards and spent hours combing through Japanese texts on the subject. I once asked him if he had a photographic memory because he could identify sword signatures without a book to which he responded with a rather cold offended tone, "no, I study," and then proceeded to chastise me about the merits of hard work.

Most people only know Sensei's public persona where he seemed very accessible and willing to be patient as he answered people's ill-

informed questions. The truth of the matter is that Sensei was a very strict teacher. Some used to say that the best teachers are the teachers who are the most unreasonable. That is because Japanese teachers used to only value strictness as a measurement of their teaching prowess. Sensei was no different. His standards for his students were incredibly high and he was quite often unreasonable and hard to deal with.

When I was younger, I just thought Sensei hated me and was some how singling me out or picking on me. Today, I realize he truly cared about me and because he cared he cared enough to try and push me to my greatest heights.

Only many years after Sensei's passing did I realize that he wasn't perfect and didn't hate me but was just a human being just like me. Sensei's Zen teacher used to say, "nothing goes as you think it will." The Bishop's admonishment of Sensei helped me to see that nobody is perfect and that everyone and everything is too complicated to fit into a box of what is or what should be. Now that I am older and a parent and a teacher, I realize how difficult it must have been for Sensei to treat us the way he did because it was for our own good. As the teacher, I can see that Sensei was just a human being flawed and riddled with imperfection like all of us. Sensei wasn't some sort of super hero, but just a person tasked with a tough job and only doing the best he could.

Sensei is my teacher. I say is because despite being gone from this Earth, he is still teaching me today. Sensei's passing unintentionally created his last teaching, which is kind of final exam, so to



Untitled

by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Honesty is the great virtue we adore,
 But few honest people today,
 We put honesty so high on the shelf,
 Who can reach it from where they stand?
 It is only in our pure heart,
 Devoid of ego and pride,
 Where honesty truly lies,
 Keep your heart pure,
 Do not draw the sword of hate,
 Which only draws blood and grief,
 Cut only with the Sword of Light,
 To conquer ignorance and suffering.



speak. The final teaching is a reflection of who Sensei was a teacher as his students are faced with the final lesson which was, “what will you do or who will you be when I am gone.” The day after Sensei’s passing created a sudden vacuum of strictness. Each of his students must now be their own “master” and are now in charge of their own destiny because now there is nobody to correct them or who cares enough to point out their inconsistencies, shortcomings or obliviousness. So, who are we and what will we do now?

If in fact we have learned what it was that Sensei was teaching then all we need to do is ask ourselves, “what would Sensei think if I did this?” This one question with an honest answer can guide us and thus Sensei will still be our teacher.

Today, everything I do in my life is in some way influenced by the

17 years I was Sensei’s student. From the way I get my children ready for school to the way I teach my classes or how I treat my acupuncture patients – everything is a reflection or an echo of what I learned as his student.

In the end, who was Sensei? Sensei was a teacher and a human being of the highest caliber. He did what a teacher was supposed to do – he introduced direction-less people, like me, to another world and held us to a higher standard than we had ever held ourselves to and enabled many of us to reach higher than we’d ever thought previously possible. Sensei, like all good teachers are supposed to do, reflected back on their students a better version of themselves and as a human being demonstrated that they are supposed to care for and be concerned for the wellbeing of other human beings. •



Remembering Sensei's Aikido

by Ken Watanabe **laido Chief Instructor**

It's been 12 years since Furuya Sensei passed away and I can still remember how he made Aikido so look easy. He always made it look easy. But how? How did a man who obviously did not seem athletic or graceful move like that?

When I first saw Sensei's Nisei Week Aikido demonstration back in the Summer of 1988 – the same one that drew me to the dojo – I thought to myself, “this stuff might be fake.” After the demonstration, I reasoned that if Aikido can make an overweight guy like Sensei move against four opponents, then imagine what it can do for a skinny guy like me?

I can remember his Aikido, not from videos, but from being his main *uke* or the main person who received Sensei's technique, which meant I was charged with demonstrating the proper way to take *ukemi*. For as long as I can remember, I got the privilege to experience Sensei's Aikido technique first hand as I took his *ukemi* for both classes and for demonstrations – even before passing my *shodan* exam.

Most would think based upon Sensei's Aikido ability that he was physically strong, but I think many people might find it surprising to hear that he wasn't a very physically strong at all. Not in the way we think a “strong” person would be. I can't count how many times I would have to open food jars for him. Yet, I wouldn't dare try to break away from his *nikyo* or *sankyo* grip because it was so strong and tight – no way.

As people get old they often lose that pep in their step, but Sensei's Aikido technique was still smooth and powerful, yet quick and light even as he got older. As powerfully as Sensei threw or pinned me, I oddly always felt safe. I only had to be sure I took the proper *ukemi*, of course! Sensei's technique always felt strong and powerful without a sense of being pulled or pushed or being forced or muscled in any way.

The thing about Sensei was that he seemed to get better and better without training. From my prospective, it seemed as Sensei got older, his technique became more softer, more fluid, smoother, yet at the same time more powerful. To me, it seemed that Sensei's movement lost the brashness and bravado of youth; it became something inexplicable.

Sensei's technique was a different kind of power. On some throws I didn't have the faintest clue how I got tossed so clean and effortlessly, yet still landed safely. I don't want to use this particular word because it's so misused but, the only way I could say how some technique worked was because of some kind of “magic.” Of course, I know now that it was his masterful use of timing, spacing, and connection, but even that I can't be sure of.

After a while, I had enough confidence in my *ukemi* skills to protect myself so I tried to “get” what Sensei was doing. But, it became so challenging, often maddeningly frustrating, because I couldn't figure out what he did or what skills he was using. I'd often scratch my head and think, “how the hell did he do that?” and that became

“Selfish or self-centered practice means nothing. It is important as we develop ourselves, to help and give to others as well. It is in selfless giving, beyond thinking of one’s self only, that is to enter spiritual training.”

– Rev. Kensho Furuya



like a mantra that I would say to myself when I was out of breath, after he “aiki’d” me as he demonstrated some technique in front of the class.

Once, I remember being asked by some film crew interviewer what it was like being thrown by Sensei. How do I, someone who knows nothing about Aikido’s mysteries, explain it other than “I just fall?” because I didn’t “know” what he did to me to make me fall like that.

Sensei always emphasized precision in Aikido. After all, Aikido is a martial art and a martial art requires a kind of life-or-death type of precision. When dealing with a strong attack, precision is necessary, from the timing, the spacing, the footwork, and to the connection. Timing, spacing, footwork, and connection are very important to do Aikido effectively, yet what is also equally important but completely abstract is what the technique feels like.

A great thing about being thrown by Sensei is that he spoiled us, because we knew exactly what good Aikido was supposed to feel like. One bad thing about being thrown by Sensei was that when someone did Aikido on me incorrectly, it was instantly obvious

despite not even knowing or seeing what they were doing – it just felt incorrect.

Sensei was many things, funny, stubborn, a little selfish even. Sensei was, after all, human. People often joined the dojo expecting some kind of Buddha or a sage experience but all they got was strictness and training. Sensei, of course, considered himself neither a Buddha nor a sage. Sensei believed credit for the skill level he reached belonged to his teachers, and to Aikido. He was committed to passing on what he received down to us and that is why he taught us the way he did. That is why Sensei valued the basics so much – he wanted to give us what he received from his own teachers.

After all of my 20 years studying Aikido under Sensei, I can tell you that his Aikido is not magic. Sensei was not a magician nor was he a sage or Buddha – he was just a person who worked hard to be the best so that, as Sensei put it, he could “be a stepping stone for his students.” Sensei’s Aikido was simple and effortless, but it was also powerful, and it wasn’t contrived like some Aikido is today. Sensei’s method was simple, “train hard because good Aikido begets good Aikido.” •

Why Keep Training?

by Santiago Garcia Almaraz **Kodokai Chief Instructor**

Knowing something sometimes creates ego and the ego is what creates limits. Aikido shoshin means, "Aikido's beginner's mind." The beginner's mind is a mind which returns back to the beginning where simultaneously anything is possible and at the same time nothing is completely knowable. Thus,

a person can be mindfully in awe of something that they don't completely "know." Returning to the beginner's mind is where a person can become completely spontaneous and in the moment but yet completely aware at the same time.

Often times, since Furuya Sensei's passing I find myself needing a boost in motivation. When that happens, I read Sensei's book *Kodo: Ancient Ways*. Each time I read it, I am completely fascinated by it and I find myself returning back to the first time I read it. This incredible book, with so many interesting stories about Japanese culture and philosophy, totally won me over 20 years ago and now my own copy is completely worn out as I assiduously read through it on a daily basis. Because I read bits and pieces of it and re-read so many of the chapters almost every day, I discover new interpretations or uncover some detail that in the first readings went – unnoticed – this phenomenon is truly amazing and intriguing.

Now that Sensei has passed away, reading *Kodo* helps me to stay motivated when I am having a bad day or when I need a boost and can no longer contact Sensei for help.

Today, it seems that students have problems staying motivated or staying focused. It seems that way because some people are practicing less frequently. Whenever a student's motivation begins to wane, I recommend that they go back and

they started practicing Aikido in the first place or what led them to start down the path of Aikido.

I can only answer for myself that I was attracted by the beauty and philosophy of Aikido as an art and how being an art form required a certain level of technical sophistication and difficulty that just couldn't be attained by anyone. The art of Aikido has so many layers that all work together to coordinate timing, speed, spacing and technical skill in order to perfectly synchronize with the movement of the attacker.

After reaffirming my original reason for training, the second

question, more importantly is "why do I continue practicing?" The reason why I continue to train after more than 20 years is that I enjoy seeing how the techniques evolve with not only me as a teacher but also when a nuance, movement, or sensation is revealed to a student which was not visible in the past which is the same feeling I have re-reading Sensei's book.

These revelations can only happen when a person puts in the work and keeps on trying despite setbacks, obstacles or life changes.



With constant and consistent perseverance, little by little, the "secrets" of the martial arts will be revealed.

I understand that sometimes we find it difficult to find reasons to continue practicing. After all we are all human and subject to all the outside distractions. However, going back to the beginning and revisiting our motivations enables us to reestablish our original motivations which can help us overcome those situations in which we have to make an effort and overcome our own sluggishness which I am sure is the same in many other situations every day.

Aikido training sometimes is not easy especially since there are no instant rewards that today's society is used to. Training is ephemeral in that it is not like a bank where we can collect monthly or quarterly interest on against our past investment of improvements. Sometimes we will invest several years only to see a small amount of improvement and this is why we need to "see" like a beginner who sees the smallest of change as a victory instead of being a tired and unmotivated but experienced practitioner who is frustrated because they are not improving fast or big enough.

In the dojo, the key to training is to see it as a practice and a practice is something that must be done over and over again until proficiency is gained and that is why Sensei used to say, "The Way is in training." We must do Aikido constantly and consistently in order to get any benefit from it.



Having the attitude of training with the "beginner's mind" means returning back to that place where we started when we "knew" nothing but despite that we were full of awe and excitement. It is at this place, the beginning, where we reaffirm our commitment and find our motivation and this is how we keep on going. Every time I read a passage from *Kodo*, I am taken back to the beginning and it puts a smile on my face. I smile because in that moment I remember Sensei and I remember all of his encouragement over the years. Sensei's belief in me helps me to stay motivated and it helps me to keep on going. •

Omoiyari by Frances Yokota Aikido 1st Kyu

In August of 1994, I left the coziness of my home, friends, family, the dojo, and everything I knew in Los Angeles and began a yearlong study abroad program in Japan. Although I am Japanese-American by birth, my Japanese language skills needed a lot of improvement and I knew it was not going to be an easy transition. I had relatives in Japan, but they lived much too far away for me to commute to school in Tokyo and so instead, I would be staying with a Japanese host family that lived only 50 minutes by bicycle or train. Living near Tokyo also allowed me to train at Hombu Dojo. Furuya Sensei made sure to contact them to let them know I would be attending practice there for an entire year. My first day of practice, I was welcomed and felt at ease, and I sincerely appreciated all of the communication Sensei had done on my behalf. It was one less strenuous moment, and it was greatly appreciated.

Despite my fears of living in Japan, I was definitely excited to be there. I would immerse myself in the Japanese way of life, full of its own traditions, culture, and mindset. Luckily, as a child, we practiced some of its traditions and I was taught some of its culture at home, albeit mixed with our American way of living. As for the Japanese mindset, one such thought or practice is known as *omoiyari*. Translated, *omoiyari* means “to think while doing.” It is a very important part of the Japanese way of life, and it is inherently taught from childhood. My parents raised me to try to be acutely aware of the needs and behaviors of the people around me, how my behavior was noticed by them, and how I needed to take the appropriate action for any given situation. In Japan, this type of awareness and behavior is practiced as being sensitive to the feelings, situations, and circumstances of the people around you. You then take action by making an effort to help them and to make a difference. It was something that was emphasized in the dojo and something I experienced on a daily basis while living there in Japan.

After a month of settling in to my new home, new school, new way of life, I began to get homesick. I missed my family, my friends, the diversity of food, and the culture I had left behind. Then one day, I received a package from the Aikido Center of Los Angeles, from Sensei. It was a care package of American snacks, ground coffee, and a note that wished me well. It was so unexpected, and it made me feel missed and not forgotten. Throughout my time in Japan, Sensei sent me holiday cards, dojo newsletters, and other care packages. Because of Sensei’s generosity and care, I missed home less often, and I started to cherish each day I was there. The months began to pass more quickly, and soon the time came when I would be heading home.

I saw how Sensei’s practice of *omoiyari* stretched across the ocean to help me. He was acutely aware of my uneasiness of living abroad. He knew I would miss home, miss the dojo, miss the familiarity of life in the states, so he made sure to continually remind me that I was not forgotten, and that the dojo would be there waiting for me when I returned...and it was.

The other day I stumbled upon the letters and postcards Sensei had sent me while I was in Japan – I didn’t even realize that I had kept them. Seeing those cards brought back a rush of memories and I remembered Sensei’s *omoiyari* and how he practiced *omoiyari* every day in his own life and how he encouraged us to practice it in our daily lives. *Omoiyari* isn’t just a Japanese concept, it is a concept of higher living where we are aware of everything around us and thus are empathetic, considerate, and mindful of others. When we can see how our awareness and actions start to positively affect the lives and mindsets of those around us, it naturally begins to create an environment of love and harmony. I sincerely appreciated Sensei’s thoughtful and unexpected care and concern for me. It truly made a difference. •



“An old, but well known Zen saying: Hibi Kojitsu – ‘Each day is a Good Day!’ In our Aikido training and as we reflect on our lives and ourselves, we often feel frustration and sometimes desperation. Disappointment is only another part of our training which we eventually overcome, just as we struggle to understand and refine our techniques. We should never think of it as something apart from ourselves which intrudes and interferes with what we aspire to. Embrace the ‘bad’ as well as the good and see its original Oneness. Dogen Zenji wrote: ‘The greater the aspiration, the greater the enlightenment.’ Thank you and have a very Good Day today!”

– Rev. Kensho Furuya

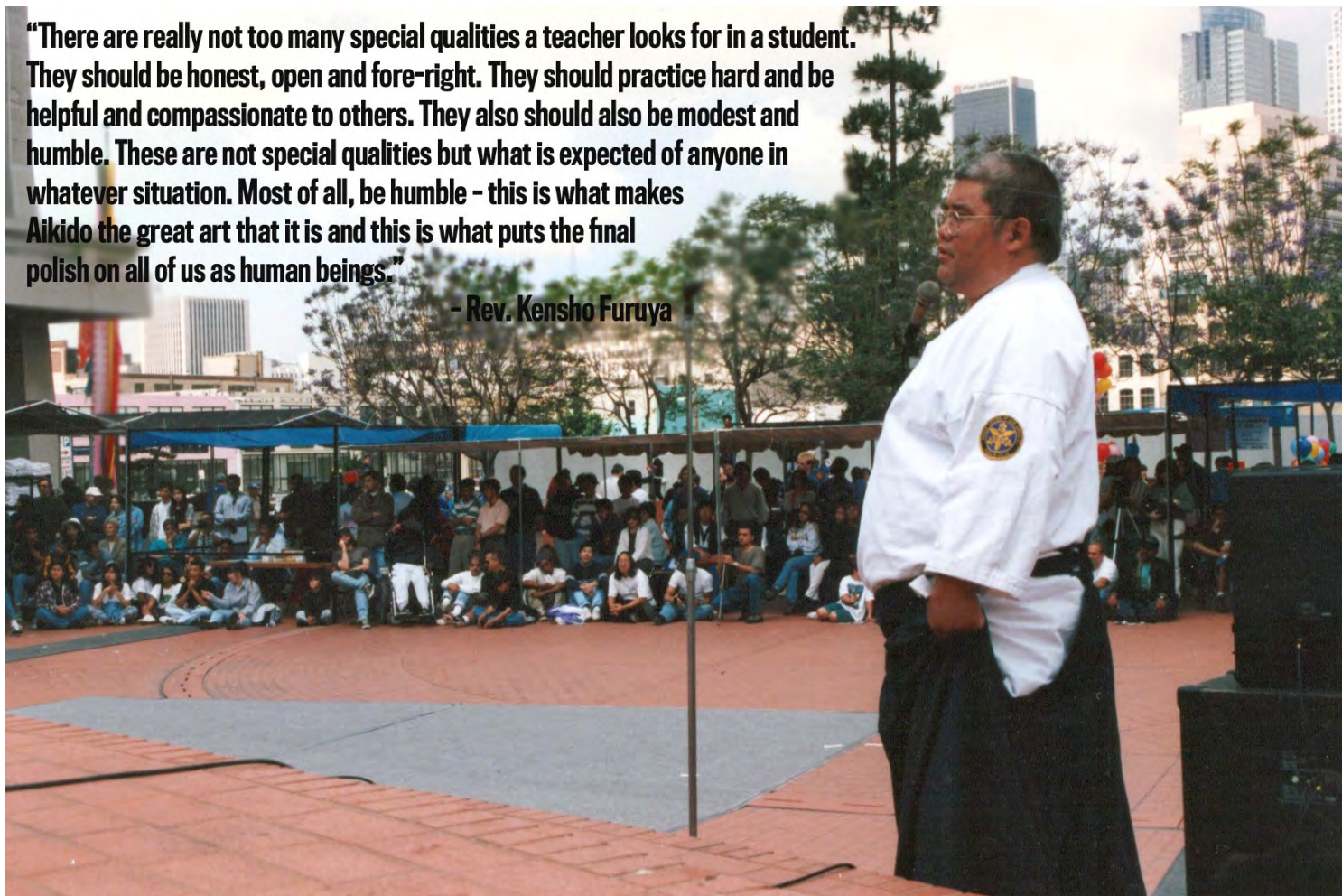


“We expect different things from our teachers today. I looked to my teachers for knowledge, wisdom and trust, now, we look for popularity and success. I think I will never be a popular or a successful teacher because I am not interested in such things. As a priest, we are not allowed to seek fame and fortune. Still, I hope my dojo will carry on after I am gone. ‘So much to teach and so little time,’ has been on my mind a lot lately. Luckily, I have never had to regret not appreciating my teachers enough while they were around.”

– Rev. Kensho Furuya

“There are really not too many special qualities a teacher looks for in a student. They should be honest, open and fore-right. They should practice hard and be helpful and compassionate to others. They also should also be modest and humble. These are not special qualities but what is expected of anyone in whatever situation. Most of all, be humble - this is what makes Aikido the great art that it is and this is what puts the final polish on all of us as human beings.”

- Rev. Kensho Furuya



守愚不移志 黙黙養其神

The last scroll that Furuya Sensei put up in his *tokonoma* the day he passed away is translated to mean:

Be Humble
Be Strong
Always Keep Going

“When we suffer bad times we always think that the world is somehow against us. Actually, we can look at it in another way. The bad times we suffer are actually blessings in disguise. Only the purest gold is tested in the hottest fire, lesser metals cannot take the heat. Dogen Zenji said, ‘The greater the aspiration, the greater the enlightenment.’ Aspiration is always tested and polished by hardship.”

- Rev. Kensho Furuya



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羅府合氣道学院古屋道場

1211 N. Main Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012 | www.Aikidocenterla.com
E-mail: info@Aikidocenterla@gmail.com | Telephone: (323) 225-1424

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