



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Harmony and Peace

About 10 years ago I arrived in Los Angeles newly single, with a new job. At that time I was looking for something to fill my spare time with, something that is fun, where I could meet new people and, lastly, get some exercise. Having briefly studied Jujitsu, what seems like a lifetime ago, one thing I always wanted to do was get back into martial arts. The question was, which one? That is when I remembered my old Jujitsu teacher had mentioned that he studied Aikido.

I remember Sensei Shihan Pereira had a picture of O'Sensei at his dojo that we always bowed to before we got on the mat. I also remember him telling us that he could not teach Aikido in the South Bronx because the students wanted something simple that can be learned quickly. Now in my 50s, I found myself looking for a martial art that was challenging and good for my age. For me, the choice was clear.

My next step was to find a good school in the downtown area. After a little research I found the Aikido Center of Los Angeles. I called the dojo for information, and several weeks later I went to see a Saturday class. When I saw the dojo and how the class was conducted I knew I had to give it a try. I was especially impressed with the focus the students had and the silence while practicing the techniques. I quickly joined after observing class and could not wait to start. I became friends with the other white belts and my training began.

Today I can honestly say that I have gotten more from being part of ACLA that I ever thought possible. This last year both my training and my learning has been elevated because of my upcoming Black Belt test. The preparation for the test has forced me to take my training a lot more seriously. Last week I was mentioning to one of the senior students that I have learned more in this past year than in the previous six years.



Why I Train

by Victor Gonzalez **Aikido Shodan**



Overall my study of Aikido has opened the doors for me to explore myself. Yes, even at my age I'm still learning how to be a better "me." Also, training at ACLA has given me the opportunity to travel with my fellow Aikidoists. I can't express my feelings into words when I got off the plane during my first trip to Cuba. Traveling with our dojo and practicing in Havana was truly amazing. It was interesting, we all kept an eye on each other and made sure we represented our school and teacher with honesty and integrity. I remember Omar Lam Sanz, the sensei there, saying to me how he wished his students were more like the way we were with Ito Sensei. I didn't know what he meant until later he explained that as we walked around Havana we were always looking to make sure we could see our teacher. One in the front and one in the back and that's how we maneuvered around Cuba.

Being a part of the ACLA family has made me appreciate the sacrifice it takes to keep our school running while maintaining the teachings of our school's founder, Reverend Kensho Furuya. All the teachers volunteer their time to teach us and my job is to show up and practice as hard as I can.

If I have to sum up why I train, I enjoy going to class and discovering something new about a technique I have been practicing for a long time. There are many layers to Aikido. There is also something Zen-like when I'm training, as if nothing matters except being in the moment. Training and coming to class is also good exercise and the students and teachers have become my friends. It took a while but I'm glad we are less hierarchical and more inclusive. I can't think of a better group of people to spend my time with. •

Editor's note: Victor passed his shodan exam on March 30, 2019.

Last year at the end of the year, we had our *Osoji*, our year-end clean up, in the dojo. After the mats were cleaned, they were re-turned to the dojo floor. While the configuration of the mat space did not change, as happens each year the individual mats are put back in different locations than from where they came. Since different mats suffer different levels of abuse from falling bodies, individual mats will have different levels of “hardness” or “softness.” Before the first class on the newly-cleaned mats I mentioned to another student, “now I will have to figure out where the soft mats are and the hard mats are.” This student replied, “oh, are there soft mats and hard mats?” While it is possible that this person’s ukemi is so good that the condition of the mats doesn’t matter, I think a more logical explanation is that they just never noticed. I don’t think that is terribly unusual. I would not be surprised if I got a similar response from other students if I were to ask.

I can’t say for sure why we seem to be, more and more, less in touch with our surroundings. Different ideas come to mind: living in an urban environment, increased reliance on technology, overcrowded schedules, cognitive overload. I feel though that we are missing out on a huge significant experiential component of our stay here on Earth.

More than 10 years ago, I was working in New York City and had attended a business dinner at a steak house in Midtown Manhattan. I left alone about 9:30 pm to head back to my hotel in Times Square. After I exited onto 51st Street I walked west to Seventh Avenue where I turned left, heading south. It was a nice evening, temperatures in the 50s, with a light drizzle just beginning to fall. The sidewalks in the area, just above Times Square, were packed with people.

After two blocks, I saw in the crowd coming toward me a small boy,

who looked to be about five years old. He looked to me to be very scared. I stopped, and as he walked closer to me I bent down and

asked him, “are you lost?” He looked about to cry, but managed to say, “yes.” I asked if he wanted to step to the side under the awning of a club to see if we could get him some help. He said, “okay.”

I asked him his name, which I don’t remember. I asked him what happened and he said that he was with his Dad, his Uncle, his brothers, and his cousins. Apparently, they had just left some place where they hailed a couple of taxis to take them home. In all the confusion of people piling into the cabs, he ended up standing on the corner watching the big yellow taxi pulling away.

I asked him if he knew where he lived. He said, “Riverside Drive.” New Yorkers know that Riverside drive goes on for many blocks, but he didn’t know the building number, or even the cross street. He did, however, know his phone number. I dialed from my flip phone, but got an answering machine that just said to leave a message. I didn’t leave a message.

I told him that we were going to call the police; that they would be able to help. I gave our location and description to the 911 operator. While we were waiting for the police to arrive, the doorman for the club came over and said some reassuring words to a very frightened little boy.

In less than five minutes an NYPD RMP pulls up in front of the club. Two uniformed officers get out. Squatting down to the eye level of a five-year-old, in the distinct New York City patois, one of the cops asks the boy what happened. The kid tells the story of everyone else getting in the cabs, leaving him on the corner. “Wow,” says the cop in his New York accent. “Dats jest like

Home Alone!” “I know!” says the kid.



The Power of Awareness

Gary Illiano Aikido 3rd Dan



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Taking It Slower by Ken Watanabe Iaido Chief Instructor

Nowadays we like to hurry. We like everything fast. Even I like the convenience of faster internet speed, faster wait times at fast food drive-thrus, and overnight delivery. For many of us, fast is often a good thing.

When people think of martial arts, the same mentality often applies. “Look how fast they do the technique! They must be good.” Speed equals mastery. Or, does it?

Speed can be a good thing. However, when we practice too fast for our level, we lose an important part of the training. When we get too excited and hurry, we can lose concentration in large segments of our movement. For example, if we sneeze while driving, during that sneeze our car travels farther going 60 MPH than if we were going 20 MPH. That is a long stretch to be unaware of what’s happening on the road.

The more we hurry, the bigger the lapse of mindfulness in our technique. Going slower while practicing maintains our concentration and energy: it becomes easier to see any mistakes that are being made in our technique.

When we move slower during training, we are trying to familiarize ourselves with the whole movement, but at the same time, trying to imbue as much concentration and mindfulness into our movement as possible.

In Iaido, we are supposed to practice the technique very slowly. We are trying to become aware of every little thing in the technique: our foot work, how the sword is moving, how our opponent is attacking us and reacting to our movement, everything. Even when teaching the basic overhead cut in Japanese swordsmanship, we first emphasize the sword’s correct movement while developing focus and concentration. The sword cut is practiced slowly at first, emphasizing correct movement and control. This develops the cut’s proper movement, and when speed and strength develop naturally with the proper movement and focus, the cut becomes an effective technique.

In weapons work, the technique is not judged by the practitioner’s strength and speed, but rather by the quality of the movement, as well as the movement’s focus and control. Anyone can hurry through the technique, flail about, and use too much muscle, while sacrificing their balance and posture, but perfecting the weapon’s movement shows one’s true skill.

Even in Chinese martial arts, when Furuya Sensei’s good friend, Master Hsu taught us how to punch, instead of going harder and faster, he admonished us to “punch slower.” To a beginner who just joined martial arts, this advice seems counterproductive. Punch slower? How is that going to work? That is only the beginner’s impatience and shallow view of the technique. The student’s move-



ment, concentration and energy must first be correct in order to derive the most effectiveness out of the punch. This helps the student become aware of how to use their entire body when punching, not just thinking about using their hands.

Practicing slower helps us focus on the correctness of the movement, and this correctness carries over to when we start using more speed and power. As the technique's movement becomes more familiar to us, our speed and strength can develop naturally

while maintaining the same level of energy and concentration.

Without the proper practice, too much speed becomes sloppy. Too much speed makes it too easy to gloss over our mistakes. Going faster might feel like you're getting good quickly, but in the end what do you have? Unfocused movement without real meaning. Getting good in the technique isn't just physical training, but mental and spiritual training, as well. Take it slower. It's the quicker way to mastery. •



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The cop gets out his cell and calls the kids number. He leaves a message and his cell number as a call back number on the home answering machine. “C’mon,” he says to the kid. “Less get in my car and see if we can find dem. Dare prolly jest as scared as you cause dey lost you, and dey might be rouh here lookin for you.” “Okay,” says the kid. They walk over to the RMP, get in, and drive off.

I never heard what happened, but I like to think it got sorted out with a happy reunion.

When my 10-year-old grandson Chase comes to visit us in our apartment in Pasadena, California, we play a little game. It doesn’t have a name or anything; it is just something we do when we walk the dog around our block. In the square block that contains our apartment building, there are about a dozen and a half businesses. So we go out, walk the perimeter of our block, and try to remember what is there. As we go, we name the four streets that surround the block, and try and remember all the businesses and the names, like the hair salon, the sandwich shop, the vitamin store, and the bank. As we walk past each of them we mindfully notice these places and their names. When we get back, we see how much we can remember. The more you play the game, the easier it gets.

I like to think that through this exercise my grandson is learning to be more aware of his surroundings than he might otherwise be. He has his own phone number and address memorized, but not ours. If for some unthinkable reason he were to separate from us, or need to summon help for us, he would certainly have a better chance of a successful outcome from being able to describe the surroundings in detail to, for example, a local police officer.

I believe most people are too busy and too hassled to notice their surroundings much, or at all. Also, people have come to rely on technology to replace learning, to their detriment. We have a couple of signs outside the dojo that identify us as an Aikido school. We had a guy come in a few weeks ago who said that although he

drives along North Main Street twice a day, he never knew we were here. He came after looking up the address online, entering it into his phone, and following the directions of the map application.

As martial artist, knowing your environment is another component of training, another arrow in your quiver, just like knowing martial techniques and being in good physical condition. How useful is it to throw down your attacker with a flawless wrist technique, outrun his buddies looking for revenge, only to wind up in a dead-end alley because you didn’t know the lay of the land? Wouldn’t you want your police officers to know the streets of their beat? Your firemen to know where the fire hydrants are? Your ambulance driver to know where the nearest emergency room is?

I once heard a 911 tape of a woman whose infant had just stopped breathing. After several minutes the operator asked the cop what his ETA was. His reply, “I’ve got the Hagstrom’s open now” referring to a popular street atlas of the day. He wasn’t even on the way. Fortunately, the baby started breathing again on its own, but I would not have wanted to be the guy who didn’t get there before the baby died because I didn’t know where the house was.

I believe there are people whose work requires them to be completely knowledgeable about their environment as a matter of life or death. A commando on a secret mission in enemy territory, or an intelligence operative under surveillance in a foreign capital do operate in environments where they may literally have to run for their lives. They do take the time to thoroughly learn their environment so they make it back home when things go south.

As martial artists, awareness of the environment seems to be somewhat critical. I don’t believe that most of us need to operate at the life or death level, but becoming more aware of your environment, I have found, leads to a richer, more meaningful life experience. It only takes awareness. It might mean slowing down, putting away electronic distractions, or making time in a hectic day to “stop and smell the roses.” Who knows, someday it might provide you with the opportunity to help someone in real trouble, while the people around you stand searching for a signal on their cell phones. •



Reigi Saho – Harmony and Peace by Rev. Kenso Furuya

If offered a diamond, each of us would gladly accept this great treasure. However, if we were to take a diamond and hold it tightly in our hands all day long, soon our hand would get very tired and begin to hurt. We may even reach a point with all the pain that we no longer even desire the diamond.

This idea of holding on to a diamond too tightly is the same theory with holding an idea in the mind too strongly. The only difference is that the mind doesn't express all the pain in a physical way as we would feel with our bodies – but nonetheless the pain and strain is all still there.

Today, we are so interested in comparing and analyzing our Aikido practice and thinking what is “best” and what is “different.” In our own polite way, we are still competing with others and are continuing to attempt to outdo others. In this case, we can only measure success and accomplishment by how we can beat others or jump ahead of them. In this sense, we bring our modern competitive world into the “sacred and pure” of the dojo.

When this happens, we must ask ourselves, “What is the purpose of our practice and what are we seeking in Aikido?” Every day, we talk about peace and harmony, but with this underlying competitive idea, peace and harmony never show up in our practice or in our lives. Thus, we can see that in some or many ways, we are still competitive, economic animals who can only measure the world numbers or by the almighty dollar sign.

Eventually, once we get tired of fighting or competing, we realize that we must seek what is truly important and real in our lives. Some of these things which are important like peace and harmony cannot be touched but if we try, we can realize them without a doubt. As a person who practices Aikido, we should not compromise our lives or give in to popular notions and trends. The way of Aikido is one that lives a quiet life without strife and without the need to compete with others – and practices Aikido seeking higher values in life without the need to step on others.

Living the way of Aikido consists of a life that has a relationship with *reigi saho* or politeness. *Reigi saho* is a natural emotion, one that doesn't have to be learned or pounded into us. It is also not a form of abuse or oppression and it is neither a hierarchy nor feudalism. *Reigi Saho* is the natural expression of one's heart. The truth of our hearts is that we want to live in harmony and peace not strife and conflict. The ultimate form of harmony and peace is in the valuing of the lives of others and our hearts and minds are not filled with the conflict of value, money, profit, advantage, or self and personal politics.

The other day, I was making an appointment to meet someone and one my students informed me that had this person had suddenly passed away. Although, I did not know this person and I have never met him, I was still shocked and saddened to hear that he had died. This kind of sadness and sympathy naturally springs from one's heart naturally and spontaneously – it is only natural and is the original form of *reigi saho*. This is typical and true with every human being, but I only give my own personal example here.

Last week, when everyone saw the tragedy and horror of the London bombings, everyone naturally felt rage and anger that such a thing can happen. This sense of righteousness and justice is also the natural, spontaneous form of *reigi saho* but the first thought should not be righteousness, but of sadness and empathy that humans are suffering both victims and perpetrators. *Reigi saho* enables us to see each person as someone who suffers and thus we are able to see their suffering and realize their humanity.

When we are in the dojo, we are taught that we must be nice to each other and cooperate and create a friendly atmosphere in practice, this is how we practice to understand *reigi saho* which we will eventually use in our daily lives. When we can naturally observe the tenets of *reigi saho* in our daily lives this is truly the highest expression of Aikido and our true and natural selves.

Editor's note: *Furuya Sensei published this article in a slightly different form on his Daily Message blog on July 14, 2005.*

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

April - May 2019 Dojo trip to Japan	June 29 (Saturday) Intensive seminar
May 25 (Saturday) Intensive seminar	July 4 (Thursday) Special Holiday Class 9:30 AM
May 27 (Monday) Memorial Day Dojo Closed	July 27 (Saturday) Intensive seminar

The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles (ACLA) admit students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, 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

居合道 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**

Is the Official publication of the
Aikido Center of Los Angeles

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The Aikido Center of Los Angeles
has been awarded Official *Konin* recognition by the Aikikai Foundation, Aikido World Headquarters.

We are committed to the study and practice of the teachings of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba and his legitimate successors, Kisshomaru Ueshiba and the present Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba.

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.

The Aikido Center of Los Angeles
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