



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Inner Work, Outer Beauty

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Climbing Mount Tsukuba

Though many are the lofty mountains
In the cock-crowing Eastland of Azuma,
Fame has told of Mount Tsukuba,
Since the age of the gods,
As the noble mountain throning god and goddess,
The beautiful mountain with two peaks,
For men to climb to overlook the land.
So, if I do not climb it now—
Though winter's close
Is not the time for climbing—
I shall miss it greatly;
So, laboring up the thawing paths,
I have reached the summit.

— Manyoshu, III:382-3

Azuma Gorge
by Kawase Hasui

Difficult Gratefulness

by David Ito Aikido Chief Instructor

Long ago, before I became a black belt, I was outside the dojo after class talking with another student. This other student was trying to talk me into joining a local Shotokan Karate class with him. This student was my senior so I was listening intently as he outlined how cross-training in Karate would make me a better Aikidoist. I didn't know anything about *budo* let alone the martial arts so I just listened. At one point, Furuya Sensei rounded the corner on his way back from the temple. We both stopped talking and bowed to him as he passed us on his way into the dojo. I didn't think anything of it until the next day when Sensei called me into his office. I had never been in Sensei's office or had spoken to him privately so I was very nervous. He asked me what we were talking about. Nervously I blurted out, "We were talking about how Aikido doesn't really work and that we needed to take Karate to win fights." I cringed; it just came out. Sensei got so mad and chastised me for not knowing anything about Aikido. He lectured me for what felt like hours and I almost passed out because I stood at attention with my knees locked out for too long. Sensei said something which has stuck with me for almost 30 years now. Sensei said, "Aikido is not about strength, power or winning. It is about being a human being."

When we look at Aikido from a superficial standpoint, it is easy to let our egos run wild as we ponder good and bad, right and wrong, or effective or ineffective. When we think in these dualistic terms, we are moving away from O'Sensei's philosophy of *masakatsu agatsu* or in other words "the truest victory is the victory over one's self."

Here is an excerpt from an interview where O'Sensei talks about *masakatsu agatsu*:

In Aikido, there is absolutely no attack. To attack means that the spirit has already lost. We adhere to the principle of absolute non-resistance, that is to say, we do not oppose the attacker. Thus, there is no opponent in aikido. The victory in aikido is *masakatsu agatsu* (correct victory, self-victory); since you win over everything in accordance with the mission of heaven, you possess absolute strength.

Reading this we can begin to see where our Aikido training is supposed to be heading. The opponent does not really exist but only as a point of reference. Their attack is then only a method of measuring where we are on the journey towards achieving *masakatsu agatsu*.

When we contend with our attacker then we have already lost our Aikido. With contention usually comes our egos and soon after that anger, hatred and mindlessness. If we can embrace our attacker and harmonize with them then that usually comes with calmness, compassion and mindfulness.

The question sometimes arises as to "Why do we care what happens to our opponent?" In understanding humanity, we realize the universal oneness and that the opponent and I are one in the same. Therefore, if I am suffering then everyone is also suffering too. With that understanding, because we suffer we realize that the person confronting us is no different and only engaging us

because they are suffering. We do not wish to be destroyed when we act out of ignorance when we are suffering and therefore we should not destroy others when they are suffering. Therefore, when we do not resist there is no opponent. With this understanding, Sensei's assertion becomes true that the study of Aikido is really to learn about humanity.

Our opponents are then just an opportunity for our growth. Being reverent or grateful for one's situation or one's adversary is a very old *budo* teaching and we can see it as far back as 1282, the year after the second Mongolian invasion of Japan. Hojo Tokimune led the army which repelled the Mongolians and a year after the invasion, he built Engakuji Temple as a monument to both the Japanese and Mongolians who lost their lives in those battles. Tokimune was an ardent follower of Buddhism and understood the idea that all beings possess Buddha nature. Buddha nature is the understanding that all beings have love, compassion and kindness within them and thus the potential to become enlightened and with this understanding, our opponent is no different from us. After the battle is over and once a person has lost their life their allegiances and differences fade away. All that is left is a human being who found themselves on the other side of the battlefield and was only doing their best. Both of us possess loyalty and dedication and as D.T.

Suzuki wrote, "Our enemies are as faithful to their cause as we are to ours and this sentiment when genuine is to be revered." What it took for that person to rise to the level to meet us as equals on the battlefield is the same qualities which are imbued in us, and thus we are the same. When that person falls on the battlefield, we mourn and respect them because they gave us the opportunity to develop ourselves and are therefore worthy of our gratitude.

The situation or the attacker are then only an opportunity for our growth and thus worthy of our appreciation. O'Sensei once said, "Be grateful even for hardship, setbacks, and bad people. Dealing with such obstacles is an essential part of training in the Art of Peace." From this idea we can understand that difficult people and situations will never go away, but come to us as means of training. They are the test to see if in fact we have truly embraced the Art of Peace.

In November in the United States we celebrate our Thanksgiving. But what are we really thankful for? It is easy to be thankful when the circumstances are positive or going in our favor. It is much harder to be thankful when things are difficult, to understand that they are only that way for our own self-cultivation. This is the path in the Art of Aikido. Being able to give thanks when things or people are difficult is the truest test of O'Sensei's philosophy of non-violence and *masakatsu agatsu*.

Sensei was right. Aikido is the study of what it means to be a human being. Please be kind to everyone you meet because each person is on their own journey and going through their own situations, but aren't we all? If we are all in fact one, then even those who oppose us on the battlefield of life deserve our kindness, compassion and forgiveness – this is the way of Aikido. This is the way of *Masakatsu agatsu*. •





Responsibility of Teaching

by Santiago Garcia Almaraz *Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai*

More than 20 years ago, after training with Furuya Sensei for some time, he instructed me to form a dojo and to begin teaching Aikido. I found teaching to be very overwhelming and confusing because I didn't have any background in teaching and he didn't tell me directly "how" to teach. Sensei was a traditional teacher which meant that I was expected to watch him and the other instructors carefully and figure out what to do on my own.

I understand now that teaching is important way for students to expand their understanding of Aikido and continue evolving within the art, but above all else, teaching is form of serving others. To serve others enriches us and develops us in a way that only practicing will we never achieve.

Teaching does not replace training, but it is a natural evolution of learning. Obviously one has to have a certain amount of technical training so as to be qualified to lead a class.

Teaching necessitates that we be careful about how and what we are teaching. Having an understanding about how the techniques work and their execution is paramount to transmitting it as clearly so that the student understands it. Obviously we can't just want to be in front of the class. We have to develop ourselves technically as best as we can so as to transmit Aikido correctly.

A good teacher always teaches within the bounds of their own capability. Thus, we must avoid teaching techniques that we are not thoroughly acquainted with which could confuse or create misunderstandings for the students.

When we teach, we must be aware of who is taking our class and their capabilities. This allows us to adjust the class accordingly because we are aware of what the students can and cannot do, what their deficiencies are and what we may need to adapt. With this awareness comes the ability to truly "see" the students and will enable them to improve not only appropriately but quickly. This can be difficult, but being aware is a large part of not only life but also in Aikido training.

Teaching requires attention and care of the student because they are coming with the purpose of learning something. With this intention, we must be patient and consistent, so the student has time to assimilate what we are teaching. It can be frustrating when the student can't do exactly what we want at first, but this is part of one's training and it takes time to develop patience. Aikido can be very complicated to do and to teach and we all need some time to learn and to make mistakes, but with time and constancy everyone will gradually find their way.

Continued on page 6...

If Furuya Sensei emphasized anything in class, it was the practice of good footwork or *ashi-sabaki*. *Ashi-sabaki* is one of the most important aspects of Aikido let alone any martial arts technique. In the past, footwork was so important that in good Kung-Fu schools, teachers only taught the real footwork to their most trusted students and only after a long period of time. It was thought that if the student knew the footwork that they could someday defeat the teacher.

In Aikido, it's a little bit different. In our dojo, footwork is one of the first things taught to a beginning student. Of course, if one is observant then they'll notice that the footwork in Aikido isn't all that complicated. In *irimi*, we step forward (sometimes we step sideways at a right angle), we rotate our body by stepping back to our rear in *tenkan* or we step backward to fade toward our rear in *tenshin*.

However, footwork is more than trying to follow the movements like dance step footprints on the ground like in an Arthur Murray floor diagram. It is not only *where* we place our feet but *how* we do it.

Training our feet to move properly was very important to Sensei. He always emphasized a deep *irimi* movement. This, of course, made practicing the techniques more difficult than we might have liked. It seemed like we could never *irimi* or move forward deep enough without being scolded. Sensei said that in Kisaburo Osawa Sensei's classes all he ever said was "deeper" and "more." After hearing Sensei's admonishments and many years later I finally realized the value of footwork in developing this kind of movement.

If we step like we're walking down the street in Aikido, our legs won't move with the proper energy and intention. If our feet, the foundation of our hips, move with no energy then our *tanden*, or "center," won't have the proper energy. If our hips don't have the proper energy and focus, then our upper body won't be stable. In short, the power from the earth will not be able to extend into our entire body and we won't be able to generate the proper energy or generate power.

When stepping, it's important to step with the feeling that we are stretching our legs. In fact, when we *irimi*, the feeling should be that our legs are stretching as much as they can – our front leg stretching forward as our back leg stretching back propelling our body forward.

Even when we pause in the technique to check ourselves, we should remember to maintain that stretching feeling so our energy stays alive or what people refer to as *zanshin*. *Zanshin* liter-

ally translates as "remaining mind" and in this context means the continuation of one's concentration in the technique after the movement has stopped. With this mindset, our movement continues even as the movement itself seems to physically pause or stop.

At the same time, when we move and are stretching out our legs, we should also be practicing moving with stability. We do that by stepping with the bottom of our feet skimming or brushing the surface of the *tatami*. When stepping, it is best to not lift our foot off the *tatami* and casually plop our foot down. That kind of step has no meaning.

The Secret is the Footwork

by Ken Watanabe *laido* Chief Instructor



In Aikido, each step has a purpose. In swordsmanship, people often say *itto issoku*, or "one cut, one step" and so when we cut, we cut with our feet. Our feet deliver the attack to our opponent. Without our footwork, we'd just be cutting empty air. Likewise, in Aikido, when we throw our partner, we should throw with our feet and body moving as a whole, displacing our opponent's balance, allowing us to move and throw.

Proper footwork creates the energy that's moving our body to unbalance and throw our partner, but it is important in many different other ways. It helps us to get our body into a position so that we can blend with the attack. Footwork helps us to determine if

our body movement and positioning is aligned with our opponent's attack. It's also important to see how the direction in which we step determines our spacing with our partner as well as keeping the connection with them.

O'Sensei, the founder of Aikido, was said to be able to move across a room to engage an opponent in seemingly one step. What this means is that when O'Sensei threw his opponent, their body was also being displaced across the space of that room. This kind of footwork is very hard for us to understand, yet Sensei said that a good Aikidoka should be able to move the length of one *tatami* mat or six feet in one stride, if necessary.

It's important to remember that the power of Aikido doesn't come purely from physical strength; at its most basic, it originates from the energy and strength of our footwork and how we allow that energy to permeate to our entire body, unfettered, as we do the technique.

The footwork in Aikido might appear free and easy, but its dynamic nature hides its precision, focus and power. Footwork is the secret to Aikido and thus good footwork, or footwork grounded in the basics, is the key to getting good at Aikido. •



Michael Stinson 1970-2019

Earlier this month, Michael Stinson passed away. I watched this video documentary on Star Wars and something in the section on Mentors reminded me of Michael and his passing. In that section, the narrator states:

Yoda, Qui-gon, Obi-wan. In mythic tradition, these three characters share the role of mentor. Part wizard, part priest, part surrogate parent. Mentors give philosophical and spiritual guidance to the hero. They often possess almost magical powers that reflect a lifetime of study, discipline and acquired wisdom. Usually, the mentor performs another important duty early in the hero's journey; he must present him with a special gift or idea - the wisdom of some sort of discernment. The light saber can cut but so can discernment. This is sorting out life. Being able to make out those distinctions allows the hero to move forward in the story. Unfortunately, during the hero's journey, the mentor cannot stay forever. It is crucial that the help not stay there - that they either leave or die or we would never know that we have in fact taken in the teaching. [We realize that] the mentor is now within and I am able to survive. Star Wars shows that as valuable as the mentor student relationship is ultimately we will outlive it.



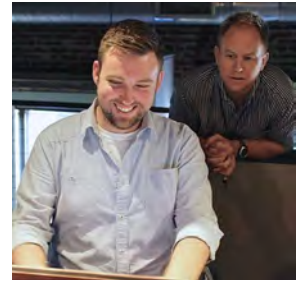
many other small details that he helped change in the dojo.

Michael was an old school *budo* warrior who just happened to specialize in typography. He was a graphic designer extraordinaire with a very verbose list of professional accomplishments that I only realized after his passing. Most recently, he also spent a lot of time teaching and mentoring other designers and lecturing on typography at places like Facebook, Disney and Blizzard, to name just a few.

Michael was a good friend to me and a huge proponent of our dojo. Some of you may have trained with him on the mat and some of you may not know him at all, but everyone has seen his touch around the dojo as he was the mastermind behind our new newsletter layout, our new website and influencer of

Michael was a teacher's teacher and we seemed to just click the moment he joined the dojo. We bonded over dinner while lamenting over traditional teaching and learning and trying to figure out what motivates the students of today. Michael is someone that Furuya Sensei really would have liked because Michael had such a good understanding of the Way despite his short time in the dojo.

It is said that a good teacher only shines light on the path for others illuminating the way for those who wish to go farther. After Michael's passing, I saw his influence as a teacher first hand in the outpouring of stories by his former students who credited their time with him as a major stepping stone to their current successes. Sensei once said, "A teacher is considered a success if they can find one true student in their lifetime." Based on Sensei's assertion and all the successful students who credited Michael as being the teacher who changed their lives, I'd say he was a huge success.



These two pictures typify Michael. As good as Michael was, he didn't want to be the person in the front beating his chest telling the world how good he was. Instead, Michael wanted to be the person who, from the shadows, helped others find not only their voice, but also their way in life. As a teacher, Michael was strict and unyielding, but in a gentle but stern way which helped to



coax a person to their highest level. I know this to be true because he did this for me in so many ways.

Michael was an Obi-wan type of teacher and like Obi-wan, he

brought wisdom and guidance to so many but also like Obi-wan his stay was short but had a huge impact. Michael was there when so many needed him and he taught and guided a great deal of us. On Michael's forearm the Latin word *a fortiori* was tattooed, which meant "with good reason." I know in my heart that Michael was needed somewhere else and so "with good reason" he needed to leave this world.

Michael's passing can be a reminder to love and cherish one another, but it also reminds us to live our lives to its fullest because we never know where our lives will come to an end. Michael's life inspires us to settle for mediocre work and that anything worth doing is worth doing well but not just for ourselves but also for the world as well.

I am deeply saddened by Michael's passing and my deepest sympathies go out to his wife Rachel and his daughter Melanie. I miss Michael dearly but I feel blessed to have known him and to call him my friend. I know I will see him on the other side, but for now, be at peace my friend. •

by David Ito



Responsibility of Teaching *continued from page 3...*

Anyone can teach a student with special gifts or talents and on a certain level there is no merit in teaching only students who are “special.” Our obligation as teachers is to help each and every student to grow within their own possibilities despite all of their talents, virtues or limitations.

Most classes will usually have many different types of students with many differing degrees of skills, knowledge or learning styles. We all learn differently, at different speeds or have different skills or abilities – no one is better than the other. The one who teaches has to be aware of this and do their best to teach each different type so that each person gets what they need so that they can improve.

Teaching is not a means to stroke one’s ego but is an opportunity to help and serve others. Sensei once wrote, “We get everything handed to us on a silver platter – yet we have no awareness that we must, in turn, serve others with this same silver platter.” Serving others enriches us and develops us in a way that only practicing never will.

It is said that “everything in Aikido and in the dojo has a purpose.” This implies that we need to take responsibility or take ownership of every aspect of teaching as a teacher and every as-

pect of learning as a student. With this responsibility or ownership means being mindful of our punctuality, cleanliness of the dojo and what we are teaching but also take in consideration about the care and compassion for what we are doing.

Furuya Sensei once wrote:

A Sensei exists for one’s practice and training and to understanding the Way. As my Zen master always used to say, “We are only stepping stones for our students.” It is hard to reach Aikido in one leap. Both the teacher and the student are stepping stones as my Zen master used to say, to reach this horizon. It is in this way that the student and teacher can learn and share in the dojo. In a funny way, without the student’s desire to cross, the stone is just a stone and not a special “stepping stone.” Without the stone, the student may never cross over. This is a funny way, I think, to describe the interdependent relationship between student and teacher. I hope you can understand my point.

As a teacher, like my teacher, I am just a stepping stone for the future of Aikido. Teaching is a natural evolution of a student’s progress, but it is a privilege. It is a privilege because what we do or don’t do has a direct impact on the development of future good teachers and future good people. •

In the process of polishing a Japanese sword, there are two basic steps: the first is called *shita-ji* which literally means “ground work” and is the basic step of grinding away the flaws, correcting the shape of the blade and giving it an edge. Although this is the first step, this step is the most important and takes the most skill. This is where all of the labor and hard work are applied. Once the ground work is good then the blade goes through the second step or *shi-age* or “final polish” which is where the final beauty of the sword is brought out. If the ground work is not done competently, however one uses their skill, the final polish will never come out well.

This process of *shita-ji* and *shi-age* can be easily related to our Aikido practice. If one masters the “fundamental” or *kihon-waza* techniques of Aikido, it is rather easy to perform advanced or very difficult techniques because everything is based on the ground work of one’s *kihon* or “fundamental” practice.

Even if we try to do difficult or fancy techniques, if we do not master the basics, these techniques will never be executed expertly. Like polishing a fine sword, or applying lacquer or creating a beautiful patina to metal such as a sword guard, everything is based on the initial *shita-ji* ground work.

In studying Japanese art, we learn to recognize the *shi-age* outer beauty of the work but we also learn to understand how well the inner *shita-ji* workmanship has been executed or how well it has been constructed or put together. This concept of *shita-ji* and *shi-age* is present in almost every traditional Japanese art. In ceramics, when one is throwing a bowl or vase, the clay must be prepared properly and this often takes much longer and involves more effort than actually throwing the vase itself. If the clay is not properly prepared, the final glaze will not hold or the whole piece will not do well in the firing. In lacquer work as well, if the surface is not prepared properly, the application of the lacquer will be difficult and the desired result will never be achieved properly.

In many ways, human beings and Aikido training follow these same rules. We often judge a person by their outer *shi-age* appearances only but we never try to understand the inner *shita-ji* of a person. Sometimes, the outer *shi-age* appearance of the bowl looks very good but many times, because the *shita-ji* is not constructed well that we begin to see problems.

In a good *tsuka-maki* or “handle wrap” on a Japanese sword, for instance, the binding only gets better as one uses it more and more. This means that the basic work has been properly executed. Sometimes, a sword handle wrap looks good at first, but

when you begin to use it, it unravels or begins to look bad because we see that they started off with inferior materials.

Many, many years ago, I tried to encourage a new black belt by allowing him to teach class. He was so full of confidence and had good strength so he began to study other martial arts on the sly thinking that it would improve his own Aikido or impress everyone around him. He thought that he could hide his other training

but it clearly showed up in his Aikido. Of course, when I could no longer have him teach class, he immediately quit the dojo. For many students, it never occurs to them that studying Aikido more is the better and only way to improve one’s Aikido. We always think that “more of something else is always better.” Maybe most people can understand the *shi-age* because it is the most obvious and easiest to see but most people cannot see the underlying *shita-ji* or the underlying quality. This is an essential and important quality to develop in one’s training and in all things, I believe.

I sometimes see black belts trying to jam beginning students in Aikido practice. Competing in strength and trying to show off their strength to others, especially their juniors or those weaker, is not following the principles of Aikido at all. Sometimes,

those people think they are impressing me and everyone else, but it only makes me very sad and disappointed in them. I am not impressed, I only think, “How come they don’t know any better than that!” They may think they are impressing others by showing off their strength or knowledge but in this case, the cheap *shi-age* cannot hide at all the faulty and improper *shita-ji* lying below.

No matter how beautiful the outside skin of the watermelon is, the true test is the taste inside. How disappointing it is to pick the nicest looking watermelon in the store and take it home only to find out that the taste inside is so bad and not what you expected at all. This also holds true for human beings as well. To forge and develop one’s inner self is the same as preparing the *shita-ji*. If we truly train our inner self well then the *shi-age* or final polish of ourselves will always come out beautifully.

Think of yourself as a beautiful sword to be polished. Focus on your *shita-ji* by following all the steps and forging your inner self. Naturally, when your *shita-ji* is good your *shi-age* or final polish will be good and your true humanity will shine through in the future. •

Editor’s note: *Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on April 11, 2002.*

Inner Work, Outer Beauty

by Rev. Kensho Furuya



UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

November 27-28 Dojo Closed: Thanksgiving	December 22 (Sunday) Children's Class Christmas Party
November 29 (Friday) Special Black Friday Class	December 28 (Saturday) Last Intensive Seminar
November 30 (Saturday) Intensive seminar	December 23-27 Dojo Closed: Christmas
December 7 (Saturday) Dojo Christmas Party	December 30 (Monday) Osame Keiko – Last practice of the year
December 8 (Sunday) Michael Stinson Memorial	December 30 (Monday) Bonenkai Party – Forget the year party
December 14 (Saturday) Osoji Year-end clean-up	December 31– January 3 Dojo Closed: New Year's

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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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.

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

Affiliated Dojos of the Aikido Center of Los Angeles



Aikido La Gomera Aikikai
Kodokai Dojo



Aikido
Salamanca Aikikai
Kodokai Dojo



Aikido Valladolid Aikikai
Kodokai Dojo



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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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