



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

2

We Are Not Alone

By David Ito

Ito Sensei expounds on the myth of fighting alone.

4

How It looks

by Ken Watanabe

Watanabe Sensei explains how we dress says a lot about us.

7

The Origins of Teachings

by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Furuya Sensei discusses the two different philosophies of Japan.



The New Normal

Walking along a narrow path,
Listening to the far off
Fulling-block

- Buson

小路ゆけば
遠く聞ゆる
砧かな

- 蕪村

Sometimes, when we were struggling, Furuya Sensei would often admonish us by saying, “The Way is hard.” The Way (道) or “do” itself is not “hard” but what makes it hard is how we perceive the journey.

Examining Buson’s haiku, it can teach us a different way to perceive our journey as we follow its path. I would imagine that Buson was out walking when, in the distance, he heard someone hitting a *kinuta* and it inspired him to write this haiku. A *kinuta* or “fulling block” is a kind of wooden mallet that the Japanese used to use to wash clothes. The process of washing clothes was to hit the cloth with a wooden mallet against a piece of wood. Repeatedly hitting the clothes with a *kinuta* would not only clean the clothes, but also give the fabric a shiny quality. My interpretation of this haiku is through the lens of a martial artist. The first line “walking along a narrow path” is about the difficulty in following a Way like Aikido. The second line “listening to the far off” is about the solitariness of following the Way. The last line is supposed to conjure up the sound, in this case the beating of the mallet, which brings us back to reality.

When I think of this haiku, it reminds me of the old dojo. Whenever I was late to the dojo, as I approached the class already in session, I could hear the rhythmic thumping of students being thrown down. Sometimes, I would take a minute and stand outside listening to the rhythmic pounding. Listening to the pounding was kind of pleasant and, in a way, it brought me some solace. It was comforting to know that there were other people pursuing the Way just like me. This momentary pause and realization would often cause me to get excited and made me rush in train quicker. This same phenomenon happens whenever I go to Hombu Dojo in Japan. As I walk down the street approaching Hombu Dojo, I hear this same thumping rhythm of the students hitting the mats and it is one of my most favorite things.

Following the path of Aikido, or any martial art for that matter, is a solitary pursuit. After all, we alone have to put in the work. This often creates a feeling that we are *kogunfunto* (孤軍奮闘) or

“fighting alone.” On a certain level, it has to be this way or else we would be waiting for someone to guide us, show us or save us and we would not be putting the work in. That longing for someone to do it for us but having to do it ourselves is what makes the Way “hard.” The Way itself is not hard, but what is hard is finding the discipline to follow the Way.

Budo is supposed to be a singular activity because it is supposed to teach us *jiritsushin* (自立心) or “self-reliance.” The problem with too much self-reliance is that it can create a sense of loneliness. The feeling of loneliness of following the Way is conveyed as Buson walks by himself and hears the pounding of the *kinuta* or when I sit outside listening to the students rolling on the mats. When we hear the rhythmic pounding outside a dojo, it conjures up this idea that we are alone because we are not doing it. However, anyone who has heard the rhythmic pounding outside a dojo can tell you that it is quite enticing and that it inspires a bit of excitement.

The excitement comes from knowing that others are pursuing the Way too. As Buson listened longingly with loneliness in his heart, he heard the pounding and it brought him back to the moment. Buson must have realized that others are following their ways too as people had to be diligent and go out to the river and put in the effort to clean their clothes. In the same way, a martial artist has to solitarily put in the work but the sound of others hitting the mat reminds us that others are there too working on their Way.

We Are Not Alone



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

The Way is not exclusive. We might have to walk the path under our own power, but we are not alone. Hearing the *kinuta* Buson or pounding of the mats reminds us that we are not alone because others are doing it too.

The teacher is not a guru, but a guide and the other students aren’t there as bystanders but as willing combatants - everyone is there fighting their fight as you are fighting yours. Doing it together creates a common bond and realization that we, in fact, do not fight alone.

Sensei is correct, “the Way is hard” but the journey becomes much easier when we realize that we are not alone. A dojo is a community. It is a community of people who come together with the shared vision of developing themselves. Our loneliness abates as we realize that it is easier to get to the top of the mountain when we help others get there too. •



Many people approach the martial arts with the romantic idea of finding a superpower hidden deep within the martial art. Finding a superpower or ability will give them some sort of advantage above the ordinary person just like the characters that we see in movies or TV. It is almost a cliché that new students come into the dojo with their heads full of romantic ideas looking to find an old Asian man who speaks in proverbs who will somehow transmit all those secrets to them and they will in turn discover a world of magic or esotericism. The truth is that nothing could be farther from reality of studying a martial art. What is interesting to see is when they enter through the door and they find something more normal, more earthly, and perhaps less romantic than they had imagined. It can be a tough realization for some and can lead to disappointment.

In Furuya Sensei's book *Kodo* there is a quote that says, "the teacher knows that there are no secrets in the world, secrets are called like that in the hope that people will pay more attention to the teacher." When I first read it, I was confused but the more I train, the more I understand what Sensei was trying to say.

Sensei was trying to convey to the reader that there are no secrets in the martial arts, but that giving people "secrets" could possibly improve their desire to pay attention.

I remember one of the first times I realized that there are no secrets. In Iaido class, Sensei would often correct me by saying, "More sayabiki!" Sensei's words repeated this to me over and over again. Sayabiki is the pulling the sword off of the saya. Most

people mistakenly believe that the sword is taken out of the saya, but in Iaido that is it is the left hand that frees the sword from the saya. To execute a good noto or "sword draw, one needs to coordinate this complicated movement at a smooth but quick speed. Noto is very difficult to master especially in the first years of one's practice.

In one of my first Iaido classes, I was doing such a poor job at drawing the sword that Sensei came over to me and said, "The secret to Iaido is in the left hand." I was really trying to be sincere in my movements and I thought that I was pulling mainly with my left hand and not my right hand so I didn't see much

sense in his words. Sensei said, "More sayabiki!" to me so much that those words have haunted me in my practice and now I hear them whenever I do Iaido. Now, only

after many years of practice, I have begun to understand the importance of this "secret" that Sensei told me on how to make a good draw; more sayabiki.

Once I realized what Sensei was saying, I realized that secrets do not really exist in the martial arts. Actually, what happens is that in most cases we are not prepared to see what the teacher is trying to teach us. Therefore, the teaching is hidden from us because our perception

won't allow us to see the corrections, advice or teaching that the teacher is trying to teach us.

The teaching is hidden because our way of seeing things is hidden by our egos. Something becomes a secret because, as Sensei said, it makes us pay more attention to what it is we are doing.

Secrets



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

Continued on page 6...



In the West they say, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” This idiom warns us to not make assumptions about people based on their appearance, but people are naturally wired to do exactly that. Unconsciously, we make assumptions about people all the time, every day. In less civilized times, we had to be able to judge instantly whether a person approaching us was a friend or a foe. It was part of our survival mechanism.

Nowadays, life isn't so perilous, but we still need to know how to interact with that person who's about to sit down next to us at the bus stop. We look at what they are wearing, how they are wearing it, how they are walking, and in an instant decide, “This person is A-Ok,” or “I think I’ll take the next bus.”

We might see someone wear fluorescent pink to a wake or a gray flannel suit to the beach and dismiss them as weird, but is that fair? After all, it's what's on the inside that counts, right? Yes, and no.

Traditional martial arts training doesn't discriminate between appearance and state of mind; both internal and external are one and the same. In martial arts, how we carry ourselves and our focus are closely connected to and influence each other. One's appearance often reflects their focus, or lack of it.

In Kendo, the term for how a student wears their practice uniform is called *chakuso*. When we look at the first character in the

How it Looks



by Ken Watanabe
Technical Director

word, *chakuso* (着装). “chaku” (着) means “to don” or “wear.” That character is the same character used in the word *kimono* (着物). The second character *sou* (装) means “attire or dress.” Therefore, *chakuso* literally means “to don attire.”

Chakuso is used in Kendo to describe the manner in which kendoists put on their *keikogi* and *hakama* and their *bogu* or “protective armor” but also in how they appear when wearing the entire ensemble together. Correctly wearing one's uniform is an important part of one's martial arts etiquette.

Our appearance is also how grading panels judge our skill level and our understanding of the art during examinations. In fact, if our testing results are borderline, our *chakuso* can often be the deciding factor in whether or not we pass or fail an examination.

In a match, our opponent might first judge our strength by how we put on our uniform or the way in which we wear our uniform. If there is something wrong with the way we wear the uniform, it means there is probably something else that we have ignored in our training and, more often than not, it means there is an opening in our defense as well.

Continued on page 5...

How it Looks *continued from page 4...*

In Iaido examinations, one does not wear armor, but the testing candidates are being judged more than on their skill. They are also being judged on their appearance, including the way they walk, sit down, bow and sometimes even the spirit with which they do all of this.

The idea in *chakuso* is that the more experienced and knowledgeable the student is, the more put together and appropriate their “kit” will be. An experienced student is expected to know how to wear the uniform correctly. Once they understand how to wear it correctly, the training refines their sensibilities and they begin to consider other details like the proportions of the uniform, its balance, the quality of the uniform and its silhouette.

Eventually, the student develops their eye and their aesthetic sense, along with an instinct for recognizing what is good and what is of quality. Once a student can understand this, even a relatively inexpensive uniform can still be worn with grace in a refined and dignified manner.

Even in western style, it’s said that dressing well is good manners. Dressing well and appropriately shows that you care about the occasion and don’t want to make others feel uncomfortable. In western culture, our *chakuso* could be how we wear a suit for a job interview or for a wedding. It could also be how we would dress going to a baseball game or to a company picnic. On one hand we shouldn’t judge people on their appearance, but on the other hand, how one presents themselves often says plenty about them.

The attention to *chakuso* is also a practical one. If the uniform is worn incorrectly, or it is the wrong size, it might pose problems for training. A few years ago, I thought my flexibility was waning. It became more and more difficult to do the warm-up stretches. As it turns out, when I sized-up when buying a new pair of *keikogi* pants, I discovered that the reason for my flexibility problems were that my old *keikogi* pants were too tight and that they were hindering my range of movement!

Even if we don’t practice Kendo, Iaido, or need to wear a *hakama* or formal Japanese divided skirt to demonstrate, we still have to pay attention to our appearance. Are the pant legs of our uniform too long? Too short? Is the jacket too tight? Are the sleeves too long? Even the simple *koma musubi* or “square knot” we use for our training *obi* has a proper tying method and appearance. If the knot is tied incorrectly, it bunches up too much and causes the ends of the belt to fall awkwardly. But when tied correctly, it looks well-balanced, ties flat, and stays tied.

It seems unfair to judge someone’s level just by the way they wear their uniform, but martial arts training is designed that way. If we don’t care, (or if we don’t care to know), how could we be aware of what is correct, or what is incorrect? We might even feel something is wrong or amiss, but if we don’t care enough to

fix it then our training stops.

In my own experience, as the way I wore my uniform changed and become more proper, I discovered that it was one less thing distracting me. How one ties their training *obi*, ties the straps on their *hakama*, or inserts their sword into their belt may seem like a small, inconsequential thing, until it affects your training. Proper *chakuso* frees up our minds to focus solely on our training.



Learning how to wear the practice uniform properly seems like a lot of trouble, but when you think about it, it’s also a lot of trouble to practice how to make the cut in Japanese swordsmanship or to throw a perfect punch. If we care enough about one thing, that care will transfer over. Author Anais Nin said, “How you do one thing is how you do everything.” Thus, if our uniform is sloppy and unkempt, most likely our mind is in the same state.

Chakuso is more than just knowing how to put on the uniform correctly. When we look further into the meaning of the word, *chakuso*, the second character (装) also means “to pretend, to disguise, or to

affirm.” Does this mean that the strength and experience we show when wearing the uniform correctly makes us a fake? Are we just fooling ourselves and everyone watching us?

When we practice the aikido techniques, the *zanshin* or “finishing posture” is very important. There are several things we must think about to make it look correct. If our ending stance looks correct-- how we hold posture and our arms; how we put the correct energy is our stance-- then our mental stance will be correct. It is our mind that is telling our body to stand straight, how to position our hands, where our feet should be. Our focus is visible in our posture. Our finishing stance, like how we wear our practice uniform, is the disguise our mind wears to show its competency. We fake it until we can make it. A good finish is how we show how serious we are. Yet, if we are honest with ourselves, however correct our finish is, or however proper our uniform might appear, we know that our mind and spirit are still playing catch up.

Once our egos proudly declare that we have arrived at mastery, our progress stops. When we are humble enough to know that we are trying to emulate the next step in our training, then we can go farther. *Chakuso* is more than wearing the uniform correctly; it means that even though we appear strong and competent, inwardly we still know we have a long way to go and that there is more training to go. The physical technique is the easy part; the mind and spirit are the most difficult things to train.

They say when you copy the Buddha you become the Buddha. In *zazen* it’s said one assumes the same position as the Buddha when he became enlightened so as we meditate, we become the Buddha. In the same way, when we put on the practice uniform and don it correctly, we become that expert. Of course, we know that in both cases the reality is far from the truth, but that is why we train. •



Secrets continued from page...

Today, I am the teacher and struggle with ways to capture the attention of my students. When a new student starts Aikido, I find myself telling them the secrets but, like me, they cannot understand it. For instance, one secret is that in all Aikido classes begin with Tenkan Kokyu-ho and end with Kokyu Dosa. This is obviously no secret, but the truth is that it enables the student to focus and it gives them something to concentrate on since both techniques are quite difficult to execute and can be hard to understand the practical application. Thus, the students tend to just robotically go through the motions with these techniques. What they don't understand is that the more we examine both of these techniques carefully, the more we will discover their secrets and that they teach us many things about the fundamentals of Aikido, which will help us to progress in many of our other techniques.

In Tenkan Kokyu-ho, one of the first things we learn, among many other things, is the correct spacing with our uke. Later we learn things like timing, the timing with movement, how to rotate our bodies, moving from the hip and many other things. The practice of Tenkan gives us a solid and stable position from which to focus and concentrate our technique.

In Kokyu Dosa, we must perform it from seiza or while "seated on our knees." Practicing Kokyu Dosa from a kneeling position focuses our practice on our kokyu or "breath power." It is easy to think that Kokyu Dosa is done with the upper body and not the lower body. From the outside looking in, it is true but, as we move our upper bodies, especially our hands, arms and shoulders, we must synchronize our movement with our breathing and our breathing comes from the lower part of our bodies. In coordinating our upper bodies with our breathing, we learn how these movements destabilize, control and move our partners.

Both Tenkan Kokyu-ho and Kokyu Dosa are the basis for developing the rest of the techniques in Aikido. Both of these techniques are not "secrets," per se. Their secret is not hidden. Their secret is not some archaic practice that is reserved to be transmitted as some sort of secret final teaching. Their secret is that they are hidden from us because of our minds inability to see them. Their secret and all its information has been there from the first day and all we had to do is just look with our eyes, clear our minds and open our hearts in order to see them.

The secrets in the martial arts are revealed at the crossroads of being patient and consistent in our training. When we have applied ourselves, we will see the secrets hidden in plain view waiting to be discovered. •

I often discuss the teaching and learning process in Aikido, but I think that for most people, it is still a very mysterious and difficult concept to grasp.

As most people may already know, the two great philosophical traditions in Japanese thought and culture are Confucianism and Buddhism. These two ideologies are so ingrained within the culture and psychology of the Japanese people that even they themselves do not recognize it very much in the way that they think and view life which originated from these two schools of philosophical thought. If we were to speak to a modern Japanese person today and tell them that their thinking and outlook was very much Confucian and Buddhist - they may deny it strongly saying that they have never studied or had an interest in either of these two philosophies!

These methods of teaching have been handed down in Japanese culture since the beginning of their civilized history. In Confucianism, teaching follows Confucius' famous statement: "If I show the student three corners, I expect them to come up with the fourth." In Confucianist teachings, there is the idea of the model gentleman-scholar in society and the idea that the society can reach a state of order and justice if we follow the way of the ancients with respect to the ideas of honor, respect, duty, courage, and filial piety which were held in high regard in those times. Even today, we see this idea of high respect for seniority and age. Yet, the "fourth corner" leaves room for the student's own creativity energy and tests their critical thought process to develop ideas on their own.

In Zen Buddhism, there is another all-pervading concept of learning and instruction which became the basis for Zeami's treatise known as *The Kadensho and Fushi Kaden* which dealt with the concepts of learning and grasping an art. Zeami wrote his treatise at a time when many of the traditional fine arts, as we know them today, were beginning to form in Japan in the 14th century. Zeami's thoughts have become the basis of traditional learning in Japan and even in today's modern society, we still see evidence of this.

Many of Zeami's ideas came from the Zen Buddhist saying, "Beyond words and written scriptures, pointing directly into one's heart." What is sought in the traditional Japanese arts is the conveying (transmission) of the art from "heart to heart"

without words.

This is a reference to the Buddha's final sermon, when after finishing his sermon, he silently held up a flower. Mahakashyapa, his most senior student, understood the meaning instantly and the Buddha looked at him and smiled.



The Origins of Teachings



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

used by mountain priests and those who practice ascetics. Paired together, the design refers to the deep connection of military arts and spiritual discipline. In this piece the conch shell is missing - but if we are initiated into the Yagyu teachings, we understand that this is supposed to be there - only "hidden" or implied. An uninitiated person would only see the design alluding to warfare - the Yagyu student would understand that this is deeply connected to spiritual training (represented by the conch shell horn) which is not represented. With the Yagyu tsuba, the "absence" of the significant "conch shell horn" in the design is the "implied" meaning of "spirituality" along with martial training (battle baton) gives impact and energy to the message.

In our training, we must learn to see what is there in our training and see what is also not there as well. Often times, the most profound is hidden and reserved only for those willing to be diligent enough to see what is hidden in plain sight. •

Editor's note: *Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on September 27, 2003.*

This arises persistently in all of the traditional Japanese arts which idealized that the highest form of instruction is this very same "heart to heart" communication and understanding.

To us, we have the idea that must be stated repeatedly in clear and loud terms, or we have no idea what they are talking about. For instance, in Yagyu tsuba or "sword guards," they have this design style in which the design has a secret meaning and this design is especially unique by what is not represented tangibly here. This is referred to as *rusu moyo* (留守模様) or "missing design." If we study the Yagyu sword guards deeply, we understand that the war baton - signifying battle or warfare is always paired with the *hora* or "conch shell" - large conch shells were made into horns

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

Dojo Coronavirus update:

Beginning November 8th the new City of Los Angeles mandates go into effect:

- Masks are still required for everyone to be vaccinated or not.
- Proof of vaccination or a 72 hour negative COVID test will be required to train for anyone under 12 years old.
- You will need to show your proof or test result in order to train.

IMPORTANT DATES

November 24-26 (Wednesday-Friday): Dojo Closed for Thanksgiving
 November 27th (Saturday): Special Post Thanksgiving class at 10:15 AM
 December 4th (Saturday): Dojo Christmas Party at 6:30 PM in the dojo
 December 11th (Saturday): Osoji - Dojo Year End Clean-up at 8:00 AM
 December 19th (Sunday): Mochitsuki - Mochi pounding at Zenshuji at 6:30 AM
 December 24-25 (Friday-Saturday): Dojo Closed for Christmas
 December 26th (Sunday): Special Post Christmas class at 10:15 AM
 December 29th (Wednesday): Osame Keiko - Last practice of the year at 6:30 PM
 December 29th (Wednesday): Bonenkai - Forget the year party at 8:00 PM
 December 31-January 4 (Friday-Tuesday): Dojo Closed for 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, gender identification, national or ethnic origin or sexual orientation in administration of their educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.

Aikido Training Schedule

合気道 時間割

Saturdays

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

Mondays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Tuesdays

No Class

Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Thursdays

No Class

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular 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

Saturdays

7:45-8:45 AM Regular class

Wednesdays

7:45-8:45 Regular Class



The Aiki Dojo

is the Official publication of the

Aikido Center of Los Angeles

Copyright © 2021 Aikido Center of Los Angeles.

All Rights Reserved. Published by the Aikido Center of Los Angeles. No portion of this publication may be copied or reproduced without written permission from the Publisher.

The names, symbols, logos, and photographs and all other intellectual property of the company, brands, and people appearing in this publication are the exclusive property of their respective owners and should not be interpreted as an endorsement of or by the Aikido Center of Los Angeles. Any legal and equitable rights in their intellectual property are exclusively reserved to those owners.

Aikikai
Foundation



AIKIKAI®

Aikido World
Headquarters

Aikikai Foundation, Aikido World Headquarters

公益財団法人 合気会 合気道本部道場

17-18 Wakamatsu-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, JAPAN

Contact: 03-3203-9236 | aikido@aikikai.or.jp | www.aikikai.or.jp

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.

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



The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

羅府合気道学院古屋道場

1211 N. Main Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012

(323) 225-1424 | aikidocenterla@gmail.com | aikidocenterla.com

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.

Listen

"Aiki Dojo Podcast"

Follow

@aikidocenterla
@teacher.aikido

Read

"Aiki Dojo Message"

Watch

2 minute aikido technique