



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Ken Watanabe is promoted to Shihan

Congratulations!



Is excellence an all-the-time thing? Modern motivationalists and “successful” people often propagate the idea that “excellence is an all-the-time thing.” In Aikido, excellence is not an all-the-time thing but rather something that we continually strive toward.

Usually, I take my car into the car wash and I am in and out in 15 minutes. The other day, I decided to wash my car myself, which I hadn’t done in a long time. After working assiduously for two hours in the sun, I began to get tired, but I still had at least another couple of hours left if I wanted to do it perfectly. I still needed to clean out all the cracks between the air conditioning vents, steam clean the carpets, and vacuum under the seats. As I started to get tired, I thought to myself, “Do I really need to do this good of a job?” A little while later, I began to ask myself, “Is excellence an all-the-time thing?” The more I cleaned, the more tired I got, and then I asked myself, “Is it really an all-the-time thing?” Then I thought, “If it is, then taking the car to the car wash only ‘adequately’ cleans it and thus I am falling short of excellence.” Then if that is true, then “I haven’t been achieving excellence.” Then I thought of all the times that I don’t act with excellence like when I don’t immediately wash the dishes or don’t spend exactly two minutes brushing my teeth.

Excellence

“The top of one mountain is always the bottom of another.”

– Marianne Williamson



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

When I was younger, I was the type of person who believed that excellence was an all-the-time thing. For many years, this idea governed every part of my life, and I thought that anything short of perfect was a fail. This all-or-nothing thinking created a lot of heartache and difficulty in life.

Thinking that excellence is an all-the-time thing has its roots in perfectionism. Perfectionism can impact our mental health, giving rise to issues like obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, and depression, to name just a few. When I look back, many of my past relationships succumbed to this all-or-nothing type of thinking.

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Realizing this, excellence is not something we achieve, but rather it is something that we strive toward. In striving toward excellence, we try to do our best. Doing our best means to “try as hard as we can to do it, or to do it as well as we can.” It doesn’t mean always doing something perfectly. Having a striving mindset enables us to work towards something and to do our best but at the same be tolerant and compassionate with ourselves if we fall short.

O’Sensei said, “The Art of Peace begins with you. Work on yourself and your appointed task in the Art of Peace. Everyone has a spirit that can be refined, a body that can be trained in some manner, a suitable path to follow. You are here to realize your inner divinity and manifest your own innate enlightenment. Foster peace in your own life and then apply the Art to all that you encounter.” In his quote, O’Sensei wasn’t advocating for perfection. He didn’t say, “be perfect at...” Instead, the operative word O’Sensei used was “work” which implies that we are building something.

A person isn’t the best because they have achieved something. Excellence isn’t a place. Excellence is a state of mind where good becomes great and better becomes best. If we have a mindset that we have to “be” something, then what do we do if we are not the best?

Therefore, excellence is about honesty, or rather being able to see ourselves or our efforts honestly. Some days the best we can do is get out of bed, while other days we climb mountains. The question is, “Which took more effort or courage to achieve?” When we can honestly see that we did our best then we can be happy with the effort that we put out regardless of the outcome. This enables us to have a healthier point of view rather than the all-or-nothing mindset that we punish ourselves with.

The practice of Aikido is a journey not a destination. Every day, we strive towards continual improvement even if it is only an inch. Author Martha Beck said, “How you do anything is how you do everything.” This quote can be about achieving excellence at every little thing that we do. However, it can also be about the practice of seeing ourselves in a truer light where excellence is merely doing the best that we can, even if we fall short of making it to the top of the mountain. No one is perfect and every person is doing the best that they can. The difference between a normal person and a person who studies Aikido is that the person who studies Aikido is striving to be a little bit better than they were yesterday. Excellence is not something that we achieve. Excellence is about self-improvement and our desire always to do our best.

The best are not the best because they are good. They are the best because they strive to be better than yesterday. •



Some students see rank as a goal. Other students see rank as an indication of status. Promotions are a double-edged sword. At the same time that rank is important, promotions can also cause problems, especially if the student doesn't understand the promotion's meaning and reasoning.

This year I was promoted to the teaching rank of *Shihan*. *Shihan* is the highest teaching rank awarded by the Aikikai World Headquarters. For our dojo and for myself, it is an important milestone. My own teacher, Rev. Kensho Furuya, whom I consider one of the finest martial arts teachers and the one without whom I would never have reached my current level of skill and understanding of Aikido and Iaido, did not receive the rank of *Shihan*.

Does that mean I believe I'm better than he is? If I believed that, then I feel there would be a problem. A promotion like this is like enlightenment; it's only a moment in time. Enlightenment is not a constant state. We do not stay enlightened; we return to our natural state. That is, we are changed, yet we are unchanged.

Being awarded the highest teaching rank of *Shihan* doesn't mean I have arrived any more than a student being promoted to the rank of *Shodan*, or "first degree black belt," means that they have mastered Aikido. *Shodan* means "first level," but a better translation for *sho* is "beginning." My teacher explained it best

as if the *dan* or "levels" are steps on a staircase leading upstairs: "If we stopped climbing at the first step, then we'd never get to the bedroom upstairs!"

Being awarded *Shodan* means that from this point forward the student's real training can begin. *Shodan* means that the student has acquired the basic tools with which they can begin their training. From here it is possible to someday gain an understanding of the art.

The Same Way



by Ken Watanabe
Shihan

Whether or not I received this promotion doesn't automatically make my skill and understanding of Aikido better or worse. What a promotion should do to a student is drive them to be better. In essence, they have to match their rank. They need the mindset to improve and the curiosity to find the way to do it.

If a student's rank and status disappeared, that doesn't take away their ability; they would still have the skill and knowledge from their training. When I received my *Shodan*, I didn't think, "I am good now!" When I taught my first class shortly after my promotion to *Shodan*, I realized that I did not know a single thing about Aikido. Yes, I could demonstrate the techniques, but a real understanding? Not at all, and nothing that would help the students.

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The Same Way *continued from page 4...*

From this experience, I learned that teaching and practicing are two different things. When we train, we can choose to do whatever we want and how we want to do it. We have no responsibility. We can practice to get a workout, we can practice to learn something, or we can practice to feel we are better than everyone on the mat. We can practice selfishly, or we can practice in a way that brings the best energy and the best technique out of both ourselves and our partner.

When we teach, we have a responsibility to point the students in the right direction with the correct tools. We can't just teach the students whatever we want. We have to teach the type of techniques that will create the best understanding of the art. Then, we have to teach those techniques correctly as we can. We can teach to show we are the boss, and we can teach to show off, but we can also teach to pass down the art so that it might continue. We can teach selfishly, or we can teach in a way that not only creates good students, but also good people.

When I began teaching, the biggest question going through my mind was, "How the heck do I help this person?" How does this technique work? Why are we teaching this technique and why are we teaching in this manner? There were so many questions pertaining to the technique and training.

The only way to understand was to follow Sensei's training method and follow his unwritten curriculum. I had to trust that Sensei wasn't leading me down the wrong path even though I did not understand the how nor the why. However, by following Sensei's method I was able to arrive at an understanding of the art. I had to trust my teacher completely.

What I hope to do is pass on what I received from my teacher. Furuya Sensei passed away 17 years ago and because of his teach-

ing and his strictness, I am still able to learn about the art by teaching it. It's not so much about learning something brand new or the accumulation of techniques; it's about refining what I already know; a deepening of my knowledge and understanding. The more I follow this path called Aikido, the more I can see the wisdom of training correctly and as purely as I can.

Aikido is a fantastic martial art. It is sophisticated and powerful, but that realization came after years and years of practice and teaching and refining and reviewing. I learned to practice Aikido in the simple way: by patiently trusting Sensei and the art, and by patiently working to master the skills I needed to do the techniques correctly.

When we are promoted, we have to remember that we don't do it on our own. We do it with the help of everyone. We even have to consider people outside the dojo bubble. Everything and everyone affects us and guides us in our choices.

When Ito Sensei gave me the news that I would be promoted to *Shihan*, I reacted how I always react when I'm promoted - with disbelief. I thought, "Who, me?" I am the kind of person who sees these types of occasions cynically, yet I learned a very good lesson. Ito Sensei said that my promotion is not only for me, but for the dojo. My rank as *Shihan* elevates the status of this dojo and demonstrates that Sensei was in fact a good teacher.

As much as the rank of *Shihan* honors me, it is not the end all be all. Ranks are like signposts on a highway. A traveler can go in the correct direction but at the end, still take a wrong turn and miss their destination. I, a *Shihan* with over three decades of experience under my *obi*, have to still go forward in the correct direction just as the new freshly-minted *Shodan* has to as well. Whether a veteran or beginner, this road, The Way, on which we all travel IS the destination. •



Kodokai Dojo's 25th Anniversary Seminar

As many of you know, this October Kodokai Dojo celebrated its 25th anniversary. When I look back, although it takes a lot of effort to remember certain things all the way back to 1998, I am very aware of all the work and effort that it took for many months until finally opening for the first time on October 8, 1998 in our first location.

Admittedly, these 25 years have passed very quickly, maybe too quickly! We have had good times; we have had difficult situations. That is why for me, the anniversaries have a bittersweet taste. It is a feeling of happiness for what has been achieved, for the path traveled, for all those students and friends who have shared these years and have stayed with me for all these years. But it is also a feeling of sadness for those difficult moments, for the hard times that have happened. I am also a little bit sad because Furuya Sensei passed away and because students have left us. They are not here to enjoy these moments and share the joy of seeing how we have continued to get up after each and every failure.

When it comes to anniversaries, I have to confess that I do not like them very much. What happens to me with any kind of celebration is that I feel, even if it is not so, that it is somehow the end or that the goal was achieved. For me, I prefer to think that in a dojo the day-to-day is more important. The days before the anniversary or the day after it are more important to making it to something like the 25th anniversary. The date of your birthday is important but more important is how you fill those years. Those years should be filled with classes, training, and hard work. On those days there are no celebrations, cakes, or special privileges. On a certain level, we don't have to celebrate anything more than the luck and privilege of having an opportunity to train, a place to train, people to train with or a person to teach us.

The way to view the dojo is not easy, and sometimes when I think about it now, I think I was a little bit reckless when I started at the age of 24 and only *shodan*. At that young age, I had no knowledge or experience to build a dojo and carry it on my back, but I guess that is one of the virtues of being young and ignorant, right? All I had was a lot of enthusiasm and a huge desire to learn and teach.

I think that from the outside the perspective of the dojo is very different than when we are a student, instructor, senior or even our teacher's personal assistant. In all these levels we have a unique perspective of what the dojo is like and the closer we are to our teachers, the more we will be able to get an idea of what the ins and outs of a dojo are really like.

25 Years Old



by Santiago Garcia Almaraz
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai

Nowadays, all this is a little different from 10 or even 20 years ago. There are many daily things

in the dojo that are essential for its operation, and most times we can only realize all the behind-the-scenes things that happen when we are "alone" and at the head of our own dojo.

25 years ago, I was lucky because I had Sensei to support me and I had people near me who wanted to help me, support me, and who drove me when I just felt like

I couldn't keep going. Often times, the teacher is not the most important person in the dojo, but rather those people who are willing to dedicate their lives to help the dojo thrive. Many of those people, like Sensei, lived very far from Spain, but were sometimes closer than my own students.

25 years ago, I met Sensei and he supported me. 25 years later, Sensei is no longer with us, but Ito Sensei continues to support me and Kodokai Dojo. These teachers have been critical to the growth of our dojo and a huge part of my development not only as a teacher but also as a human being.

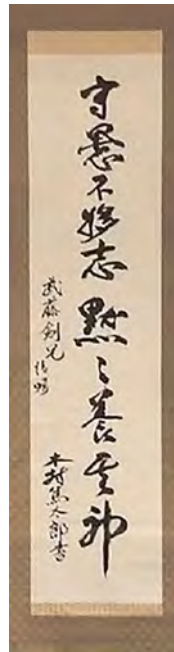
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25 Years Old *continued from page 6...*

Years upon years and countless hours on the mat were supported by fellow students like Ken Watanabe Shihan, James Doi, Mark Ty and many others. It is only with their kind and generous support that we were able to make it these first 25 years. They themselves have been huge contributors to their dojo in Los Angeles which celebrates its 50th anniversary next year. I am enormously grateful for everyone's support and for helping me maintain my friendship with our sister dojo in Los Angeles.

The day Sensei died he put up a scroll that translates: "Be strong, be humble and always keep going." I can honestly tell you that this saying is the only thing you need to make it to 25 years. There are many, many more people to thank. In fact, to each and every one of you who has come through our dojo, please know that each of you has left your mark on me and the dojo, whether your time here was long or short. In the end, each of you has helped me to become the person I am today, and you have helped the dojo reach our 25th anniversary. Thank you so very much!•



UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

IMPORTANT DATES

November 22-24 (Wednesday-Friday): Dojo Closed Thanksgiving
November 25 (Saturday): Special Post Thanksgiving class
December 2 (Saturday): Dojo Christmas party
December 16 (Saturday): Osoji - Year end clean up
December 17 (Sunday): Mochitsuki at Zenshuji
December 17 (Sunday): Children's class Christmas party
December 22-25 (Friday-Monday): Dojo Closed Christmas
December 30 (Saturday): Osame keiko - Last practice of the year
December 30 (Saturday): Bonenkai party - Forget the year party
December 31 - January 2: Dojo Closed New Year's
January 6 (Saturday): Kagami Biraki - Dojo opening class
March 8-10 (Friday-Sunday): Furuya Sensei memorial 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, 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 Advanced
 11:30 AM-12:30 PM Theory

Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular
 8:30-9:30 PM Fundamentals @Budokan

Sundays

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

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

Mondays

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals
 6:30-7:30 PM Regular

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Tuesdays

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals
 6:30-7:30 PM Weapons

NOTE: Visitors are welcome to observe our Fundamentals, or Regular Classes.

Iaido Training Schedule

居合道 時間割

Saturdays

9:00-10:00 AM Regular Class

Tuesdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class

Thursdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class



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The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

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

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

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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2 minute aikido technique