



# The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

2

## Holding Too Tightly

By David Ito

Ito Sensei explains how to not hold on too tightly.

4

## Life or Death

by Ken Watanabe

Watanabe Sensei shares how living and death occur in the mind.

6

## Commonsense

by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Sensei illustrates what makes commonsense so uncommon.



A koi swimming upstream symbolizes good luck and abundance. The koi is supposed to be so determined that it can swim up a waterfall and thus it also symbolizes perseverance and courage. Watercolor by Maria Murakawa. See the back page for more information.

## Welcome To The Autumn of Resilience



## Holding Too Tightly

To study Aikido is to practice the fine art of balance. The poet, Rumi said, “Life is a balance of holding on and letting go.” Reading Rumi’s quote, I thought to myself, “Aikido too is about the balance between holding on and letting go.”

In Aikido, balance is a dynamic state where one is able to move fluidly because they are centered. Think of it like a top that achieves somewhat perfect balance when it is spun with the right speed, power and technique. If it is spun too rigidly, it cannot reach the speed to gain balance or maintain its balance and it will fall because it will lose its fluidity. If it is spun too loosely, then it can’t reach the balance point and it will easily fall.

One of the more interesting things about beginning students is the confusion about how strongly to grab their opponents in class. Some are very polite and tend to grab too loosely while others are too overzealous and grab too tightly. When someone doesn’t commit to the attack and grabs or strikes with weak power, it makes the execution of techniques difficult. Likewise when someone grabs too tightly or strikes too rigidly then people can accidentally get injured and it gets hard to learn the movement properly. The hardest part about an attack is being able to give someone just enough resistance or strength to help them execute the technique but at the same time help them to grow.

It seems that grabbing too hard is the most common way that most beginning or uninitiated students tend to grab. Maybe, the student grabs as hard as they can because they want to “see” if the technique will “work.” Maybe, they grab hard because they are scared or maybe some just grab because they are having a bad day. Regardless of why, grabbing too hard is a form of violence and violence is the antithesis of Aikido and this is something that newer students have to learn to “let go of.” Grabbing or at-

tacking strongly has a way of activating our nervous system. When that happens, we put undue stress on our bodies. When this happens, we go through a cycle of fight, flight or freeze and our bodies become rigid and we lose our ability to act and move with fluidity and balance.

Long ago there was a famous geisha named Yoshino Daiyu who lived in Kyoto and was known for her beautiful lute playing. Before an important sword duel, Miyamoto Musashi visited Daiyu. Because of the impending duel, Musashi couldn’t relax and tried his best to remain vigilant just in case there was a surprise attack. During Daiyu’s performance, she noticed Musashi’s posture and how his mind seemed stressed. She stopped playing and said, “I don’t know how you can be such a great swordsman when you are much too stiff. It is like this lute that I am playing; how do you think it can produce such a beautiful sound?”

Realizing his impoliteness, Musashi shook his head and didn’t know how to answer. In one movement, Daiyu took out a knife and cut her precious lute in half. She said, “Do you see these crossbars inside? They are perfectly balanced. If they are too tight or too loose, then they can’t produce beautiful sounds. Only with the perfect amount of tension can they produce beautiful music. The crossbars inside of you are too tight and will eventually break from all the tension.”

Balance is dynamic state and it is constantly in flux between laxity and rigidity. The trick is in knowing when to be hard and when to be soft. Balance is a state that cannot be achieved and because it cannot be achieved then it has to be something that becomes a practice.

Aikido training teaches us how to put balance into practice so that we can feel when the timing is just right to either let go or hold on. •



by **David Ito**  
Aikido Chief Instructor

Recently I had the privilege of translating my teacher Rev. Kensho Furuya's book, *Kodo: Ancient Ways* into Spanish. As a student, I studied directly under Sensei starting in 1997 and until his passing in 2007. Although it was a book that I had read several times, translating it forced me to deeply examine each word so that I could illustrate Sensei's teachings properly to Spanish readers. With this exercise, I now have a deeper and more profound understanding of his teachings.

Although I am not a professional translator nor am I a native English speaker, I tried to combine my interactions with Sensei and his writings to give the Spanish readers the best version. Many of the chapters in *Kodo* I had discussed with Sensei to get a better understanding of their meanings. I knew that Sensei would have wanted me to make sure that I got each and every nuance as closely as I could to his English version. My translation is more than just using Google Translator which "magically" translates text with the nuance and context of a computer.

Many of the articles written by Sensei have deep meanings. They must be studied and analyzed deeply to understand them and give them the correct interpretation so that the translation is as authentic as possible. There is a passage in one of the chapters in *Kodo* that I believe sums up this my feelings of this idea of authenticity.

The other day I heard an interesting story about a Zen master, Yamamoto Gempo, who passed away sometime after WWII. As I understand it, he was abandoned as a baby and picked up by a couple who raised him through childhood. He became very ill, nearly lost his vision, and was abandoned a second time, but was saved by a priest in a temple nearby. He worked in the temple for many years doing menial work, such as keeping the grounds clean, doing the laundry and chopping the firewood, until one day he decided to become a priest.

Gempo told his Zen master, "I am thinking about entering the priesthood since I have been working in this temple for so many years," and the teacher agreed that it was a good idea.

"But do you think I can become a priest?" Gempo asked. "I know nothing about Buddhism, I have no education, no family, my health is poor, I cannot read, and I am nearly blind."

The Zen master replied, "Perhaps you cannot become a regular priest, but I think you can become a 'real' priest."

When I asked my teacher about this story, he had heard of Gempo and met his several times. "Yes indeed," my teacher said, "He was a real priest."



## Authentic Aikido



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

possible. In working hard, we become more "authentic" and end up finding a deeper meaning in our training. Many of the people who come to the dojo arrive with backpacks filled with their "stuff" and I don't mean clothes. They are weighed down by fears, frustrations, expectations and limitations that have been made worse by the coronavirus. Our "baggage" makes us wonder if following the path and learning Aikido will even be possible.

It is clear, like with Yamamoto Gempo's story, that we don't all come to training with the same qualities. Our own individual qualities don't give us the same opportunities but what does give us the best and most authentic opportunity is our passion for the art. Our "limitations" are not just what stops us but actually what drives us to improve ourselves.

When I see the classes or I see individual practices being done with a mask, gloves and other safety protocols, I wonder if this is true Aikido and this word "authentic" comes to mind. These impediments drive us to deepen our practices and search for authenticity. Training in the time of the coronavirus is clearly not ideal or what it should be but with the correct attitude and passion combined with hard work, we can still make it "authentic" Aikido and become "real" Aikidoka. •



Aikido training requires a certain amount of serious focus that is akin to life or death. There are many parts of the Aikido that require attention. When we practice, there are techniques we like to practice and there are techniques we don't like to practice and there are always techniques that we seem to catch on to easier than other techniques. Surprisingly, Furuya Sensei told us that *ushiro waza* or "attacks from behind" were his least favorite, yet he made that group of techniques one of his best techniques. A great teacher was once asked for the secret to his skill, and he answered, "I take my worst technique and make it my best technique. After that becomes my best technique, I take my worst technique and make it my best technique."

Aikido has a logic that can only be realized once we master the *kihon-waza* or "basics." The more we practice, the more we will understand what makes the techniques work, the better we understand Aikido's logic. From here, it's possible to see what makes Aikido, well, Aikido, and from this jumping off point, our Aikido grows and matures naturally.

It is said that each technique has its own special teaching. When faithfully and properly practiced, the various basic techniques will grant us their lessons. Each technique has elements that reinforce the basic premise of Aikido like footwork, timing, spacing, blending, and *kokyū* movement. At the same time, this is important to keep in mind especially when we, as humans,

tend to pick and choose what we like and don't like.

Neglecting an entire section of techniques can only give a student a partial and somewhat impaired view of Aikido. This kind of perspective, a student will never realize the versatility and effectiveness of Aikido. There are techniques we are naturally good at, but to concentrate only on what is easy won't make us good and is just playing around, not real training.

## Life or Death



by **Ken Watanabe**  
Technical Director

To understand Aikido, we must practice balance with respect to our training and remember to practice all the basic techniques and not only the ones we like. Only by seeing all the facets of training, can the logic of Aikido be realized. From here it becomes easy to see what Aikido "is" and what it is not. When we understand the logic of Aikido, then it becomes obvious as to how to adapt the techniques to changing times; what we can add, what we can take away, how to teach it, what is important to emphasize and what isn't.

As instructors and teachers, we are not just teaching a collection of techniques or the techniques we are good at, but should also try to show how everything in the Aikido training is related and interconnected to each other. Without this, Aikido will degrade into a haphazard and thoughtless collection of techniques and movements instead of a consistent and cohesive system with a solid foundation.

*Continued on page 5...*



*“We train like it is life or death, but the death in this sense means not to die on the inside.”*

**Life and Death** *continued from page 4...*

Everything in Aikido is connected to everything else in Aikido. Like a circuit, if something is missing, the circuit might work but not at its most optimal level. There will always be something amiss and it may not work reliably. When we don't complete our training or ignore parts of it, this is where we realize that our Aikido might be lacking, but it's not Aikido that is lacking but how we approach it. Like a sword, Aikido and how we practice the techniques are a reflection of our true inner selves and also the extent to which we are transformed by the training.

When we begin practicing Aikido, nothing makes sense. Everything seems foreign or disjointed. It is only through consistent and constant training that we begin to see how everything is connected and the logic of Aikido and its training begins to be revealed to us. It is from this base that we begin to grow as Aikidoists. As we go from mindlessly repeating the movements to realizing their purpose and place in the training, we then practice them mindfully and build a stronger foundation.

Nowadays, with the coronavirus pandemic, we see lots of people who “know better.” Whether it's due to inconvenience or an infringement of their freedoms, some people cannot handle this change. It's the same with Aikido training in the age of COVID. The solo practice may be “boring”, but what part is boring? Is the boringness due to the limitations of a student? Is the boringness because we are easily defeated and give up? If we don't understand the value of things, then it's easy tap out when things don't fit our preferences perfectly and quit.

During this time of being forced outdoors with no-contact practice, it is even more important for both students and instructors to continue their training and not stray too far off the path of training. What the teachers should be teaching, and practicing should fit into the logic of the teachings and techniques of Aikido. How students practice Aikido should also fit into the same logical framework as well.

People love to say, “Training is like life or death,” but most people don't interpret that literally. We train like it is life or death, but the death in this sense means not to die on the inside. •



## Commonsense

*Wakimae* (弁え) is an unusual Japanese word which we may translate as “commonsense.” In one Japanese dictionary, it is translated as “discretion” but I am not sure if that really conveys its meaning and usage. I think that the Japanese definition of “commonsense” is a little bit closer, but this is just my own idea.

The word “commonsense” for us modern people can have a very negative connotation, but in Japanese, it has a “good” nuance at least among the older generation. In English, commonsense can have the meaning of “know your place,” as in “don’t rock the boat” or “follow rules,” etc. However, in Japanese thinking, “to know your place,” is a positive thing. For us in the west, knowing one’s place is a kind of oppression or restriction of our freedoms – which we abhor.

The other day, I was having dinner with a friend who recently changed jobs. He works in his field as a consultant and is hired from one job to the next, moving here and there. As usual, in his new job, he complained about some of his new co-workers – the bossy types, the lazy types, the pushy types, the timid types and the arrogant types. Wherever he seems to go, they all seem to be there – each particular type on call without fail!

On his second day, right on schedule, he already had a few run-ins in his new job. One of the workers complained that he was



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

doing a procedure incorrectly and this created a ruckus. Another run-in was about being too pushy or too bossy. Of course, this all went to the boss who had to reconcile the matter.

He defended himself saying that he was “not incorrect” because he was just doing it in a different way, his own way, which was not the typical way they operated in his new job. He was not really pushy in the other situation; it is just that he had seniority and much more experience than his new supervisor. Of course, he believed that his judgments were much better, and he also liked to show off. As I was listening, I tried to always be sympathetic to my friend whom I know is very competent and experienced in his job and does everything very well. Yet, as he was talking over dinner, this idea of “wakimae” came to my mind.

It is not just my friend, but I see *wakimae* everywhere, in the family, at work and even in the dojo. Of course, my friend is correct in his procedures, but I feel for the other people who have been there before him and have established a certain routine that they have all agreed upon to follow. Of course, I also agree with my friend but perhaps the other people don’t feel comfortable with having a new person come into their work environment who is suddenly taking over and showing off about how they know more and can do more than everyone else.

Continued on page 7...



**Commonsense** *continued from page 6...*

Who is right? Perhaps, if my friend understood “wakimae” then he would try to observe “his place” in his new position and perhaps be a little more “reserved” or humble – this is only “commonsense.” Do people today feel this way? I do not know.

It always happens in the workplace or in the dojo, where someone tries to be too pushy and stick their nose into other people’s business where it doesn’t belong or act too bossy and arrogant – this is often the source of conflict, hurt feelings and chaos. Today, we think if we are “right” then we can do whatever we like. Or, we like to show that we know more than others or show our own seniority or power over everyone else. These types of people always wonder, “How could I be wrong? I am always right!”

Wherever and in whatever situation, we need to demonstrate *wakimae* so that we can understand where our place is, when to move, when to be still, when to go straight or when to turn – this is just like an Aikido technique. Most of us however just barrel straight ahead and we don’t care whose toes we step on or who we knock over in our path because we only have in our heads that “I am right, and I am better than you!”

Of course, my friend is not like this and he is not a bad person, I think. But I can see why there is always bad feelings and conflict wherever he goes – he needs to practice Aikido, maybe.

In the dojo especially, everything is *wakimae* – to know your

place or we can say perhaps “to know where we are,” is probably a more appealing way to say it.

*Wakimae* can mean to know one’s place, but I think in this sense we know where and who we are but more often than not we have no idea where we are nor who we are trying to be.

In the Analects of Confucius, Confucius was asked to perform an important ceremony, the first thing he did was to approach the seniors and elders and ask detailed questions of how this and that should be and on and on. One of his students observed this and complained, “Why does our Master need to ask so many questions of those elders, he knows this ceremony much better than they do!”

To Confucius, it was more important for him to observe the etiquette to ensure that everyone was happy and comfortable than it was to show off his knowledge. Indeed, by acting with *wakimae*, he brought everyone into agreement to ensure that the ceremony would be a success.

In traditional Japanese society, more than to show off that we are right, it is important to insure the harmony of the group. It is the same in the dojo as well, the harmony of dojo overall takes priority over an individual’s private agenda – this is *wakimae* which my friend may never learn.

**Editor’s note:** *Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on April 16, 2004.*

# UPCOMING EVENTS

行事 .....

## Dojo Coronavirus update:

We have started doing Aikido techniques with partners using the jo or short staff to maintain the connection. The classes will still be outside and, we will only offer a limited schedule as well. Please maintain six feet social distancing and wear a mask at all times.

For more information on Maria Murakawa's watercolor art, please contact her at: [marimostories.co@gmail.com](mailto:marimostories.co@gmail.com)

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

### Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 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

### Thursdays

No Class

### Mondays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

### Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

### Tuesdays

No 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

### Mondays and Wednesdays

8:00-9:00 PM Regular Class



# The Aiki Dojo

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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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