



# The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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## Autumn Returns!



When I started telling folks that I was training for my black belt test, the most consistent question I got was, “So that means you can beat people up?” Apparently, this is a common response and it makes sense because of the stereotypes about the martial arts. Just today in children’s class, a student commented, “I don’t understand why we have to do the crab walk and bunny hop, it doesn’t have anything to do with karate.” To be fair, Cobra Kai is popular with some of the youth right now, so maybe that’s where that came from. In any case, it’s extraordinary that there is an Aikido class for children; in my childhood, maybe the closest I ever came to any form of martial arts was learning how to twirl a baton in Girl Scouts.

It wasn’t until my 20s when I came across the martial arts on a random day. Walking home from a therapy session and passing by a dojo, I thought, “hmm maybe I’ll try that out.” In my first week, I was told by a senior student, “you have a lot to learn, and you’re going to learn the hard way... yeah, you’re going to learn the hard way.” I’ve been thinking about that day ever since because I still wonder what they meant—that I showed zero martial potential? That I messed up on some techniques? Or maybe I messed up on some etiquette? Or I wasn’t hanging the cleaning rags right? Or maybe that person was just going through it and took it out on the closest person in proximity. Their remark impacted me, as it felt demeaning and unwelcoming. Although at first I mostly held resentment about it, I’ve also tried to make meaning out of it so that the comment served a purpose rather than a harm. Thankfully, it wasn’t enough to make me quit. Aikido has been a profound practice for me; not some fun hobby, but more like a “coming home” milestone in my life, as if I had finally found the thing that I may have some level of natural ability and can have it be part of my life, for the rest of my life. The dojo became a sacred space for me where matters of the soul got sorted out.

## Shodan Essay

by Ayuri Terada Shodan Candidate

At the same time, my 20s were a selfish time in my life where I was not thinking about my purpose in this world. I had an easy 9 to 5, could pay my bills and rent, and lived pretty comfortably, and, ignorantly. It was towards the end of my 20s that I started to go inwards and engage with conflicts that came up during that time, and I started thinking about what else I could do to experience meaning in my life. I returned to my adolescent dream of becoming a teacher. During my preparation for this big undertaking, I took a pause from training as grad school and public school teaching took up an enormous capacity. Almost 10 years later, being an educator has definitely generated meaning in my life, but it has also burned me out because of an unsustainable system that does not make it easy for teachers to stay. I am honored to serve working class families of mostly immigrant children whose ancestries come from Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, Oaxaca, the Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Korea, Senegal, and Africa. My students come from lineages of revolutions and genocide survival, brilliant engineers and the most skillful astronomers. As young students of

Color, they have been learning to navigate a world that sees their culture and heritage as less than. While I am a person with multiple privileges, it has been a heavy, heavy load to have this role of teacher, and I know my time in the classroom is nearing its end. Aikido has helped me realize this necessity, and it is life-giving because I am fighting to follow my intuition to evolve from a calling that I’ve given my heart, mind, body, and soul to, and am now steadily seeing my path forward towards a different way. Taking my *shodan* exam helped me reveal what was already within—that I am so much more than my self-deprecating thoughts of unworthiness and insecurities, that I am stronger when I practice courage by training on the days that I didn’t want to train, and ultimately that I will one day act on my courage to quit teaching.





A lot of being an educator entails the uncomfortable but necessary process of self-actualization. It was in my early years as a teacher that I engaged deeply with ancestral guilt around Japanese imperialism in the 1900s. The colonization of lands and the violent dehumanization of people from Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, Indonesia, China, and so many more in Southeast Asia, consumed me. I sat with grief and shame for some time, not knowing what to do with this history that came before me but was a part of me. To what extent was it my responsibility to address the harm and trauma generated by Japanese imperialism? I felt so much shame and didn't have a lot of support in processing it. Knowing that my maternal grandfather was a soldier during World War II, I wondered in what ways did he participate in the atrocities that Japanese soldiers are known for. When I found out he was drafted, it helped me to complicate his story; that it wasn't by choice but by government and military obligation. Culturally, I knew enough that there are strong beliefs in Japanese customs around honor and loyalty. Of course, the stories about my grandfather's time in the war are nonexistent; soldiers don't talk about the war after coming back home. So, as a descendent of a Japanese citizen drafted into the war, I am left with more questions than facts. I try my best not to dwell on not knowing, because I have no control over it. Whether my grandfather is an honorable ancestor or not, I know that at the very least, I am an honorable descendent. Practicing Aikido is my way of trying to restore any harm that my grandfather may have possibly committed onto others during the war, and is a part of the long path for healing ancestral trauma that I've inherited.

When I have to run to the bathroom during class time, I tell my students that I'm stepping out for a moment and to "protect

each other." It's a very vulnerable thing to step out of the classroom and leave young people unsupervised, so I am very intentional about using the word, "protect," because I want my students to see themselves as part of a collective, not as individuals just looking out for themselves. If anything were to happen, I want them to be able to respond in a way that serves to keep everyone safe, as much as possible. Training in Aikido has developed my sense of *budo*- the martial Way. How I speak with my students, how I expand my peripheral vision in the class, how I interact with strangers in public, how I drive on the street, how I hold higher expectations for myself and others, or how I navigate conflict with people- I am learning how to practice a certain way of being that holds integrity, dignity, discipline, and humanity as constants. In such a fast world, this is no easy task.

While I would've had a very different approach than the senior student in my first week at the dojo, maybe their comment about learning the "hard way" was their way of giving me the heads up that everyone has their own journey with training, and maybe even a different purpose. For me, I train with deep gratitude for Aikido as a martial art because it is teaching me how to evolve my humanity and subsequently, how to evolve along with the humanity of the world. So if I ever come around to training for my next exam and folks ask whether I can "beat people up," I would like to be able to say that my ability surpasses beating people up; instead, that I know how to protect people. If I can learn how to keep myself and others around me safe, I would feel good about that. •



The *tenkan* exercise - we practice it in every class. But, why?? From a hand-to-hand combat standpoint, this exercise doesn't seem very practical. *Tenkan* seems so abstract-- almost meaningless. Who out there is going to grab our wrist? When will we ever need to turn like that?

Regardless of what we were practicing, Furuya Sensei always began his classes with the *tenkan* exercise and then followed it up with *tenkan kokyu-ho*. To me, the *tenkan* exercise seemed like such a boring part of class - like doing dance steps!! As a beginner, I would think, "I'd never get this to work. If I ever did *tenkan* in a fight I'd get beat up!"

When we think of body movements and footwork in Aikido, we think of the big three: 1) *irimi*, or entering; 2) *tenkan*, or turning, and 3) *tenshin*, or fading back. These are the body movements we see when negotiating an attack.

It's easier to see how we control and neutralize the opponent's power when we watch someone *irimi* into an attacker's blind angle or *tenshin* out of range of the attack. However, in *tenkan*, we enter, then turn, and end up next to the opponent, both of us facing in the same direction. When we begin practicing the *tenkan* footwork, we find that it's not so easy.

## Tenkan



by Ken Watanabe  
Technical Director

When we think of the *tenkan* movement in martial arts terms, then it becomes extremely sophisticated. *Tenkan's* footwork is an important component in many Aikido techniques. Without a strong *tenkan*, these techniques will be difficult to do correctly. Another important reason to practice *tenkan* is that it is actually a very difficult movement to do correctly, let alone effectively.

*Tenkan* requires correct timing and spacing, the correct energy in our footwork, and a strong sense of connection with the opponent. Practicing *tenkan* takes a relatively awkward movement and transforms it into a move with energy, stability, and balance. In martial arts, every time we take a step, it has to have meaning. An important part of the technique happens every time we take a step, and the technique draws energy from that step. Each step must be smooth and fluid but at the same time stable and strong.

Even in the simplest, most basic Aikido exercises, it's important to use our whole body. It is relatively easy to slide forward or fade backward against our opponent, but when we add in pivoting and turning it becomes next to impossible. Doing *tenkan* adds another layer of balance and stability to consider, not to mention how slow it feels when we practice trying to master *tenkan*.





In Aikido, we try to establish a strong connection with our opponent, but that's only part of the story. When we practice *tenkan*, we are strengthening the connections in our own posture. When the connections in our posture aren't solid, then we have to rely on upper body strength. This makes us become top heavy and off balance. Furuya Sensei used to tell us, "You can put as much power as you want in your legs and hips, but from the waist up you should be relaxed."

As we practice turning our body, it's important to practice stepping back with our rear leg stretching back but at the same time connecting it to our center. This means our whole body starts and stops with each step. The energy in our footwork transfers into energy in our center and then, into the entire technique. Without developing this feeling of a whole-body connection between our feet and hips, out through our hand blades, our movement and technique will have nothing to blend with the energy from our opponent, hence no Aiki.

Once we can establish connection within our own posture and issue power from our center, then we can begin developing the connection with our opponent. Usually in most martial arts the energy from this full body energy is used to injure or kill our opponent as we issue power into them. However, in Aikido we use that same killing power to align with, neutralize and blend with the attack and instead, throw or pin them.

As we practice developing the physical connections in our posture, we also have to practice the mental part of the movement. As our body turns to blend with the attacker's energy, our concentration turns with it; that is, at the moment of contact, we are already aligned with our opponent. What this means is that while in *tenkan* we practice aligning as much as we practice turning — the movement appears circular but in its heart it is linear just like *irimi*. Both mind and body have to turn and align together with each other as well as with the opponent.

How important is *tenkan* to our training? Sensei would tell us how he used the *tenkan* exercise to assess the students' skill level whenever he was teaching at another dojo. He would determine what the students needed to be taught after observing how they moved and took the *ukemi* for *tenkan*.

Much like Aikido basics such as *kokyu-dosa*, *ikkyo*, and *irimi-nage*, it is very important to include the *tenkan* exercise in almost every class, teach this exercise correctly, and for the students to practice it correctly.

In essence, when we practice *tenkan*, we are trying to align ourselves with our opponent, mentally, physically, and spiritually. When we do this seemingly tedious and worthless exercise, we are actually trying to practice and develop everything we need for good Aikido. That is how important *tenkan* exercise is. •

The Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez wrote: "Human beings only learn to be children after being parents; we only learn to be parents after being grandparents." As a teacher, I would add that by saying, "We only learn to be students after being teachers."

When we start to teach classes and put ourselves in front of the class, that is when we really understand how a student should behave. I am not saying that it is mandatory that every student become a teacher or run a dojo, but I think that the "student" perspective takes on a very different dimension when we teach or when we are in charge of a dojo.

In most of the articles that I write, I spend most of my time describing how the attitude, behavior, effort, commitment, or dedication of the student with respect to the dojo, and with respect to their teacher should be like. On the other hand, I have started to think about how a teacher should be with respect to their students.

It is clear that the teaching systems and the way we relate to them have changed over the years and over the centuries. What was normal in the 16th century would be completely unthinkable today. The reasons and motivations that a teacher has to teach have nothing to do with the reasons or motivations that a student has to begin the practice of a martial art.

In the past, I doubt that many of the practitioners would have joined a dojo if they knew the demands that the teachers of the past would have required of them. I think that this is the big difference with today. In the past being disciplined, making an effort, or being dedicated was a matter of life or death. Students would soon have to use the skills that they learned and so they had to be prepared for that life-or-death moment in which they would surely have to apply what they learned in order to survive. So, the teacher used to have no problem demanding dedication, loyalty, and commitment from their students.

Today it is difficult to maintain that feeling of loyalty, respect and dedication to an art because the student approaches the martial arts from a different perspective and perhaps that is why the teacher also has to also lower their expectations of the student but not in the way we might think.

So, should the teacher demand less? Be more accessible? Make things easier for the student? From my point of view, how the teacher should be comes from their skill in observing the student's behavior and adapting their teaching and training to fit their ability to assimilate. When I speak of adapting the training, I mean that we must understand what the student "goes through" when they train in the dojo and figure out if they really want to learn and follow this path because not all students are created equal. Selecting and intuiting who is prepared for the greater demand, greater commitment, or deeper training is a complicated task. It is a long process of watching and observing. It is the reverse of the student's *minarai keiko* where they learn by "watching and observing." At teacher, watches and observes to better teach the student. By watching and observing, we can

## Understand the Student



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

carefully figure out if we should stress the student more or less. We learn how much rope must be given between the teacher's demand and the student's willingness. Too much rope or too little will cause the connection between the teacher and student to be broken which could cause us to lose a future good student, teacher, or martial artist.

Today many teachers complain that there aren't any committed students left. They think that students do not train with the same intensity or dedication. In my humble opinion, I am optimistic, and I think that there are people willing to dedicate and commit to their training and there are people out there who are eager to learn. However, as I have said this is a long and bitter-sweet process for the teacher since it takes a lot of work and a lot of time to find those dedicated students. Today, martial arts have to be understood from a historical, social and economic sense and obviously there are people out there who do not want to have any involvement or commitment to a martial art. I think this is normal because we are not all in the same situation in our

personal and work lives. So, it would be unfair to judge all students equally. That's why I think we should look at teaching from

the eyes of the student. Each student is doing their best to be good students, but each student has their own lives which are as complicated or more so than mine.

For me, it is the job of the teacher to get through to the student. Getting them to understand clearly that to grow and evolve in a martial art takes not only a lot of hours of training but also daily sacrifice. However, with this sacrifice comes a reward. It is the job of the teacher to project our knowledge of art so that each student who sees it differently will understand it the same.

This is where the teacher has to be up to the task and develop themselves so that they can be ready to help the student evolve in whichever way they evolve. A sad truth that someone once said to me, "Teachers don't get to choose their students." With

knowledge and experience, comes the ability to plan ahead. The teacher thinks, "If I do this, then this will happen" or "This one thing will change everything."

– Gabriel García Márquez

My behavior as a teacher should not be influenced by having a bad day, family or work problems, fears, frustrations, or my desire to be funny. The teacher must live up to their students and must be more demanding of themselves than they are to the students. Teaching is a very demanding job. It is a balancing act between paying the bills and remaining faithful to their teacher's teachings. We can look at students as simple numbers that help us pay our bills and who satisfy our whims, but that is short sighted. Being a teacher is not easy, we have to help the student fight against fatigue, pain, and their fears while at the same time giving them a stable, healthy, and inspiring place to develop themselves. That is why we must look at teaching from the eyes of the student. Being a teacher is more than just teaching classes where we teach them to roll or do *ikkyo*. From my point of view, the best teacher knows each student and knows what they need at all times and tries to create the best scenario to take them to their "maximum" in every way. •



There are three steps that each student should remember in their training:

### Step 1: Real “Reality”

In Aikido, we should keep our feet on the ground and deal with our training from the standpoint of “reality,” because we are dealing with life or death. At the same time, we must also appreciate that reality can be far beyond the scope of our understanding and knowledge to embrace so much that we cannot even comprehend – we may tend to not accept this. This is why faith is so important.

I have noticed that many people are Star Wars fans, and easily mix up Aikido with being Jedi Knight, even going as far as comparing O’Sensei to Yoda. This is not healthy at all. Star Wars is a great epic story and entertaining movie, but after all, it is just entertainment and fiction. Why not associate your life with Texas Chainsaw Massacre? Or Nightmare on Elm Street or maybe Bambi or Snow White?

Aikido training should never move even one inch away from the activity of our Daily Lives and how we live our Lives. This is one of the most important aspects in our Aikido training.

### Step 2: Training is Artificial

Aikido training like almost all forms of training follows “artificial” rules. What I mean by this is that the rules and form of training are “made up.” For instance, in the traditional tea ceremony, we strictly follow the rules and forms set down by its founder. The purpose of which is to attain the same desirable and revered aesthetic state or mental sensitivity as that achieved by the Founder of tea ceremony, Sen Rikyu. Like a fine painting, this aesthetic state of mind is also considered a form of art. Achieving this elevated state of mind is, we consider, one profound way to achieve a higher level of daily lives or a more artistic sense to our lives, in how we behave and think and how we view the world.

If you think about this, this is true with many things in our world today which make up our “real” lives. We all follow “made-up” rules which govern our lives. As an example, we stop at red lights and go forward on green lights. We all agree to this as we drive and therefore it makes it so that we can drive safely. It doesn’t work unless we all agree to this made-up rule. If we were to go to some other country, it is quite different, they all agree to the “made-up” rule to go on the red, and stop on the green. It is like driving a car in Europe and American or perhaps Japan – the rule on which lane you drive in is all agreed upon and depending on where we are, and so we must follow the prevailing and respective rule.



## Three Steps



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Way in Aikido and no matter how much or how long we train in this fashion, we will never achieve the Aikido as O’Sensei taught it.

If we only talk about Aikido technique, we can talk about anything – even nuclear weapons and poison gas – whatever is effective and will do the trick, I suppose. If we talk about Aikido spirit, then it is important to try to understand O’Sensei’s mind and spirit.

What makes me very sad today, is that in my time, O’Sensei and Aikido were one in the same. Today, many practice Aikido quite divorced from O’Sensei and Aikido. I wonder what kind of Aikido this can be and where will it take them?

### Step 3: Transformation of the Artificial to the Real and from the Real to the Artificial.

This comes from the age-old idea of positive and negative interaction. Although we follow an artificial means (the form of practice) to achieve a greater sense of the reality of our lives, what makes this process so profound is that it is based upon O’Sensei’s genius, virtue and heart.

It is like the first step to reading is to learn the alphabet. However, simple knowledge of the alphabet does not endow you with the power to read. •

*Editor’s note: Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on October 28, 2003.*

In Christianity, we also follow certain rules too. In Christianity, to achieve the ideal state which God recommends to us – do this and don’t to that. It is the same with almost all religions.

In Aikido too, one basic goal in training is to discover or learn the same ideals and skills that O’Sensei possessed or at least, try to understand them within ourselves, the ideals which he has discovered for himself and has taught to his students as “this is Aikido.” This is one goal in our training to understand what O’Sensei is trying to teach.

It is permitted to interpret Aikido in anyway you please nowadays, so everyone comes up with their own ideas and interpretations or whatever they themselves think as to what Aikido is. Although this creates a great deal of creativity in Aikido, one must also be continually aware as not

to compromise the goals, ideals and forms of Aikido itself. In our training, if we forget O’Sensei, it would be easy to lose our

# UPCOMING EVENTS

行事 .....

## Dojo Coronavirus update:

Currently, the City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles has lifted the face mask mandate for all persons vaccinated or not. Anyone who still wants to wear a face covering in class is welcome to do so. There is also no vaccination requirement to attend classes.

### IMPORTANT DATES

- October 9-20: Spain trip
- October 29th: Intensive Seminar
- October 29th: Instructor's class
- October 30th: Children's Class Halloween Party
- October 31st: Halloween - Dojo Closed
- November 23-26 (Wednesday-Saturday): Dojo CLOSED Thanksgiving

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  
11:30 AM-12:30 PM Theory

### Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 AM Fundamentals  
6:30-7:30 PM Regular

### 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

6:30-7:30 PM Regular

### Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

### Tuesdays

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

8:00-9:00 AM Regular Class

### Tuesdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class

### Thursdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class



# The Aiki Dojo

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Headquarters

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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