



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

2

Adversity Reveals

By David Ito

Ito Sensei explains how adversity has a way of revealing who we are.

4

What's Important

by Ken Watanabe

Watanabe Sensei discusses what is important to focus on.

6

Swordsmanship Difficulties

by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Sensei illustrates what makes swordsmanship difficult.



AIKIDO TRAINING IN THE NEW NORMAL

The coronavirus situation at hand is not ideal nor is it effective for learning Aikido. However, with that being said, it is a wonderful opportunity to gauge one's true level. The Greek poet, Heraclitus said, "Out of every one hundred men, ten shouldn't even be there, eighty are just targets, nine are the real fighters, and we are lucky to have them, for they make the battle. Ah, but the one, one is a warrior, and he will bring the others back."

I believe that the coronavirus is a time of truth and self-revelation. Understanding Heraclitus' assertion, who we truly are is being revealed by the adversity of the coronavirus. Who we come to find ourselves to be isn't necessarily bad. It is actually a good thing because the revelation gives us the opportunity to learn about ourselves and it gives us our true starting point.

Generally, we think of a warrior as being someone who is strong and skillful. However, many of us don't go off into battle or risk our lives on a daily basis anymore so the characteristic of being the strongest is necessary, but it's not all that crucial. What is crucial towards being a true warrior is actually our mindset.

Each person in Heraclitus' assertion can be an archetypal mindset: the conscripted, the target, the fighter and the warrior.

A conscripted mindset is someone who has no desire to be doing whatever it is they are doing so they are just going through the motions. They don't care and have no concern and it is reflected in their attitude and execution. We've all seen this person at work and even at the dojo who is "just phoning it in."

The target mindset is one of misplacement or being improperly equipped. Furuya Sensei said, "The best students do the right thing at the right time." The person with the target mindset wants to be there but cannot succeed because they are placed in the wrong position or don't have the proper tools to succeed. They become a target because they become frozen and they become frozen because they don't know or haven't been taught what the right thing is to do at the right time.

The fighter's mindset is very good and most martial artists fall into this category. The fighter always does the right thing at the right time. In Japanese, when the most natural thing is done at the right time, it is called *atarimae* (当たり前). *Atarimae* means "natural." When someone does something which is the most natural next step, it is *atarimae*. For instance, we turn the water off after we are done washing, that is *atarimae*. Another example of *atarimae* is the Japanese fans' conduct at the 2018 World Cup. After each match, the Japanese soccer fans cleaned up the

stadium. They thought that it was only right to clean up a mess that they made so that was *atarimae*. This is the stage of most martial artists because they learn a set of pre-arranged movements or responses to their opponent's advances and thus they do the right thing at the right time. At this level it could be thought of as *go no sen* (後の先) or "attack after being attacked."

However, because things are being done by rote, this mindset is only good at the end of the intermediate and at the beginning of the expert levels.

The warrior archetype is the level that most martial artists aspire toward. At this level, the warrior's mind works by intuition rather than rote. They do the right thing before it needs to be done. In *budo* this would be called *sen no sen* (先の先) which means to "attack before being attacked." This is the level of most Aikidoists start at, not because Aikido is better, but because the philosophy of Aikido begins where most other martial arts end. The Aikidoist yearns for more than being able to destroy their opponent. What they are interested in is something deeper like O'Sensei's philosophy of *masakatsu agatsu* or "The truest victory is the one over one's self." The warrior mindset is a constant cycle of self-improvement. With each victory or defeat comes an evaluation and with that the warrior re-sharpens themselves. The

warrior isn't necessarily the last level, but it is for most of us mere mortals.

Miyamoto Musashi said, "There is nothing outside of yourself that can ever enable you to get better, stronger, richer, quicker, or smarter. Everything is within. Everything exists. Seek nothing outside of yourself." No matter what level we find ourselves at, it is only the level of the moment - it is our situation but not our state of being. What separates the conscripted mindset from the warrior mindset is nothing more than how

they go about reconciling an uncomfortable or seemingly untenable situation. *Budo* training is supposed to teach us how to think. We learn through training that the only thing which separates winning from losing is how we think and what we take away from the outcome. Some of us give up or some of us freeze up, but the best try and find a way to get to the next level.

By changing our mindsets, we can use adversity to guide us to our greatest heights and someday achieve *masakatsu agatsu*. Today, the situation may not be the best and there are so many unknowns, but that doesn't mean we give up. We cannot control what will happen to us, but we can change how we think and how we let the situation affect us. •



Adversity Reveals



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

One of the positive things about the coronavirus situation is that we have the opportunity to watch Aikido classes online. Previously, watching demonstrations was the best way to confuse a student because teachers and styles tend to differ. Most students don't know the difference between demonstration Aikido and teaching Aikido. Now, classes are available online and students are able to see what and how a teacher is teaching Aikido and thus able to learn, watch, comment and share in different ways of learning and teaching Aikido in the context of a class. The other day I was talking with Ito Sensei about whether the classes during this confinement were boring, less dynamic or perhaps more complicated since the teachers have to use more imagination and ingenuity than in the regular classes when the students could work in pairs. This conversation made me reflect on how explaining or teaching in class can be something that helps students or confuses them.

The way of teaching has changed a lot and I think it will continue to change. In Furuya Sensei's book *Kodo*, he laments about the tendency of dojos to be more like businesses. In olden days, the merchant was one of the lowest categories in Japanese society. There was a saying: "A merchant will only bow their head to pick up a penny or even a discarded peel of an orange in order to make a profit." A merchant was thought to have no humility or pride. This consumer's mindset resembles a supermarket in which the student chooses and discards as they please and only strives for just enough and barely gains an understanding of the art.

Sensei once commented to me in a conversation that one of his sword teachers would barely explain anything to him and would sometimes only demonstrate the form or kata once. So, he had to be very attentive and focused in order to learn everything since he did not know when the teacher would repeat it again. Today, perhaps too much is explained to the students and there is no time for the student to reflect and understand for themselves. The time between not knowing and knowing has been reduced to nothing and are now one in the same. I think that sometimes I feel the same way toward my students that Sensei and his teachers felt toward theirs.

Naturally, times will change and the way of teaching in the past has to evolve. In the olden days, teachers hardly spoke or corrected the students and would purposely let them struggle as a tool to teach them perseverance and determination. This helped to prepare them to receive the teacher's words or corrections and help them to focus themselves to learn the art. The student who overcomes many years of hardship and commitment signals to the teacher that they are ready to be taught and only then would the teacher begin to actually teach them.

Today, I think that teachers sometimes do just the opposite. Maybe it is the era that we live in or the type of student that comes to train, but I think that teachers give too many explanations, teach too many different techniques, and give the student

too much of everything. Perhaps we do this to help the students learn faster or in hopes that they do not get bored. Regardless of the reason, I think that most of the time the student is not prepared to understand too much information or too many corrections so in the end this way of teaching is counterproductive.



I'm not saying that teachers shouldn't explain or correct their students. I just don't know if by doing this, we are robbing them of the opportunity to struggle, get frustrated and have to seek out the answers for themselves through practice and perseverance. Everything has its moment and timing and I believe that it is only when the student is really prepared to "listen" that they will know how to interpret the corrections and the information. Timed improperly or by not having this understanding, they will probably not be prepared to learn. So, if the student doesn't have the perseverance and humility then they cannot pay attention and can't learn and will simply abandon their training out of frustration and ignorance.

A few years ago, I remember in a conversation with Sensei when I commented on how frustrating it was that no matter how many times

I corrected a student and even with the best intention, it seemed as if they did not understand or even hear me be-

cause they kept making the same mistake. I asked Sensei if it was good to insist that the corrections be acknowledged and perfected and he replied that he usually repeats the same explanation a couple of times and if the student is not able to understand then does not say it a third time because the student is not ready to hear it either due to lack of attention or lack of training. So since then, every time I correct a student, I don't usually insist too much and just let time and practice be their teacher.

Learning to Teach



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

Each class that we teach in the dojo is different technically since although they share many techniques or movements there is always some detail or movement that makes it different. Other factors that contribute to making classes different is the level of knowledge and other factors such as age, ability and dexterity that each person brings to class. What is the same for every person is that each person has to adapt themselves to the training. From my point of view as a teacher, when I say "adapt," I mean that I hope that I have given the student just enough information but at the same time just enough adversity to inspire them to improve. For the student, adaptation means developing the proper mindset to overcome their own tendencies, desires and shortcomings in a difficult situation in order to improve.

Sensei said, "Our goal as instructors, teachers or seniors is to be a steppingstone for the student to support and inspire them to continue on their path." We have to look inward to understand how much or how little we should teach our students. The ultimate purpose of teaching is not to make students the best Aikidoists, but to give the best of ourselves to them and inspire them to seek a better version of themselves and help them to grow and know themselves better to become better human beings. •



When we recognize the basics in everything then anything will become possible for us achieve. The responsibility of the teacher is to guide the student. When we teach our students, do we sometimes teach what is fashionable or what is popular at the time? Do we jump from style to style, mixing it up?

Teaching is about figure out what is right and balancing it with what is necessary. In our own training, we have to put in the practice in order to see and recognize what is truly valuable, what is not, and what is possibly harmful to our training. Many times, something's value, or lack thereof, is not readily apparent. There have been many different Aikido techniques that I thought were kind of silly or abstract. I could have easily stopped practicing them if it weren't for Furuya Sensei constantly teaching them.

As an instructor, I think it's important to teach the techniques and make them interesting, but at the same time it's also important to teach them correctly. Without one or the other, passing on the art of Aikido will be very difficult, both for the teacher as well as the student.

Sometimes we teach what we like, such as something flashy or novel, yet we must also remember that the students need the skills and habits that will help the student improve and give them the tools with which they can make natural progress. Many things can be faked or learned without being taught the basics. There are also all kinds of shortcuts. However, without the basics or *kihon-waza*, there will be no improvement. Without the basics, with every new thing we learn, we will have to learn it

from scratch. Without the basics, we won't have the tools to learn or understand something new to us.

Sensei told me a story about how for a little while he stopped teaching *koyu-dosa* at the end of the classes. Without knowing its true value, he thought it was just a cool-down type of technique; something to take up the last few minutes of class. In Aikido many techniques are like this. We think, "Where is the martial aspect?" or "How can I use this weird technique?"

What's Important



by Ken Watanabe
Technical Director

Without knowing the true value of something, we might accidentally discard it. Finally, Sensei realized how important *kokyu-dosa* was to Aikido training and started teaching it again. Likewise, it is the same when we practice something abstract like *tenkan* at the beginning of every single class. A student once asked me, "Why?" To explain "why" practicing *tenkan* is so important would be a class in and of itself. There is no time to talk about "why." The most important thing is to trust the teaching and understand the "why" with our feet and our bodies.

The most basic exercises in class are often times the ones that reveal a student's ability and their understanding, or their lack thereof. These abstract or confusing techniques require the most practice and understanding. When we give ourselves to the training and develop our basics, it transforms us, and in turn, transforms everything we do, from the way we sit, stand, walk, or bow – everything.



In our practice, our basics dictate our level. They may not be the most popular to practice at first, but as our understanding of Aikido, its practice, and how to teach it deepens, the basics become the only thing worth teaching and practicing.

Valuing the basics takes a long time to realize, not because it is difficult but because of this disease called “I know better.” It’s hard to set our egos aside and have the *shoshin* or “beginner’s mind” and think, “I don’t know anything.” It is hard because no one wants to be thought of as that person who knows nothing, yet in learning, and even in teaching, this beginner’s mind is very important.

Many things in training seem inconvenient. There might be a better way, a short cut to the end result, but tricks are just tricks and only impress the laymen who don’t know any better. An expert can see right through a fake whose basics are not on par. A person who focuses on the basics may not be the flashiest at the time, but the basics will carry them far and beyond the person who doesn’t know them.

It’s easy to become confused especially when a technique stops working and we lose faith in it. The technique might not seem effective or strong, but we have to ask ourselves if we are judging the technique or judging the manner with which we practice it? Have we even practiced it enough, or have we simply just given up too early?

The more I think about what makes a student skillful in Aikido, the more I see how important it is to teach the right things to the students at the right time. We don’t sharpen a sword right away. We gather the components, refine the ore, skillfully forge the iron, develop the blade’s inner structure, form the shape, and get it ready to be polished. After the sword is completely ready to be polished, then the polisher finally draws out the blade’s inner beauty and lethality.

Like teaching a student, each step in the making of a sword requires certain things at certain stages. We don’t teach them the secrets of Aikido per se because the secrets are already there, hidden in plain sight in the basics that we teach every day, ready to draw out the student’s ability and skill.

It’s easy for us to want to be sharp, effective and ready right away. That’s our egos guiding us. Like obsessing over the window planters before the house’s structure is even completed.

We spend a lot of time screwing around trying to be “good” at Aikido when we don’t even know what it takes to make us “good.” When we get stuck, we should ask ourselves, “What is good Aikido?” Practicing Aikido which is effective and interesting is important but what is also important is how the skills that create Aikido are passed on. •



Swordsmanship Difficulties

I think that because we are so exposed to the movies and TV and their interpretation of the “samurai” that we have a heavily influenced impression of what the samurai, swordsmanship, swords and the like are supposed to be. We forget that it is all fantasy and movie-magic and most of these people really have no idea of what Japanese swordsmanship is really like. The stories, the characters, the sceneries, the props and everything else is all made up. They are a part of the imagination of the writer of the screenplay, the director and the producer. Many times, the movies borrow from other movies which were influenced by other movies and on and on. Of course, to the fantasies we see, we like to add our own fantasy and ideas. In the end, what do you actually end up with? Do we really think that it is real swordsmanship? Oddly, most people do think so.

When I watch movies, the hero dates beautiful women, bad guys shoot at him from every which way, he jumps over bridges, cars run over him and through all that he never gets even a scratch or even ruffles his hair or wrinkles his tuxedo. I hope people know that this all part of the fantasy. I wish I was impervious to a dozen gangsters shooting at me with their machine guns only to finally end up with the bag of loot. Alas, it never happens just like cinema style swordsmanship. Real swordsmen don't fly thru the air, walk on water, and fight on the tops of bamboo trees. We don't kill several hundreds of bad samurai in one hour and a half. It will never happen. With practice, it may be possible to be a legend in our own time, but most of us will probably need to be content to be a legend in our own minds.



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Japanese swordsmanship requires a lot of hard work and it takes a great deal of training and commitment. This is the reality like learning to bake a proper cake, like playing the violin or brain surgery. Today, it is just as it is hard to grasp swordsmanship as it was in ancient times. In fact, it was even harder for the samurai, probably even more than we could possibly imagine. In those days, it was common to be severely wounded and even die in practice. Once, Itto Itosai had his two top students duel in a life and death duel to see who was better. The “bad” student won and that student eventually turned on him and killed him. That type of sword teaching is pretty tough in my book.

Teaching Iaido is becoming more and more frustrating for me mostly because of the students' attitudes. It seems as if everyone thinks that they know everything when they don't. I hate to say this, but it is true and it makes me very sad. Have you ever talked with a person who thinks they know everything in the world? Very sad and very boring.

I think people are fascinated with the fantasy of swordsmanship and cannot escape it. The reality of swordsmanship is that it is hard and difficult and then it only gets harder. It gets harder because of the students' attitude, not because of the teachings. The students need to grasp the fundamentals and pay deep attention to the fine details and this takes an open, honest and gentle spirit – not the arrogant, know it all attitude I often see.



In Memoriam
Hideo Yonemochi Shihan
 June 16, 1930— September 10, 2012



There is nothing wrong with movies or fantasies and perhaps many can only survive their lives in the world of fantasy. If we are trying to understand Japanese swordsmanship as a martial art, we must leave the fantasy world and plant our feet firmly on the ground. We must set ourselves upon the path to dedicating ourselves to the hard work of learning it. Our dojo does not teach sword dance or movie style swordsmanship. Our dojo is not a dream world.

Aikiken and *bokken* practice also can be difficult. We have no contact or competition in our practice, and this can be a big drawback. Because of our no-contact form of practice, we can easily fall into a doldrum of attacks that are generally too slow and not aggressive enough or lack enough power to appreciate the speed and power of the sword. I don't think swordsmanship was this way in O'Sensei's time, but today, we must consider the safety of the students. This is another reality we must work with and not allow it to be a handicap but a positive benefit.

When the sword comes at us in a committed attack, we do not see its blinding speed and power. It is virtually unseeable and unstoppable. When we finally understand this, we will begin to approach true sword training. Finally, we practice O'Sensei's sword art but fail to realize that he practiced at an extremely high level of the swordsmanship. Some people refer to his sword art as "divine." How can we grasp this high level without constant and consistent study? As O'Sensei advised one of his early students, "It is up to you to master the fundamentals, I don't teach them."

Most students forget that in the old days only samurai had the privilege of studying swordsmanship and only samurai and people of privilege were allowed to carry a sword. The sword and swordsmanship are privileges, and this should be the very first lesson which is always quickly forgotten.

Editor's note: *Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on January 11, 2005.*

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

Dojo Coronavirus update:

Good News! We will be starting to add in gloved Aikido training classes. However, the classes will still be outside and there will be no rolling ukemi. For the time being, we will only offer a limited schedule as well.

Please maintain six feet social distancing and wear a mask at all times.

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 any of our class offerings at this time.

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

is the Official publication of the

Aikido Center of Los Angeles

Copyright © 2020 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.

FOLLOW THE US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Ito Sensei
@teacher.Aikido

Aikido Center of Los Angeles
@Aikidocenterla