



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合氣道

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Back to School!



To study Aikido is to practice Aikido. However, what does it mean to practice something? The definition of practice is, “The actual application or use of an idea, belief, or method, as opposed to theories relating to it.”

Not long ago a student sent me a link to a web page where they talked about a new modality of Aikido called Verbal Aikido. Verbal Aikido is not new and actually has been around for many years. In short, Verbal Aikido is a way of resolving conflicts by applying the philosophy and principles of Aikido in conflict management. In Verbal Aikido they do not confront or encourage aggressiveness to solve a problem or resolve a conflict.

Reading this, I thought, “That’s not a bad idea.” It is not a bad idea because I think it demonstrates once again the tendency we have today to choose, mix, remove, or add things just for the sake of innovating or making things more exotic. This new idea enables Aikido to become cool, easier, or more fashionable which attracts new customers.

As an Aikido teacher, my only fear is that doing so changes Aikido and takes it away from its essence. I don’t think is a good thing to carve out the spiritual or philosophical aspects of Aikido

and separate them from its physical practice. The philosophy of Aikido is something that can be applied to our daily lives to improve many of the facets of our day-to-day experience, but it is also something that has to be learned on the tatami and practiced in every class.

Good Enough



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

I suppose that it is human nature to repackage things that have been already created with brightly colored paper so as to attract new customers who think that they are getting something new, something modern or something “cool.” Some may never know that what they are consuming was created many years ago. I remember that Furuya Sensei used to say that many of these “novelties” were like summer drinks and holiday sweets that are packaged with flash, exotic flavors, and colors so as to attract people and make them think that they are getting something different or something new.

The only problem is that after several days, in the end we become over saturated, sick of it, or bored. This leads to disillusionment and that is why most new students quit. I remember Sensei saying, “If you want to drink something good that gives you what your body needs, drink water!”

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Good Enough *continued from page 2...*

In Aikido we work, we interact, and we share experiences and practice side by side with people. This physical exchange or the practice itself can bring us many different situations that may not arise in our day-to-day life. With every exchange we can experience personal or emotional conflict, anger, frustration, discouragement, etc. These situations are our guides, which teach us how to manage these types of situations. Therefore, we can only learn or truly practice Aikido when we put on our uniform, step on the *tatami* and practice.

Something which differentiates Aikido from other arts is its ability to think about the other person. Training teaches us to look at how the technique is affecting not only me but the *uke* and the other students as well. With every breath, I have to be present, noticing how things are affecting me and how things are affecting my partner. Based on the philosophy of Aikido, I should be trying to engage in the technique which seeks a resolution to the situation that is the least harmful not only to me but to my partner as well. With training, as we progress, we tend to develop a series of “skills” that go beyond the purely technical. Being aware of what we are doing enables us to not only learn how physically to deal with someone, but also how to deal with them mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

In Aikido, at all times, we have to be aware of what we are doing, how we are doing it and how it is affecting everything and everyone around us. The strength, intensity and speed, among other things, are modified according to the attacker and this mindfulness transforms how we relate to our partners. This mindfulness creates a relationship of respect, understanding and care where I am thinking of them and trying to protect them in each tech-

nique which in turn sets up a mutual respect between two people who are combatants. That is why I believe that in Aikido it is essential to practice with all students regardless of level, age, gender, or condition. This inclusivity enriches our sensitivity, broadens our minds, and improves not only our Aikido, but every aspect of our lives as well.

Aikido is like water when we are thirsty, it does not need additives, colors, or flavors or anything else added or removed from it to quench our thirst. Aikido is a complete martial art. If we choose to add or remove things to make it more sexy or easy, we run the risk of ruining something that is already perfect.

As teachers, we should always have patience and faith and we shouldn't stoop to the level of doing things just to impress or attract students. As students, we should have trust and faith that what our teachers are teaching us in the right way, regardless of whether it's fun, easy or cool. This mutual air of trust, faith and patience is what Aikido is all about.

I understand that it is difficult not to fall prey to the temptation of “inventing” something just to invent something so that people will think we are relevant, qualified, or good enough. I have been practicing and teaching for many years and I can tell you that Sensei's words ring true. The best way is to be sincere and humble and strive to bring something positive into a student's life which will help them grow and not only become better Aikidoists, but better human beings too.

Sometimes, the most difficult thing is to just practice. Have faith and be patient because what O'Sensei created and what our teachers are teaching us may look just like plain water, but it is a great treasure. •



Although Aikido is an empty-handed martial art, it retains a weapons training component from its origins. The two main weapons Aikido students use for training are the *bokken*, or “wooden sword,” and the *jo*, or “short staff.” The training scenarios using weapons in class would be weapons vs. weapons, or empty-handed defense against an opponent wielding a weapon.

So why the sword and the staff? We’ve all read the same story about Aikido’s creation: the founder of Aikido, Ueshiba Morihei, trained in several martial arts, namely several styles of Jujutsu, Yagyu Shinkage Ryu swordsmanship, and Hozoin Ryu spearmanship. From intense practice and O’Sensei’s own genius, he created this martial art that we now call Aikido.

Because of Aikido’s sword and spear origins, weapons practice is still a part of the training in many Aikido dojos. We often see Aikido instructors comparing a sword or spear movement to its empty-handed counterpart. Techniques like *shihonage* or *ikkyo* have obvious connections to sword movement. We read that movements like *irimi* are said to have been developed from *spearmanship*.

When we watch Aikido practice, we don’t see Aikidoists move as if they are wrestlers or grapplers who are hunched over, postured low and warily circling each other. Against an attack, Aikidoists move with a balanced and stable upright posture. Although Aikido, like Judo or Jujutsu, is comprised primarily of

throwing and pinning techniques, we hold our posture and move our feet as if we are holding a sword or spear.

Is weapons training necessary to mastering Aikido? Yes and no.

We can see the obvious influences the sword and staff movement have on Aikido. Although weapons were a profound part of Aikido’s

creation and design, I would say that practicing Aikido’s basic techniques should be emphasized over weapons training.

Can a student get good in Aikido without a weapons training component? I would say, yes. However, it is impossible to get good at Aikido without mastering the *kihon-waza* or “basic techniques.” Practicing the basic pinning techniques like *ikkyo*, *nikyo*, *sanyo*, and *yonkyo* and the basic throwing techniques like *iriminage*, *shihonage*, *kotegaeshi*, *kaiten-nage* and *kokyunage* are what a student needs to get a good foundation in the basics.

The basic Aikido techniques impart essential skills to the student. These bread-and-butter techniques are necessary for students to truly master Aikido. However, proper weapons training allows the student to get a glimpse into Aikido’s creation as well as deepen their understanding of the movement.

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Weapons Training



by Ken Watanabe
Technical Director

Weapons Training *continued from page 4...*

Why train with weapons? First of all, O'Sensei loved practicing with the sword and the spear. As his students, it's only natural to want to become skillful with both types of weapons. Weapons training by its nature requires a student to be more alert and more focused than in regular class. Weapons training requires precision and control to practice safely but in an effective manner. Thus, weapons training, when practiced in a correct and balanced manner, can only augment a student's training.

According to Furuya Sensei, both the sword and the staff represent different aspects of Aikido. Both seem to be at opposite ends of the spectrum but, in a way, they complement each other.

The sword emphasizes precision. The sword by its nature requires it to be handled in a very specific way. In untrained hands it will not cut through a target. Instead, the sword will either bend or break. Also, the sword is limited in its attacking potential; it can only thrust or cut. In many Aikido techniques, we cut instead of push. In some techniques, we grip the opponent's wrist at the end of the cutting movement, much like when we squeeze the sword's handle at the completion of a sword cut.

The staff emphasizes the thrust due to its spear origins, but staff movements also emphasize flow. In proper *jo* technique the staff is in constant motion, striking and defending in all four directions, if necessary, as it's moving. Also, while the sword has only two attacking options, the staff has infinite surfaces from which to attack or defend. The *jo* has both ends to thrust, but along its length there are infinite surfaces that the Aikidoist can utilize to strike, sweep, parry, or pin. The *jo* can also be used to throw or pin an opponent.

One hidden benefit of weapons practice is that any bad habits we have in our movement will be revealed by how the student handles the sword or staff. In empty-handed practice, hiding bad habits behind speed or strength is easy and a common practice, but the *bokken* or the *jo* will only amplify any shortcoming a student has in their movement, and it will be apparent just by the way the weapon moves.

In weapons training, it's not about the self, but about how the student can forgo their ego and bring out the essence of each weapon purely and utilize it effectively. It is said that there are not supposed to be any empty movements in the martial arts.



This is especially true in weapons training, every movement with a *jo* or bokken has an attacking or defending application.

It's important to see how correct weapons training benefits our Aikido training and how Aikido's movement and timing contains the essence of this training. However, we must be careful not to emphasize weapons training over practicing Aikido's basics. Doing so would cause problems later on in our progress.

It's important to use weapons training properly without fetishizing it. Weapons training is but another tool in our training

arsenal. It is another skill to add to our progress which can aid in our understanding of Aikido. From correct practice we can see how Aikido's essence is contained in all Aikido techniques. We can begin to see how the movement, timing, spacing, focus, and precision in weapons training can shape our Aikido technique.

The sword's precise nature and the staff's flowing movements balance each other. The sword movement is precise, but also becomes free flowing; the staff movements flow, but also become precise and focused.

In short, that is what our Aikido technique should be like: clear, stable, and balanced movement that appears free, flowing, and round, yet done with focus, precision, and meaning.

Is weapons training necessary? Honestly, I would recommend mastering *ikkyo*, *nikyo*, *sankyo*, *yonkyo*, as well as the main basic throwing techniques (as well as their ukemi) over swinging a sword or thrusting with a staff. However, there is no doubt that correct weapons practice can benefit a student's training.

It's from O'Sensei's mastery of weapons that Aikido gets its essence. It's the reason why an Aikidoist moves the way they do as opposed to the way practitioners of other empty-handed martial arts move. This weapon based movement is also why the Aikido technique is so sophisticated.

Weapons training is like a tool and like any tool it can be misused and abused. It's up to the user to make it work as correctly as possible. How do we know what's right? Through correct training and through our teacher's instruction. Proper weapons training, balanced with correct training in the basics, can refine our practice and our technique. If practiced properly and correctly, it can serve both to broaden and deepen our understanding of Aikido's practice. •



I don't consider myself such a great teacher. Perhaps I am too afraid of all my many vices that I try to watch them very carefully. I don't have the courage or privilege to break so many rules as some enlightened people! Hahaha!

Like most everyone else in such an art as Aikido, I have had the occasion to be very disappointed in some instructors. Also, I have come to respect and hold up other instructors as a model for myself. We all go through this at one time or another in our training. I see this subject discussed in many forums on the internet.

When I was first ordained as a priest, my Zen master, Bishop Kenko Yamashita told me this, "Everything in this temple and what you do is unfair and unjust. If you are not prepared to accept this, you will have a lot of trouble! I myself am totally selfish and only think of myself and no one else. Don't expect anything from me because I don't care about anything but myself!"

When he said this to me, I was totally shocked but thought that this is all a part of the normal Zen "dialogue" and "chit-chat" that we always hear about. However, in the first several years, I really suffered because there was so much I didn't understand and people can always be or appear to be a big disappointment, especially all of the seniors around me. My teacher's words always stuck with me and that is what carried me through many ups and downs. Later, I realized that it was not really so "unjust" or "unfair," it is just people being people or human beings being human beings and that is the way it is wherever we go, even in a temple or a dojo.

Greatness



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

At the beginning, it is easy to set up ideals (which might be a little too unrealistic) and high expectations about Aikido and our teachers, or with our organizations, and as such we see frustration all over the internet all of the time. I think there should be a "probation time" which allows us, through correct training, to settle back to earth and look at the art in a more "natural" way. I didn't say, "reasonable" or "logical!"

Once, a soldier said to the world conqueror, Alexander the Great, "You are like a god!" Alexander replied, "Ask the person who empties my chamber pot each morning!"

As I recall old memories, I would like to relate one more episode in my temple training many years ago. Once a monk came for training to our temple from Japan. I was under the local temple, which my teacher was head of, and it was also part of the North American Headquarters. Our temple was a center for training for many monks as well. When the new monk arrived, I happened to be there when he had his first interview with my teacher.

My teacher looked at him and said, "You are here for a while. I think your father must have given you a great deal of money for your stay. Hand it all over to me!" We were both surprised at that moment and later this priest confessed to me, "I thought he was some kind of thief at first who was going to steal all my money!"

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AIKIDO CLASSES BEGIN AT THE TERASAKI BUDOKAN



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Then my teacher told him: “You come here to my temple thinking that you are going to have a good time and that we are going to give you everything! You think you are here to take, take, take and then leave. That is a big mistake! When you come to this temple, you come to give, give, give. You must give of yourself in order to train yourself, it is not a matter of thinking about all you can get. I expect you to work hard and do your best. You must give, not take away! I will keep your money and return it to you when you are ready to return back to Japan!”

We were both so shocked when we heard these words but later, I was so impressed with my teacher. I see this all the time in the dojo and in Aikido. Most people come into practice and into the dojo thinking only about what they are going to get. So many people nowadays have this attitude of take, take, take and “me, me, me.” These students either change their mental perspective or never do well in Aikido. Over all these years, I know this to be true in many cases not just in Aikido but in life as well. •

Editor’s note: Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on November 20, 2003.

UPCOMING EVENTS

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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

- September 5th:** Dojo closed for Labor Day
- September 24th:** Intensive Seminar
- 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

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
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Mondays

6:30-7:30 PM	Regular
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Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM	Regular Class
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Tuesdays

6:30-7:30 PM	Weapons
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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
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Tuesdays

7:45-8:45 PM	Regular class
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Thursdays

7:45-8:45 PM	Regular class
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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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