



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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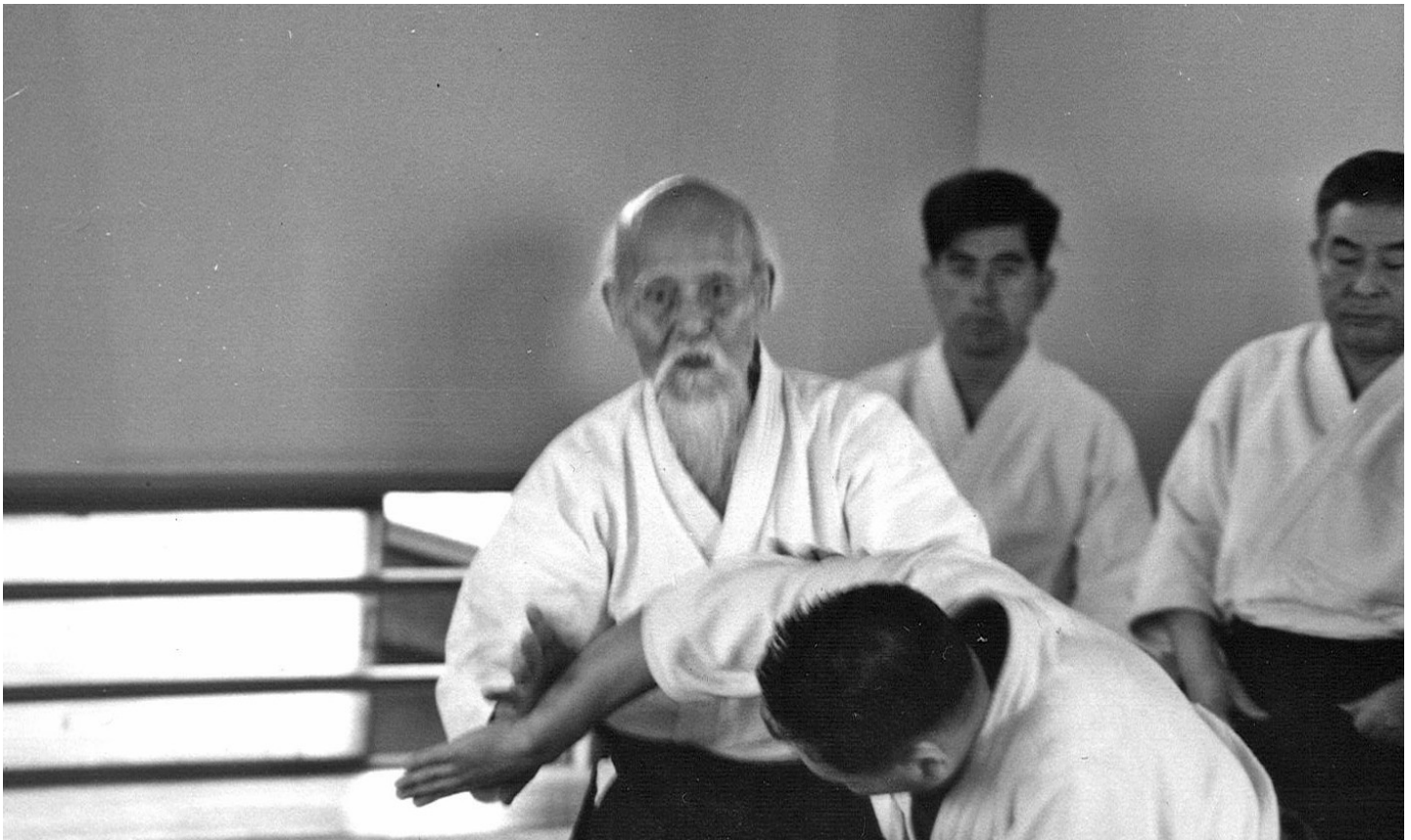
Sleepy Students

by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Furuya Sensei expounds of sleepy students on the mat.



The End of Summer



In Hollywood, when they say that a person has the “It Factor,” they mean that a person has this high-level mixture of charisma, good looks, and talent. This mixture is supposedly an indication of a person’s star making potentiality. In Aikido, there is an “It Factor” too but it has nothing to do with what a person’s looks.

In the past, accepting a student was a huge undertaking. Most teachers could only afford to take on a few students at a time because they supported the students financially. It is only in the modern era that a teacher would have a plethora of students and that the students would pay to be students.

In the past, a potential student needed to be vetted because choosing the wrong student could result in a teacher or system being betrayed, or at the very least being a huge waste of time and a drain on the resources when the person quit. Therefore, teachers of old needed to be good at “reading” their potential students. It is said that a good teacher is able to *sou wo miru* (相を見る) or “read the student” and get a sense of their physical ability or potential talent. The teacher usually has the aspiring student fight a current student to see their natural ability. At a higher level, a great teacher is supposedly able to *kokoro wo yomu* (心を読む) or “read the student’s heart” to ascertain not only that person’s intentions but also figure out the state of their true natural ability. Sometimes, this higher-level test consisted of the teacher asking the student to do a menial task which would test their ego.

A typical method in the past was to only take on students who demonstrated a higher level of physical ability. It was thought that those people could get good faster and so a lot of stock was put into anyone with physical talent. Any person not showing a higher level of physical ability was turned away because it was thought that if they didn’t naturally have talent, then it would take too long to reach a high level because they were starting from a deficit.

One of the main reasons for this old-style culling process was speed. Prior to the Meiji Era (1868-1912), teachers of military arts only taught people in their clan or family to prepare them for war. However, the Meiji Era was the end of Feudalism and the beginning of when martial arts

The Elite



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

schools went from private to public. Now, teachers were putting out shingles in search of students in order to make a living. At that time, *dojo yaburi* (道場破り) or “dojo storming” was a common occurrence. When a person was trying to create a name for themselves or gain more students, they would storm a dojo and challenge the teacher to a duel. It was thought that if you could defeat the teacher, then you could take their students and close their school. *Yaburi* means “to break” and a common occurrence was to break the teacher’s *kaban* or “sign board” in half after you beat them to signal that the school was closed. This was one reason why speed was necessary to develop students because they didn’t want an outsider to come in and defeat everyone in the school and ruin the school’s reputation.

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+ Información

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25
古道会

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The Elite *continued from page 2...*

Today, there aren't *dojo yaburi* and war is not at our doorstep, so there isn't this immediacy to find only physically talented people. It is my personal belief that every person has *tenyonoshi* (天与の資) or "natural ability." *Tenyonoshi* directly translates to mean "gift bestowed from heaven." For some, their natural ability is closer to the surface. For others, their natural talent is buried a bit deeper. I, myself, was a late bloomer and one of those people whose natural gift was buried a bit farther down. I am pretty sure that if I were to show up in the past, I would have been turned away.

When I was a student, Furuya Sensei would often say, "Aikido is for the elite." His assertion used to really bother me. I thought it was a putdown because I thought he was talking about elite in terms of one's class status. I always assumed Sensei's assertion was pointed at me in the beginning because I didn't demonstrate any physical talent and it took me twice as long as my peers to reach black belt.

Later in life, Furuya stopped saying, "Aikido was for the elite" and started saying, "Aikido is egalitarian." He once wrote, "Whatever the reason may be, talent, age and skill have nothing to do with learning Aikido - or least, not as much as we assume.

Most people who truly want to learn art can learn. Those who really do not want to learn, will not." I think Sensei changed their way he framed it because many of my physically talented peers didn't last the test of time nor were any of them there when he died.

Now, as a teacher myself, I realized what Sensei was referring to when he said, "elite." The best students have this mixture of willingness, openness, and good attitude and that is what makes them "elite." They are elite because to have that mindset is to have "It" and that person, regardless of physical ability, stands alone. I believe that anyone can learn Aikido, as it is just physical movement, but only a select few have the right mindset to live the Way of Aikido.

In the end, there are no true naturals or prodigies – everyone puts their pants on one leg at a time. Thus, we are all equal. Some of us are lucky enough to have physical talent while others are luckier to have "It" or the right mindset. Regardless of the type of talent each person has, most of us don't know how to access our talent. That is where Aikido training comes in. It is Aikido training's job to help students bring forth their gifts and to help raise them to their highest level regardless of the talent they have. Aikido is egalitarian. •



Aikido is a balanced martial art. A large part of our practice is striving to learn balance. Practicing balance begins from the beginning of our training and continues as we refine our technique. This balance is not just physical but also mental.

In the beginning, we practice finding this balance physically. At this stage of our training, we emphasize posture. At the most basic level, our posture helps us to keep upright. We practice how to keep our weight distributed evenly between our feet when we are standing in our *kamae*, or “stance,” as well as when we are moving or attacking.

Once we manage to maintain our physical posture, we can begin to develop stable movement from our hips and legs. This allows us to relax our upper body and sink our weight downward. From this point we can learn how to move from our center; that is, how to move our entire body at the same time, while maintaining our posture. Once we get used to stepping while maintaining this posture, we can begin to move with energy and stability with our whole body – our hips, both of our legs, and both of our arms.

In regards to our arms and legs, their movements must be balanced between left and right as well. When we use our arms and hand blades in Aikido, it is important to keep the focus on both our left and right sides. For example, in *tenchi-nage*, or “heaven-earth throw,” one hand blade cuts down breaking the opponent’s balance while the other hand blade comes up and extends across our partner’s chest and past their shoulder to trap them. This puts the one receiving the throw in a vulnerable place.

Furuya Sensei used to chastise us for not maintaining the balance in our right and left hands, emphasizing the top hand and letting the bottom hand collapse. In this throw the bottom hand is the throwing hand while the top hand is for trapping our opponent. What this kind of two-handed attack helps develop is the

ability to keep balance between our right and left hand blades. At the end of this technique, both arms should be extended forward and rounded with the hand blades lined up with each other, creating a complete and semi-circular feeling.

This circular shape we create in our arm movement is an important symbol of this balance, as well as an important method to develop it. If we look at the Aikido technique critically, we find that our arms always maintain this relationship with each other; both arms are balanced, energy-wise, and are connected with each other. We use this balanced circular feeling during rolls.

When we step in Aikido, we slide our feet in a method called *suri-ashi*. Our feet slide on the floor instead of coming up and stepping down. This type of footwork helps us develop our balance. When our weight is balanced between our two feet, they slide easily; when our weight is unbalanced, the foot carrying the most weight sticks to the floor. In martial arts, mobility is very

important, so this relationship between our balance and footwork is important to practice.

Later, we use this posture to

hide our footwork and balance from our opponent.

This balance is also present in our footwork. For example, if we slide forward, we move from our front foot. We stretch our front foot forward, but as we do so, our back foot stretches backward. The same applies when we slide back. The feeling is that our legs extend from our centerline at the same time. Whether we are moving backwards, forwards, sideways, or turning, we step while keeping our posture balanced as we balance the power between our front leg and back leg.

From a physical standpoint, our power comes from movement with a stable balanced posture. Without understanding this posture and balance, we will never understand how to allow our whole body to work together to issue power.

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Balance is Key



by Ken Watanabe
Shihan



Balance is Key *continued from page 4...*

At the same time we are developing our physical balance, we are also practicing our mental balance. In the beginning, the two basic focus points in the Aikido technique are: 1) the direction of our focus, and 2) the balance between attack and defense.

Although Aikido appears to be circular and flowing, its effectiveness is determined by our focus. In the Aikido movement, whether we are moving forwards, backwards, sideways, or turning, our focus is always directed forward.

For example, when we *tenshin*, or “move back” against our opponent’s attack, we balance our backwards step with a strong mental focus forward, toward our opponent. This mental focus is important. Without this balance, we would be overwhelmed by our opponent’s power. Later, as we develop this balance, we also practice drawing their power out to neutralize it.

Another example is *tenkan* or “turning.” When we practice the *tenkan* exercise, we enter our opponent’s blind side, and step backwards, turning so we are facing the same direction as our opponent. One important aspect of *tenkan* is how we focus forward throughout the entire movement even though our body is turning. As we step backwards to turn, we practice keeping our balance as we keep our focus lined up with our body movement. Another aspect to *tenkan* is balancing its circular movement, with a strong linear component. This leads to balancing attack and defense. *Tenkan* appears to be a circular defensive movement, but it also has a strong offensive aspect, especially at the *tachiai*, or “moment of contact.”

During this moment of contact, it’s important to balance out the defensive aspects of the Aikido movement and the offensive aspect of an equally strong attacking component. At the moment of contact, our movement switches from an attacking, opposing

mindset to protecting ourselves. Yet even though we are moving off the line of attack to protect ourselves, we are still balancing that defensive mindset with the attacking one, which we use to apply the technique.

The idea behind this balanced attack/defense mindset, is to change our opponent’s psychology from “attacking” to “defending.” By balancing attack and defense, we cause our opponent to react to our technique rather than our reacting to their attack. In the martial arts, it’s said that every attacking technique has some defense, and every defensive technique has some offense.

Ultimately, like the *yin-yang* symbol, every martial art seeks to find balance. This balance is easiest to understand physically during practice, but because the mental aspect is more difficult to understand, it is also important to start developing correct mental balance right away.

Balance in our practice takes a long time to understand. All defense is no good, but all attack is no good either. In balance there is a lot of back and forth. Balance is never static. It is always changing and adjusting with the situation. Once we understand balance in our own technique then we balance ourselves with our opponent.

Our physical and mental balance are closely related to each other. What this means is that our physical balance is strongly influenced by our mental balance. Our physical movement will always reveal our mental focus, or lack thereof.

The mental aspect of training will always be more difficult than the physical because it is so easy to let our ego take over and allow us to fool ourselves. This is why it is so important to train correctly and with the right intention. When we practice good Aikido, we are practicing balance. •

In most areas of our lives we are accustomed to thinking that new and innovative things are “better.” Flashy things catch our eyes, like new restaurants, new model cars, or the latest smartphone with all the updated features. Everyone likes new things because we typically associate new with innovation. However, in the martial arts, new doesn’t necessarily mean better.

Innovation in the martial arts is not a new thing. When I was a student, I can fondly remember Furuya Sensei lamenting about people’s desire to create and innovate Aikido as far back as the 1990s. Whenever people would talk about the newest and latest things in the martial arts, Sensei always commented negatively about how people “always look for innovation” and never train long enough to see “the beauty” in traditional martial arts.

Human beings are hard-wired for growth and improvement. After all, from the moment we are conceived, we are constantly maturing, growing, and changing. I don’t know if it is a function of human beings or boredom, but it does seem like many people become weary training in the basics day in and day out.

When a student has been practicing a traditional Japanese art for a long time, such as a martial art and especially in Aikido, it is easy to become tempted to leave aside the *kihon-waza* or “basic principles” and modify things to make them easier, exciting, or just more enjoyable for the students.

Sometimes this departure is a result of a personal situation like a teacher who is trying to make a living teaching. That person opts to add in something that the students might find more interesting because they simply need a change of scenery. The fact is that in any case these little things day after day take us away from our original path. In Buddhism, this is referred to as *heijoshin* (平常心) or “the original mind.”

The original mind is what we were born with before we became bombarded by the outside world. Leaving this *heijoshin* is what causes us to want something more, something flashier, or something innovative.

As a teacher responsible for teaching classes, it is difficult to maintain the balance between maintaining the foundational teachings and keeping students’ interests. *Kihon-waza* are necessary to learn for students to grow and they are necessary for teachers to teach so that they can become competent teachers. Most teachers have to balance being innovative to attract new students and maintain their interest in the art.

I remember more than 20 years ago, when I started teaching Aikido under Sensei, that I had a basic knowledge of only some of the Aikido techniques, but not all of them. Studying under Sensei showed me just how much I didn’t know. From the beginning, I chose Sensei as my teacher and so I trusted him and never questioned his way of teaching even if it was boring or if I

got antsy searching for change or innovation. Training seemed very repetitive, very physical, and very intense - it was traditional. The fact that I got bored was not Sensei’s problem. His job was to teach the class and create the situation so that I could reach my greatest potential. Understanding that, I never considered asking Sensei to change the class for me. Today, I teach Aikido the way it was taught to me by Sensei without ever consciously changing a thing.

I started teaching classes the same way I attended classes when I was a student. I trusted my teacher’s method, which was informed by hours of study and decades of practice. I was very fortunate to have been able to “simply” follow in the footsteps of my teacher.

I know this is not easy for many different reasons. However, for those of us that teach class, this

is the challenge and this is the training. Perhaps for some this is a problem because despite wanting to follow their teacher’s philosophy or way of teaching, they feel limited. However, this apprehension is the Way. Coming up with “our” way is limited because we have so few training hours compared to our teachers who never tried to innovate and those that did made sure to master imitating first. The Japanese talk about training in

terms of *shuhari* (守破離). *Shu* is the beginning stage where we learn to master the form in its entirety. *Ha* is the stage where we delve

into the techniques and explore the techniques in detail. In *ri*, we break the form of the technique, and this is where innovation could happen. Most times people think that they are seeing innovation when they watch these great masters demonstrate their arts. Interestingly, most are not innovating at all; they are just demonstrating the original way at such a high level that it looks innovative.

Today, everyone wants to be an innovator by adding and removing things that they believe are not necessary so that they can do it “their way.” Being an “original” is just the opposite. Being a true original is to master the basics and continue listening to your Sensei, day after day, trusting their way of doing things. After all, it worked for you; let it work for others.

In today’s ever-changing technological world, be an original - trust your teachers, trust their methods, and resist the temptation to change things. It will all work out; I promise you. •



Be Original



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

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The other day, I wrote about my students being reprimanded for being “sleepy students.” I think that most instructors will keep such a reprimand very private and confidential between the teacher and student, I am not such a “kind” and “considerate” teacher, hahaha! Many might think that teacher-student matters should be private. I have done this many times in the past. I discuss very openly and honestly the matters of many inquiries across the world from other students such as yourself so it is only fair that I discuss matters in my own dojo as well, if I think that it will help one’s training, wherever the student might be. To me, in the dojo, “everything is learning.” Actually, it is honest to discuss in this Yahoo Group because I have firsthand involvement in some issue. When people send me inquiries from outside, I only hear half or one-third of the story so my answer can’t be completely honest or forthright. When I answer, I am always trying to ascertain the whole story from some person’s side of the story. Usually, I am just getting a small piece of the whole pie.

Teachers, as well as students, need a wake-up call once in a while. If you want to wake up someone from their sleep, we do not bang the drum softly or blow the bugle quietly! It has to be loud and a tad bit obnoxious to awaken them. Can you understand?

Over many years, I have come to discuss everything about the dojo with my students. All my students, especially my senior students, act as my personal advisors and I discuss dojo matters with them quite openly and frankly. Each month, I conduct one open General Membership Meeting and two Study Classes in which all students can ask questions and we can discuss anything and everything about our practice and Aikido. I also answer their questions and inquiries on my Yahoo group everyday without fail. Almost every day, I have dinner or lunch or coffee with one of my assistant instructors after practice and we discuss the day’s classes and their training and also the training of all my current students. My senior instructors are always up to date and quite well informed about my opinions and methods to teaching each individual student and how best to enhance their progress and training. I also have a Senior Advisory Committee set up of my most senior and most trusted students to discuss all operational and managerial matters of the dojo as well.

Sleepy Students



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

I find that the more my students know what is going on in the dojo and everything about what I do in practice and about the dojo, the more my students understand where I am coming from and are willing to see (or forgive!) my methods each day I teach.

In my early years, I kept everything rather confidential from my students as is very typical with most teachers, but I found that students began to lack involvement with the dojo and understood what I did in class much less. I think, from my own personal experience as a teacher, it is best to be very open with my students and let them know everything about the dojo with nothing hidden or kept secret. I find that the students feel more involved and a part of the dojo which I think is important. I also

think that the more the students know what I am doing and what I am thinking, the more they are willing to accept and understand me. This all makes it

much easier and more interesting to teach and guide them.

I have found that the more my students know what is going on in the dojo and know where I am coming from, they have learned to accept all my shortcomings and failings as a teacher and realize that I am just another human being stumbling along like everyone else in this dark, mysterious place called Life!

In talking about “drums” to wake up sleepy students, I will tell you now of a little, very personal story about my Zen master, Bishop Kenko Yamashita. When he was writing his book in Japanese, his first title which he decided not to use later, was “Fuko.” Everyone thought this is a very strange title for a book because *fuko* means, “paper drum.” Everyone told him, “Don’t use it!” When I asked him about this when we were alone, he smiled like he always did and said to me, “Teaching people is like beating a “paper drum,” it cannot make a good sound and breaks so quickly on the first strike, it is a completely useless thing in this world, like myself!” I always remember this story about my teacher with great affection. Many times, I think of myself, too, as a “paper drum!”•

Editor’s note: *Furuya Sensei posted this article in a slightly different format on his Daily Message on September 27, 2002.*

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

September 5th: Dojo Closed – Labor Day
September 30th: Watanabe Shihan celebration
September 30th: Intensives Seminar
October 4th: Special class with Didier Boyet Shihan
October 9-20: Spain 25th anniversary seminar
October 28th: Intensives Seminar
November 22-24: 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 Advanced
 11:30 AM-12:30 PM Theory

Wednesdays

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

Sundays

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

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

Mondays

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

9:00-10:00 AM Regular Class

Tuesdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class

Thursdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class



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The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

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

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

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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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