



Aiki Dojo

2 The Way Isn't Easy *By David Ito*

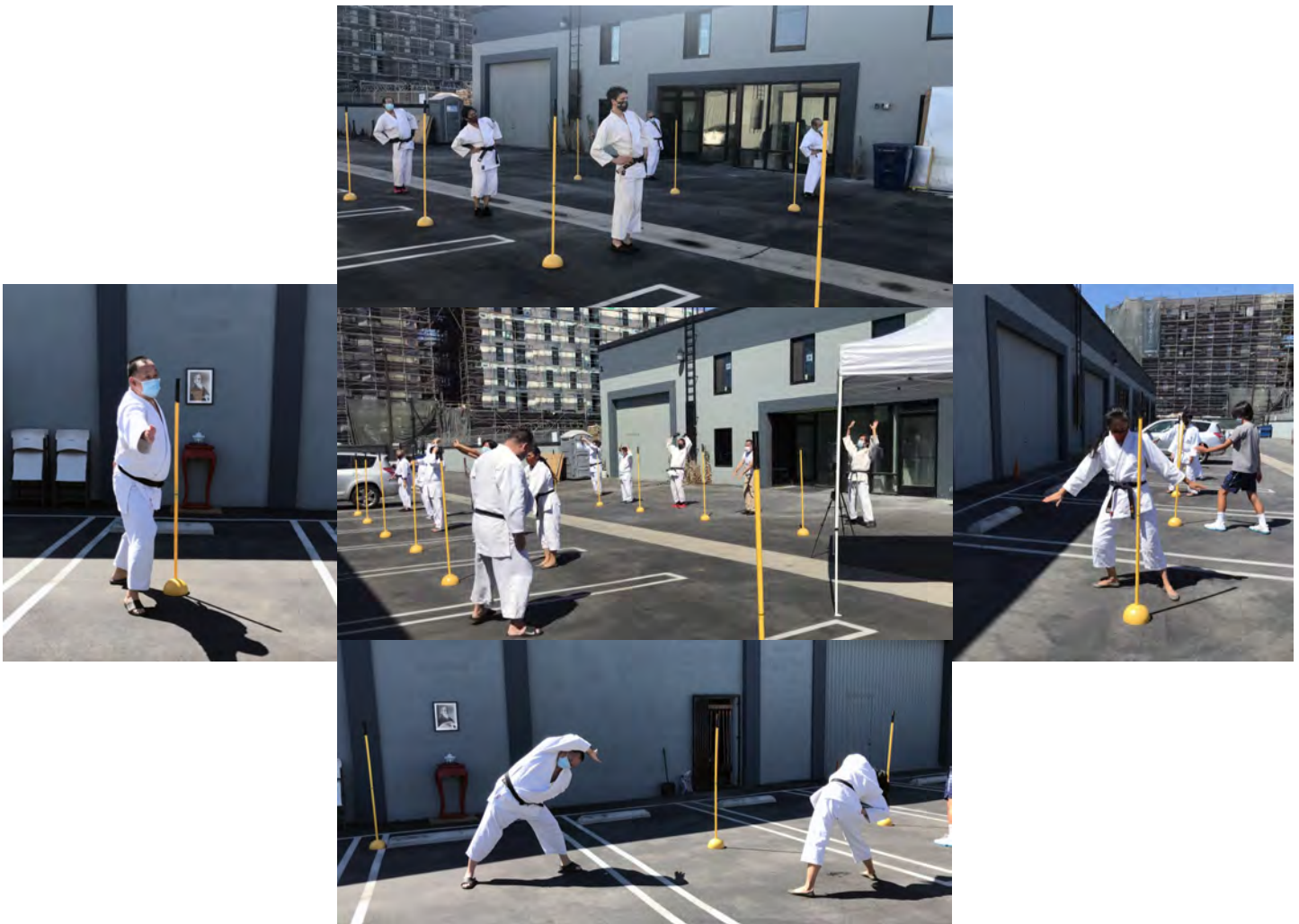
Ito Sensei illustrates how following the Way can be hard.

5 Why To Atemi *by Santiago Almaraz*

Almaraz Sensei completes his three part series on atemi.

7 Without the Basics *by Rev. Kensho Furuya*

Sensei discusses the need to focus on the basics in training.



AIKIDO CLASSES RESUME OUTSIDE



The Way Isn't Easy

死は易く生は難し
Shi wa yasuku, Sei wa katashi
 To die is easy, to live is hard

The word *do* (道) at the end of Japanese arts like Aikido, Chado, Judo, Iaido, and Karate-do literally translates to mean “path.” However, when we use the word “Way” *do* has a more metaphorical meaning which suggests more depth as it applies to the way in which we live our lives. The principle of the arts that one studies become the standards that guide our every move in life. Like all philosophies, the rules can sometimes be difficult to live by and that is why the Japanese say, “Shi wa yasuku, sei wa katashi” or “To die is easy, but to live is hard.”

A warrior monk named Musashibo Benkei and his death typify what it means to steadfastly follow the “Way.”

Musashibo Benkei was Japanese warrior monk or *sohei* (僧兵) in the 12th century. He is often depicted as an ominous or ogre-like figure with great strength who was supposed to be two meters tall which is very tall for Japanese of that time. Benkei is often times portrayed carrying seven weapons on his back: a sword, a *masakari* broad axe, a *kumade* rake, a *nagigama* sickle, a wooden *hizuchi* mallet, a *nokogiri* saw, an iron *tetsubo* staff and

a *naginata* glaive.

Benkei is best known for his loyalty to the military commander Minamoto no Yoshitsune. The story goes that Benkei met Yoshitsune while on a quest to win and take 1000 swords in 1000 duels. Benkei had already won 999 swords and was looking for the 1000th while visiting Gojotenjin shrine in Kyoto where he saw a boy playing a flute and wearing a golden sword. Thinking that this gold sword would make for a great 1000th sword, Benkei challenged the much smaller Yoshitsune to a duel for the sword. The Gojotenjin shrine was so small and so the two decided to go to Gojo bridge where there was more room. Benkei had a reputation for using his superior size and



by David Ito
 Aikido Chief Instructor

strength to take people’s swords and thought this would be an easy match because the person was so much smaller. However, Benkei quickly realized that Yoshitsune was not a boy and was outmatched by Yoshitsune’s superior speed and footwork. Benkei’s defeat was quick and embarrassing. Days later, Benkei was still upset that he had been beaten so easily, so he searched for Yoshitsune and found him at Kiyomizudera temple. Angriely, he challenged Yoshitsune to another duel, but the result was the same. After that defeat, Benkei bowed down and vowed to be Yoshitsune’s servant and bodyguard and the two went on to fight in many battles.

Continued on page 3...



The moonlight fight between Yoshitsune and Benkei on Gojo bridge in Kyoto with Kisanda behind by Utagawa Kuniyoshi 1839.

The Way Isn't Easy continued from page 2..

Benkei's most honorable and loyal deed came as the two were fleeing Yoshitsune's older brother, Minamoto no Yoritomo. Angered by Yoshitsune's success, Yoritomo and his troops cornered the pair at Koromogawa no Tate castle in 1189. Rather than allow himself to be killed and used as a trophy, Yoshitsune decided to commit ritual suicide. To ensure that his master had enough time to commit suicide in the proper manner, Benkei stood guard on the bridge and blocked the main gate and would not allow any soldiers to pass. In droves, soldiers fell to Benkei's sword and it is said that he eventually killed over 300. Realizing that his strength was too great, Yoritomo pelted him with arrows. Despite being hit by several arrows, Benkei menacingly stood firmly blocking the bridge and entrance. At one point, the archers stopped firing because Benkei's body was riddled with arrows and he didn't appear to be moving. As they moved closer, Benkei fell over and they realized that he had died standing up still blocking the entrance. Benkei's loyal death would become immortalized in many stories, *kabuki* and *noh* plays and was a statue at Chusonji hill at one time. Benkei's death became to be known as *Benkei no Tachi no Ojo* or the "Standing Death of Benkei."

The way is often spelled with a capital "W" to give it gravitas and magnitude because the Way can be thought of as one's "way of life." So, a *do* or "Way" is important because these values be-

come a person's belief system which is then the lens by which all things are perceived, assessed, and acted upon. These values can often times be difficult because sometimes we must choose what is right over what is easy or more gratifying. This is where most students of the Way struggle. Understanding this difficulty, Furuya Sensei would often say, "The Way is hard" because he knew that there was often a divide between the people who believe in the principles and those who actually live by them.



Benkei no Tachi no Ojo
Standing Death of Benkei

our success in life stems from those habits that we do every day. That is why one of the most difficult things about living the Way is living it every day and that is why "To die is easy, but to live is hard."

Benkei demonstrated just how hard it was to live the Way. He could have run off, saved his own life, and maybe even live a long time. Instead, he chose to live out his last moments resolutely with honor. Many of us may never be tested or have to demonstrate our principles to this degree, but we can still live by a code. In a certain way, Benkei's last battle was his final exam proving that he truly lived the Way.

Practitioners of *budo* sometimes say, "Tora wa shishite kawa wo nokosu, hito wa shishite na wo nokosu" or that "When a tiger dies, they leave their hide, but when a person dies, they leave their honor." Our beliefs form our character and our character forms our habits and



by Ken Watanabe
Technical Director

Before you even open “An Introduction to Aikido: Mastering the Basics Through Proper Training” the title itself already gives us our first lesson. Although Dojo-cho, Mitsuteru Ueshiba’s new book is tailored for beginners, its subtitle gives away the secret to mastering not only Aikido but mastering pretty much anything - mastering the basics through training.

Overall, Dojo-cho’s book is a good resource for both beginners seeking to master the basics and instructors who wish to develop their class curriculums, especially when focusing on teaching beginners. The book is the size of a paperback novel so it is handy and easy to use.

The book is laid out very logically, starting from the basic etiquette, to solo basics, like *ukemi* and *shikko* or “knee walking,” then moving on to paired body movements or *taisabaki*. The section on techniques begins with basic Aikido throwing techniques or *nage-waza* and then it moves on to the four basic pinning techniques: *ikkajo*, *nikyo*, *sankyo*, and *yonkyo*.

The instruction portion of the book concludes with a section on developing one’s *kokyu-ryoku*, or *kokyu* which translates to mean, “breath power.” The book finishes with a section on the Aikikai foundation and its history which is succinctly summed up for those who are not familiar with Aikido’s history.

I personally appreciated the techniques that Dojo-cho included in this book. These are not the flashy techniques we might see in a demonstration, but the kind of *kihon* or “basic techniques” that will give any beginner a solid foundation from which to advance in their Aikido training.

The beginning skills and basic techniques are expertly demonstrated by both Dojo-cho and other senior instructors from Hombu Dojo. Each entry has more than enough photos showing the proper way to practice each technique, with some techniques containing up to 20 photos in their sequences. The written instructions and photos are thoughtfully organized and intelligently worded so that they are both easy to follow.

The written instructions for each technique are clear and basic. I think that it is a key when teaching beginners. There is just enough detail in the notes to get beginners off on the right foot (pun intended) without bogging them down with too many fine points. The combination of written content and photographs is also just about the right amount of instruction for someone just starting out.

For instructors, the book answers the question, “What are the basics that will help students understand Aikido?” Thus, for those seeking to understand this, this book is a very good start.

When planning what to teach, it is important to understand which techniques impart the basic skills that benefit the student’s progress the most. The reader can clearly see this in Dojo-cho’s book.

It is important to see the basics in everything. Once we have mastered the basics, we can see the basics, or lack thereof, in any technique. When we see an Aikido technique we have never practiced before, how do we learn it? Do we start from the ground up? Yes, and no. No, it can be too much work to start from the very beginning. But in a way, yes, we start from our foundation and work our way up. We start with the basics and see how these basics apply to, and make sense of, the technique.

Even though we might practice a new Aikido technique, there should be aspects to the technique’s movements that are familiar. We ask ourselves, “Is there a *tenkan*, *irimi*, *tenkai* or *tenshin*?” When we understand the basics even the advanced techniques can give their secrets to us.

Furuya Sensei used to say this about advanced techniques, “Advanced Aikido techniques are just basic techniques practiced at a very high level.” In the end, an advanced technique and a basic technique are often one and the same. The differences are the way in which they are practiced. Some have better timing, better spacing, better focus, or better connection, to name just a few. To an advanced or beginning student, the basics are always there, supporting the student. To reach

this level of practice, a student must, like Dojo-cho’s book title reads, “Master the Basics Through Proper Training.” For me, there is no better way to start and Dojo-cho’s book does just that. I recommend Dojo-cho’s book to everyone who studies Aikido regardless of whether they are beginners or experts. •



Book Review:

An Introduction to Aikido: Mastering the Basics Through Proper Training
By Mitsuteru Ueshiba, Hombu Dojo Dojo-cho



Kata-dori Dai-nikyo Ura

- 1 Tori stands face to face with uke.
- 2-3 The instant uke grabs the tip of tori's shoulder, tori delivers an *otemi* blow.
- 4-5 Tori takes a step into uke's rear side and brings uke's arm down with the *otemi* hand.
- 6-7 Tori takes control of uke's hand with that hand and uke's elbow with the other and swings uke's arm up and then down in a circular motion in a *tenkan* movement.
- 8-9 Tori puts uke's hand on the tip of his/her shoulder, bends uke's wrist and elbow joint, and locks the wrist joint.
- 10-11 Tori brings uke facedown onto the mat in a *tenkan* movement and locks uke's shoulder joint.





Editor's note: This is the third part of a three-part series on atemi or striking techniques. The first article appeared in the May 2020 issue and the second one in June 2020.

In the first two articles, I discussed “What is atemi?” and “How to do atemi?” This article will focus on why one would use *atemi* and how it fits into modern Aikido training and teaching.

Here is a summary of what an *atemi* is:

An *atemi* (当身) or “body hit” is strike or blow to any part of an opponent’s body. The development of *atemi-waza* or “hitting techniques” stems from the evolution of Japanese martial arts, particularly in jujutsu, which can be traced back to the Sengoku period (1467-1615). Empty hand techniques were created as a form of unarmed combat for samurai who had lost their weapons on the battlefield. Some of those empty-handed techniques were joint locks, throws and strikes. Essentially, they were techniques a samurai could use in battle when they lost the advantage of distance that using a weapon created and were forced to rely only on their bare hands.

Although *atemi-waza* was originally a secondary empty-handed technique that could kill or harm an opponent, it really was more of a distraction technique. Most samurai wore armor which could weigh almost 30 kilograms and

Why To Atemi



by Santiago Garcia Almaraz
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai

would protect very well against blows especially those to vital points. Hitting those protected areas of the opponent’s body, whether they were with fists, elbows or feet would have little or no effect. Therefore, *atemi-waza*’s objective was to stun, confuse, unbalance, or set up the opponent for a throw or take down. If they could be neutralized, confused, or controlled then another deadly weapon like a *yoroi doshi* or “armor piercing dagger” which could be employed to kill them.

Here is a summary of the usage of *atemi*:

When we talk about the practice or execution of *atemi* in Aikido, there are two ways to look at it. The first is when *atemi* is used in an attack. In this case, *atemi* is being used as an attack by the *uke* or the one who “receives” the technique. Secondly, *atemi* is used by the *tori* or *nage* in the technique and is used for an intended purpose which is specific to the technique.

When we think about the rationale for *atemi* it is best that we look at the past in order to understand the present and future. In Japanese, this is called *onkochishin* (温故知新) or “to study the past to learn about the future.”

Continued on page 6...



Why to Atemi continued from page 5...

O'Sensei once said to Saito Sensei that "Aikido is 99% atemi." Therefore, *atemi* should have some role in modern Aikido. The problem is that that role is not completely clear.

Part of the problem with use of *atemi* is in its inherent aggressiveness and it being incongruent with O'Sensei's philosophy of non-violence. Some people believe that any sort of conflict, despite it being aggressive or not, creates disharmony and causes us to leave the path of non-violence. To be in accord with O'Sensei's philosophies, the practice of the *atemi-waza* must be carried out, without the intention of damaging or hurting our opponent at all, but in turn, the *atemi-waza* is used fundamentally to achieve a certain physical and mental reaction such as breaking concentration or distracting the opponent or establishing *kuzushi* or "breaking the balance" of the opponent.

Atemi has a place in the understanding of Aikido from an evolutionary perspective because it teaches us many things that help us to better understand O'Sensei's Aikido. Understanding the wearing of armor and having some knowledge of the human anatomy helps us to maintain the real meaning of *atemi* so that it will not lose its effectiveness. *Atemi* can teach us the power and speed in the execution and timing or the correct moment of the techniques. Knowing anatomy and historical impetus helps us understand where to target the strike, which influences our spacing or *ma-ai* and also our speed. Studying the deeper or mental aspects of *atemi* enables us to use the *atemi* without hurting our opponents and thus maintain or contain the level of conflict or aggressiveness. From an effectiveness standpoint, knowing or understanding *atemi* is a place that we can fall back on if we run into trouble if the technique we are using isn't working or we underestimated our opponent.

Finally, understanding *atemi* helps us to have the correct intention. What I mean is that *atemi* reminds us that Aikido can be both lethal and peaceful depending on our intention. In swordsmanship they say "satsujinken, katsujinto" or "the sword which takes life or the sword that gives life."

The *atemi* learning process requires many years of training because it is something which needs to be automatic; a conditioned reflex that is the result of many years of practice. Most of the *atemi* practiced is in reference to *ukemi* or in "the acceptance" of the *atemi* by the uke. The practice of *atemi* must always be adapted to the level of our partner and thus it needs to be understood, done with control and always have an intention. Done right, *atemi* will be a sincere, spontaneous, and natural reaction to an attacker.

The interaction of *uke* and *tori* has to be focused and concentrated because this is the only way that both can practice with security and sincerity and so utilizing *atemi* can help to create this atmosphere.

In the practice of Aikido the development of the technique is a set of physical and mental actions, movement, technique, timing, and many more elements that we will have to discover and apply at each moment and discover each day within our practice. *Atemi* is an essential part of this set of elements and discarding certain ideas without their study and reflection is dangerous to our learning. Through study and practice we will improve what we have. *Atemi* can be 99% of Aikido training but overemphasizing it can also lead us down the wrong path. Like all things, *atemi* must be done mindfully and with balance. •



Without the basics or *kihon-waza*, our Aikido is nothing. This sounds like a very critical statement, but it is true. I am not sure why I must keep saying it over and over to all my students. I say this ad nauseam because I see so many cases where the basics have been neglected or ignored with very sad results.

Many people do not realize the importance of the basics. Some think that with a little practice they have mastered the basics. Perhaps because they are so easy? Others think that practicing the basics is the mark of a beginner or new student and is somehow beneath them. So much pride in practice! Neglect of the basics is only followed by pride and these two are the most self-destructive obstacles in training. I see this all the time.

It was very evident to me in the recent seminar we had at our dojo. Although a great success from the standpoint of spirit and friendship, but getting down to the brass tacks, it was clearly evident who had practiced the basics and who had neglected them. It was very sad and evident, indeed.

I often admonish my students to not make-up their own techniques or experiment. Most are definitely not at that stage in their training, not even if they are a 5th Dan. I wish that students would practice the basics correctly just as they are. In Aikido, we do not need to fix or change things or in other words, "Don't fix what ain't broke."

I don't know where this idea came about among Aikido students and teachers who think that they can change everything around at their will. Most of these people are not even experienced enough in the martial arts. To me, it is just playing and pretending as far as I can see. This type of innovation has no place in one's "basic" training.

Without the Basics



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

Many years ago, in my Shodo or calligraphy class, there was one woman who was an instructor in her own right who had over 20 years of experience. She attended our class because of the fame and skill of my teacher, but she was very proud and somewhat arrogant. She always had to let everyone know that she was very good herself and would talk about what she thought was right. She always used the most expensive brushes and ink. One day, she wrote what she thought was a masterpiece. When my teacher came over to see it, he took a glance and said, "Even a monkey can write like this."

We were all so shocked at his words and she was so angry that her face turned beet red. When we all looked at her work, we could see that she could write in a very pretty way and it looked good at first glance. However, as we looked deeper and more carefully, we could all see that the basic skills were missing, and that each stroke was weak and uneven albeit flowing and artistic. She only practiced to write in a pretty and popular way but never bothered to master the basics. These basics are the foundation of calligraphy and enable us to have not only beautiful calligraphy, but calligraphy with depth and purpose.

In the same way, I see many Aikidoists showing off their "pretty" ways to do the techniques but most of this is junk coming from an attitude of "pretend and play." Such a waste of time, sometimes I feel like imitating my old calligraphy and say, "Even a monkey can do that!" However, I know that it would be too hurtful and unkind. When it comes to the study of Aikido, please study the basics and look deeper into them and Aikido's profoundness will be revealed to you. •

Editor's note: *Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on April 29, 2005.*

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

The city of Los Angeles has cleared us to open, but with only classes outside. However, the number of coronavirus cases is still high and has not tapered. For the time being, we will only offer a limited schedule and all classes will be outside. 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, and national or ethnic origin in administration of their educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.

Aikido Training Schedule

合気道 時間割

Saturdays 10:15-11:15 AM Regular Class 11:30 AM-12:30 PM Regular Class	Wednesdays 6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class
Sundays 9:00-10:00 AM Children's Class 10:15-11:15 AM Regular Class 11:30 AM-12:30 PM Regular Class	Thursdays No Class
Mondays 6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class	Fridays 6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class
Tuesdays No Class	

NOTE: Visitors are welcome to observe our Morning, Fundamentals, or Regular Classes.

*Last Saturday of the month is Intensive Seminar by Invitation only.

Iaido Training Schedule

居合道 時間割

Saturdays 8:00-9:00 AM Regular Class	Mondays and Wednesdays 8:00-9:00 PM Regular Class
--	---



The Aiki Dojo

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



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