



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Every good Aikidoist should be a black belt in self-care.

In the Art of Peace, O'Sensei wrote, "The Art of Peace begins with you. Work on yourself and your appointed task in the Art of Peace. Everyone has a spirit that can be refined, a body that can be trained in some manner, a suitable path to follow. You are here for no other purpose than to realize your inner divinity and manifest your inner enlightenment. Foster peace in your own life and then apply the Art to all that you encounter. One does not need buildings, money, power, or status to practice the Art of Peace. Heaven is right where you are standing, and that is the place to train."

The most readily available understanding about this passage is that it is about self-development. Westerners are very goal oriented and driven so they look at this passage from the point of view of developing one's self through effort. In the past, most martial artists followed Judo legend Masahiko Kimura's work ethic of outworking their opponents. Kimura Sensei was famous for *san bai no do ryoku* (三倍努力) or "Tripling one's effort." He said, "If my opponent trains for one hour, I will train for three." Martial artists of old wouldn't let anything stop them from training. They trained through world wars, injuries and ill-

Self-Care



by **David Ito**
Aikido Chief Instructor

nesses, and things like broken bones and concussions were just badges of honor to them. There is some merit to this "no pain, no gain" mentality, but it can also become a detriment if not balanced out correctly.

However, the most common aspect of O'Sensei's quote that most people overlook is his advocacy of peace. Peace within this context means that one's drive, determination and efforts should also include an aspect of self-care.

On a certain level, Aikido is the martial art of compassion. We, as Aikidoists, understand that violence cannot be overcome with more violence and that is why Aikido techniques are designed that way. The nature of violence is not only self-limiting but it is detrimental to the self and to society as a whole. Therefore, the only antidote to violence is, O'Sensei advocates, compassion. The definition of compassion is "the sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others." Once we reach a certain level of self-development, we realize that the compassion that we really need to give is to ourselves. Jack Kornfield said, "If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete." Therefore, self-care is compassion turned inward.

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Today, we are “standing on the shoulders of giants” and have the benefit of not only hindsight but science as well. People of the past only knew how to work harder and they didn’t understand things like *moetsukishoukougun* (燃え尽き症候群) or “burnout syndrome.” In the past in our dojo, personal time was frowned upon. Furuya Sensei lived in the dojo and taught a majority of the classes and so he couldn’t understand the need for days off or the need to have a work-life-dojō balance. The unspoken feeling was that “Sensei wasn’t taking any days off and so neither should we.” In my opinion, this mentality created a lot of good Aikidoists, but it also contributed to a lot of people quitting because of burnout or battle fatigue.

Burnout is about how our body deals with stress, and the signs of stress that aren’t readily apparent, or how little injuries can gradually become big injuries. The aches and pains have a tendency to add up over the years and they have a way of catching up to us. Overtraining has a way of breaking us before we realize we have been broken.

I trained in a stressful environment for almost two decades. I have seen a lot of Aikidoists succumb to the symptoms of stress. Witnessing this, it is my belief that students should only train in a stressful environment for around 10 or so years. Training too intensively or stressfully can cause something that the US military refers to as “Operator Syndrome.”

Operator Syndrome is a kind of burnout where our bodies become unable to deal with cortisol and its effect on the brain, which impacts our physical and mental health. The symptoms of Operator Syndrome are: “The interrelated health and functional impairments including traumatic brain injury effects;

endocrine dysfunction; sleep disturbance; obstructive sleep apnea; chronic joint/back pain, orthopedic problems, and headaches; substance abuse; depression and suicide; anger; worry, rumination, and stress reactivity; marital, family, and community dysfunction; problems with sexual health and intimacy; being “on guard” or hyper-vigilance; memory, concentration, and cognitive impairments; vestibular and vision impairments; challenges of the transition from military to civilian life; and common existential issues.”

Today, we understand stress better and have things like smartwatches and Fitbits to monitor our inner health. By working smarter not harder we understand that rest and recovery are just as important, if not more important, than working hard. Rest and self-care become just as important as how much we apply ourselves in training.

Self-care is a modern concept which has only recently become fashionable. Self-care is defined as “the practice of taking an active role in protecting one’s own well-being and happiness, in particular during periods of stress.”

Before we can truly defeat anyone, we must first master ourselves and that mastery begins with knowing thyself, and at the heart of that is healthy self-care. Every person will have different needs and so each person’s self-care will be slightly different – it is a personal journey.

O’Sensei said, “The real Way of a Warrior is to prevent such slaughter – it is the Art of Peace, the power of love.” Thus, true peace and love begins with the self and so self-care is really about the compassion we give ourselves. Aikido is about balance and true balance at its core is about self-care and that is why every good Aikidoist is a black belt in self-care. •



Every person has their weaknesses and strengths, their virtues and vices. As martial artists, we train to understand ourselves and how to handle both the good and the bad.

From my point of view, I believe that one begins to know themselves when they become aware of where they need to apply their attention and efforts and, more importantly, where not to.

This awareness usually begins with one's Aikido technique. The teacher teaches and the student tries to copy. The Aikidoist must try to learn the technique inside and out. Later on, they apply this awareness to their daily life.

The hardest part of being aware is knowing what things require our attention and efforts and what things are a waste of time and are possibly toxic to our lives. Personally, I have many flaws and weaknesses and I'm sure even a couple of defects too. Realizing this, I have to practice daily to improve upon them and that's why I am very demanding and disciplined with everything that I do. I try to be disciplined because I recognize that I have faults and realize that I am not very skilled either. Knowing that I have a lot of work to do physically, I force myself to be disciplined in not only my teaching but in my training as well. I also force myself physically and mentally to be constant and consistent in my training so at the very least maintain some sort of an acceptable level. For instance, I'm not a good writer and it is even harder for me to write in English. Each month, it is very tedious and nerve racking to write this monthly article. Each month, I try to submit my article before Ito Sensei reminds me about the deadline,

but something always distracts me. It is difficult to form an idea and write about it, let alone do it in English. Each month, I write my article over and over trying to edit it and stay on track with my ideas.

The same goes for my English-speaking skills. I do not speak English very well but every time I go to Los Angeles, I try to communicate only in English despite my limitations. Hopefully, I don't mess things up and don't hurt anyone's feelings. Mainly,

my English just comes out funny and makes for some unusual conversations.

The funny thing is that when some students tell me how good my English is, I

am confused because I think it is terrible! In reality, I am sure my English is at the very least passable, because I know that I apply myself every day to improving my English. My self-discipline and consistency improve my level while at the same time keep me humble.

My teacher, Furuya Sensei once said "I am fortunate to not be talented" and he felt so strongly about having a humble mindset. He felt so strongly that he put a sign out from of his old dojo in

Little Tokyo that read 萬拙庵 or "Bansetsuan."

Bansetsuan means "The retreat of the untalented teacher." This was his personal motto that inspired him, and it inspires me to work hard and to stay humble. In these words are the seeds of the true teacher. Training under a strict teacher is a lot of hard work. In the end, you learn something that yields a lot more benefits beyond the teaching itself that just mere skill does not enjoy.

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Self-Discipline



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



Self-Discipline *continued from page 4...*

This brings me to another Sensei phrase, “Make your worst technique the best technique.” What he meant was that we should work hard to improve our worst technique and then return to the beginning and repeat. If we have trouble doing something complicated like shomenuchi iriminage then instead of leaving it until we are ready or feel good, we should work on it until we attain a level of mastery that we are comfortable with. I used to work on my worst technique every day at the end of class. I would take a partner and work on it and study until I felt like I knew it. I tried to do this with all my techniques.

The other day at the beginning of the class, a student arrived just before the warm-up. It took him more than five minutes to change, and the class had already begun. After about 20 minutes, his body finally warmed up and his mind began to focus. I spoke to him at the end of class and tried to impress upon him the value of arriving with enough time to properly warm-up not only his body but his mind as well. What this student didn’t realize is that we are not just warming up our bodies but getting our minds and energy in sync with everything that surrounds us. When I was a student, we had to change into our *gi* or “uniform” in approximately two minutes and put our *hakama* on in less than one minute. The whole changing process was supposed to

take no more than three minutes. Dressing quickly was part of the self-discipline process in Aikido training.

In the life of a martial artist, there are no easy tasks. There are also no difficult ones. That’s because all tasks are just ways of training ourselves. It is difficult to be a good Aikidoist, since it’s not only a matter of just being strong or fast nor is it a matter of being effective. Having skill or being strong isn’t the point of training. In training everything matters but at the same time nothing matters. What matters is that we have the mindset to overcome anything which confronts us. Sometimes students say to me, “I have a long week of work and when I get home, I don’t want to come to the dojo and train.” There are many situations similar to this but facing them is a part of our training. That is why training isn’t teaching us just physical techniques to destroy the world. Training is teaching us how to be self-disciplined to overcome whatever is holding us back in not only the dojo but in life. There will always be something to surmount whether it is overcoming injuries, getting out of bed, coming to the dojo on a day when we are tired, or writing an article. Sensei taught me many things but perhaps the most important was how to look inward and realize not only what my strengths are, but what my weaknesses are as well. Training is about learning self-discipline so that we can become good Aikidoka and even better human beings. •

When we teach a beginner Aikido, we always start with some kind of wrist grab, often from static or “without movement.” The opponent steps forward and grabs our wrist, either with the same side hand as ours in *aihanmi* or with the opposite hand in *gyakuhanni*. Wrist grabs seem very basic and most times they don’t seem to have any real-world application. Cool fight scenes and any close quarter combat daydreaming rarely have our opponent grabbing our wrist.

Aikido features techniques defending against both strikes and kicks as well as techniques against attacks from behind and attacks with weapons, or from multiple opponents. Therefore, a simple wrist grab doesn’t seem that exciting. However, to understand Aikido means mastering this single-handed basic wrist grab attack.

This wrist grabbing attack is called *katate tori*. *Katate* means “wrist” and *tori* in this context means “to take.” So why do we practice techniques from a static attack? At the most basic level, techniques from wrist grabs give us the foundation for many concepts important to Aikido. Grabbing attacks provide us a foundation for our *maai*, or “spacing” with the opponent and it forces us to emphasize the connection with our partner whether we are throwing or taking *ukemi*. It also teaches us the basics of extension without pushing or struggling against the attack as well as how to incorporate the *kokyudosa* movement into our technique. *Katate tori* attacks give us the basics of what it means to be a “non-fighting” martial art.

Practicing this basic static wrist grab attack also makes it easier to see how we use our circular movement to neutralize the opponent’s attack, how we lead their movement, and how we protect ourselves by moving off the line of attack. We can see how our *irimi*, *tenkan*, or *tenshin* movements can put us into an advantageous and protected position, but at the same time, we can see how our movement unbalances our opponent. From this basic practice we can also improve our balance, our footwork, and our posture, to name a few.

For the *uke* or the student taking *ukemi*, it trains their grip to be both strong but at the same time flexible. From this connection, we learn how to read our partner’s energy and movement. From here, the *uke* practices moving with the technique in an energetic and strong way, but also in a relaxed manner. The student taking *ukemi* also learns how to relax and stretch their body in order to protect and position themselves so they can be thrown or pinned safely.

As the attack becomes more dynamic, both attacker and defender learn how to negotiate a stronger attack. The grabbing attack starts to look and feel more like a striking attack as it becomes more dynamic. When the attack becomes dynamic, we start to practice the basics of timing, refining our sense of spacing, and practice bringing our opponent’s movement into our own circular movement. This is the beginnings of *ki-no-nagare* or “the flow of ki.” At advanced levels of *katate tori* practice, the connection and timing with the opponent’s attack becomes such

that opponents begin to be thrown without being touched or the famous Aikido “no-touch” throw.

When we begin understanding and mastering these grabbing attacks, the same lessons in timing, spacing, leading, connection, positioning, and extension are applied to defending against many other attacks including strikes, kicks, weapons, and multiple attackers.

Although *katate tori* is a basic technique, a

student’s skill in Aikido is often measured by how well they can demonstrate basic techniques from these attacks. From here, we can see how

well they can catch the attacker’s movement, timing spacing and how well they position and align themselves with the attacker. We can also see how well they take the attacker’s balance as well as keep the connection. We also want to know how well they lead the attacker’s movement. At this high and refined level, basic techniques become advanced techniques.

At first glance, grabbing someone’s wrist might seem too basic and not very practical. However, it’s important to realize that practicing against wrist grabs gives the students valuable building blocks with which to master Aikido and understand its secrets. Furuya Sensei said, “Every different attack we use in our Aikido training each has its own lesson to impart to the student.”

Practicing exotic techniques is fun, and it’s important to have a wide base of knowledge. However, it’s also important to master the most basic techniques to the point that they become advanced techniques. Even the most basic technique when practiced correctly will continue to impart knowledge as our understanding and practice of it becomes deeper and deeper.

One can say that Aikido practice starts with *katate tori* but also ends in *katate tori*. That is how important a wrist grab is to our mastery and that is why we practice wrist grabs so much. •



Wrist Grabs



by Ken Watanabe
Technical Director

It seems that taking *ukemi*, of all aspects of Aikido training, is one of the hardest to understand.

I think one reason for this is that we look at *ukemi* in a reverse perspective. What I mean is that we understand *ukemi* backwards. We look at *ukemi* from the standpoint of a fight or competition – the attacker and defender or two opponents fighting. Then we try to compromise or downgrade this idea into something where we are not really competing or fighting with each other and create an atmosphere of understanding, seeing the technique, in this light, as either fake, contrived or compromised. Because of this we are always in a perpetual physical state of “I am resisting” or “I am not resisting.” Or “I will allow him to do the technique,” or “I will not allow him to do the technique.”

Even at this level – Aikido is still competition or fighting. What this means is - although we say, “partner,” we are always thinking in terms of “enemy” or “opponent” whom we fight or compete with. This compromises our basic understanding of Aikido as a non-fighting or non-competitive discipline because we cannot get rid of the concept of the “enemy.” In Aikido, according to O’Sensei’s idea, there is no opponent. To understand this concept of “no enemy” means to rid ourselves of the idea of fighting or competing - which we cannot, will not or don’t want to do.

This is not approaching *ukemi* from the first step and this is where, I think, we have so many problems.

In Aikido, as in other traditional Japanese disciplines. We start with “form.” It is just like learning how to read. We first learn the alphabet, but this really has nothing to do with writing or reading. It is after we master the alphabet and begin to use it, putting letters together to form words, do we begin the process of reading. Learning the alphabet as the first step of learning how to read is the “form” of reading.

In this same concept of “form” in Aikido and more specifically, in learning *ukemi*, we should view the *tori* and *uke* as “yin” and “yang” – both interacting and “completing” each other – not “opposing” each other.

In the beginning, both *tori* and *uke* should work together to complete the “perfect” technique as two sides of the same coin. There should be no sense of competition or fighting here.

The *tori* moves against the attack in a blending manner, and the *uke* moves to enhance or complete this blending process.

This is learning the alphabet of Aikido. This is like learning the alphabet to eventually learn to read and write.

It is important for both the *tori* and *uke* to move together and be relaxed, free, balanced and in harmony with each other. This has nothing to do with competition or fighting or who is

stronger or weaker. Indeed, a great part of the practice is to eliminate this idea or obsession with fighting, resisiting and competing.

It is only once we master this concept of blending and harmonizing with the other person, do we begin to understand Aikido technique applied to a situation “against” an opponent. However, in Aikido, there is no “against.” This is very difficult to understand for most people.

Other martial arts approach this idea of “enemy” much more as we would normally understand it in the martial arts – this is why I think that Aikido cannot be compared to other systems. In other martial arts, it is to refine and develop one’s fighting ability to destroy the “enemy.” In Aikido, the idea is to rid one of the idea of fighting. Students must appreciate how profound and how

mysterious this process must be. It cannot be understood simply, and it cannot be understood as a mere fighting system. One great aspect of this is to understand the proper purpose and execution of *ukemi* as an essential learning tool in our practice.

Most students make mistakes in trying to use Aikido as a fighting system. Or to be resistant, immovable, or inflexible in training. Many students like to compete in strength or power and the superiority of one’s technique over another. This is not recommended at all in basic Aikido and is against the spirit of Aikido training.

Finally, because most students are too stiff or inflexible or not able to move with the other person, Aikido techniques cannot be practiced at full power. In this situation, full harmonization must take place, or one could be severely injured.

In the initial stages of one’s training, do not resist the Aikido technique. We only resist because we do not understand the full power of Aikido technique and think that we are competing with the other person.

To finally master non-resistance is to master the technique which is irresistible.●

Editor’s note: *Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on October 16, 2003.*



Basic Ukemi



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

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

July 4th: Dojo closed for 4th of July

July 16-17: Volunteering at Zenshuji Obon

July 30th: Intensive Seminar

August 3rd: Terasaki Budokan Aikido Center begins

August 27th: Intensive Seminar

October 10-20: Spain trip

The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles (ACLA) admit students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender identification, national or ethnic origin or sexual orientation in administration of their educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.

Aikido Training Schedule

合気道 時間割

Saturdays

10:15-11:15 AM Regular
11:30 AM-12:30 PM Theory

Wednesdays

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

Sundays

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

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

Mondays

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

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Tuesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Weapons

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

Iaido Training Schedule

居合道 時間割

Saturdays

8:00-9:00 AM Regular Class

Tuesdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class

Thursdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class



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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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Aikido
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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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