



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Harunako by Kawase Hasui 1935

Summer is Here!



The great Japanese swordsman, Yamaoka Tesshu once said, “As a samurai, I must strengthen my character; as a human being I must perfect my spirit.” Thus, the best Aikidoists strive for perfection, but perfection is really a pursuit.

Perfection is defined as “the condition, state, or quality of being free or as free as possible from all flaws or defects.” Perfectionism is “the refusal to accept any standard short of perfection.”

Perfectionism can be a double edge sword. One the one hand, perfectionism can be used in a positive way to drive a person towards mastery. On the other hand, perfectionism can also have severe mental health consequences such as depression, anxiety, and feelings of low self-worth.

In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Hamlet says, “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.” Perfectionism is a tool. Much like a wrench, it has a specific purpose. A wrench can be used as a hammer but over time used incorrectly it could break and cause harm to the user.

Perfectionism has to be used in a specific way. Perfectionism, done right, can be a useful tool in the pursuit of mastery. Perfectionism used in a positive way helps us by holding us to a higher standard and its mindset drives us to pursue things when others have long since quit.

Pursuit Not Perfection



by David Ito
Aikido Chief Instructor

In terms of Aikido, a perfectionistic mindset helps us achieve O’Sensei’s philosophy of non-violence. Although many do not think so, Aikido is actually a very specific martial art. The reason why Aikido is very specific is because the techniques have to have an element of compassion inside them. Aikido techniques aren’t designed to break bones or kill people. They are designed in a way in which a person can defend themselves but at the same time inflict as little injury to the attacker as possible. The reason for this is because of O’Sensei understanding of non-violence. Non-violence understands that the cause of our attacker’s attack is ignorance and suffering and that the remedy is compassion, not violence. Therefore, we are giving compassion because we realize O’Sensei’s vision of non-violence. In order to give compassion, the techniques need *seido* (精度) or “precision.” Precision requires perfectionism because the tolerance for compassion is very tight. If we allow the tolerances for compassion to be too loose, then we run the risk of reverting back to violence when we lose our compassion or if the technique loses its effectiveness.

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Compassion is the highest level a martial artist can attain. Anyone can hurt another person – it takes no skill at all. In order to give compassion, one needs to have achieved a high level of not only skill but mental competence as well. That is because true compassion requires not only a high-level mastery, but it also requires a tremendous amount of restraint.

In order to train at a high level to achieve mastery, one needs to have a discriminating eye. In traditional Japanese training, they always scold the beginning students by saying, “You need to learn how to see.” Learning how to see is referred to as *minarai keiko* (見習い稽古) or “To watch and learn.” What the apprentice is learning to “see” are not only the fine details but how those details factor into the process. If a person can’t see those fine details then a crucial element could be missed and possibly lost forever. As students, we will only know if we “got it” or not in the end after the teacher has passed on. This is because it is said that the teacher only teaches us 50% and that we have to learn the other 50% on our own. How we learn that other half is through the experience of being able to see the smallest details and then figuring out how those small insignificant details factor in together in the end. With this understanding, I don’t know if a person who is not a perfectionist can develop this *minarai* mindset or a discriminating eye.

James Clear in his book *Atomic Habits* discussed something called the 1 Percent Rule. He said, “If you can get 1 percent better each day for one year, you’ll end up thirty-seven times better by the time you’re done. Conversely, if you get 1 percent worse each day for one year, you’ll decline nearly down to zero. What starts as a small win or a minor setback accumulates into something much more.” To follow the 1 Percent Rule almost requires that a person be somewhat of a perfectionist because to do it for a whole year takes fortitude and that fortitude usually comes from perfectionism.

There is an interesting thing that happens when we get close to reaching the summit - we realize that perfectionism is actually holding us back from reaching the top. That is because in order to truly reach the peak, we must realize that perfection is a pursuit. With this realization, we learn to let go of perfectionism. At this point, we need to ease our “standard” and let it flow. This is where we are supposed to *ki no nagare* (氣の流れ) or let the “ki flow.” At this level perfectionism is a form of resistance and any form of resistance is a form of violence. Letting go of perfection is no easy task. After all, perfectionism is what got us to this high level in the first place. However, once we let go of perfection, then the ride to the top is smooth and easy as we “go with the flow” so to speak.

Perfection is the fuel that we burn to get to the top of the mountain but at the top of the mountain, perfection becomes the enemy of true mastery. In Miyamoto Musashi’s *Dokkodo* or his “21 rules for living,” his first rule is “Accept things as they are.” It is no coincidence that this is the first rule. To accept things as they are is no easy task and must begin with letting go of perfectionism and embrace the pursuit.

Perfectionism like most things can be a vice or virtue. A tool is only as good as when and how a person uses it. Perfectionism has to be used in a positive way. There is nothing wrong with having a high standard. Having high standards gets us to the top of the mountain but that standard should not be used to beat ourselves up.

I don’t know if a person can gain a high level of mastery without at least a small amount of perfectionism. Perfectionism can help us or hurt us depending on how we use it. An Aikidoist knows perfectionism is a double-edged sword, but the best ones know how to wield it properly. Remember, perfection is a pursuit and not a destination. •



To a beginner, the martial arts might mean speed and power. Speed and power are important, but just being strong and fast isn't good enough. In martial arts we also need to develop our sense of timing.

Timing is about doing the right thing at the right time. Just because an attack is fast and strong doesn't

mean it can't be too early or too late. I can hurry to get to a party thinking I'm late, but once I get there I realize that I'm the first one to arrive and the beer is still warm! Or I can leave my house at the right time, drive at a leisurely pace, then take my time getting there, arriving when everything is ready to go.

When I was Furuya Sensei's assistant, part of my training was to drive him here and there. He would chastise me if we stopped at a red light and would admonish me not to miss catching the timing of the traffic signals so I could catch all the greens. To a normal person, this sounds ridiculous. When the traffic light turns red, we stop; when the light is green, we go, and when it turns yellow, we speed up to make it through.

However, to a martial artist, timing is everything. Neither driving too fast nor too slowly would've helped me catch all the signals when they turned green. I would have to carefully pace my speed so I could catch the green lights, but at the same time, I would have to drive at a speed that wouldn't inconvenience other drivers! I still drive like this to this day, trying to catch the tim-

Power and Speed



by Ken Watanabe
Technical Director

ing of the traffic signals. In practice, we should consider two kinds of timing. The first kind of timing is this internal timing that we usually practice within ourselves. The second kind of timing is an external timing that we practice when we are negotiating our opponent's attack.

When we think of the first kind of timing; that is, the timing within our own body, we are practicing the movement so that our footwork and hand movement match. For example, in swordwork, there is a saying, *itto-issoku*, which means "one sword-one step." This means that every step we take there is a sword cut – one step-one cut. In the time it takes for our arms to raise the sword over our head and bring it down, we take one step forward, toward our opponent, to deliver our blow. In the simplest terms, the step and the cut start and end at the same time.

In this basic sword cut, as a martial arts technique, we are thinking about attack and defense. In terms of timing, if we step forward as we raise the sword over our head, we expose our throat to our opponent's thrust as we move closer to our opponent. The most basic practice is to step forward as the sword cuts down. The correct timing makes it more difficult for them to attack us as we attack them.

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Power and Speed *continued from page 4...*

Likewise, many opening movements in Aikido require us to complete our hand movement as we complete our footwork. When this timing is off, our feet and hands move out of sync and our body doesn't move effectively. Our hands might be finished with what they have to do but then they have to wait for our feet to catch up. With this poor timing, our body movements become disjointed. It's important to match the timing of our steps with the timing of our hand movements. From this unison between our hands and feet, we can begin to use our whole body and once we can move with our whole body then we can understand how to use our center.

When we think of the second kind of timing; that is, the timing in relation to our opponent's attack, we are practicing our movement to either match the opponent's attack or break their timing. If we revisit the basic sword cut, if we wait for our opponent to cut, we will always be late, but if we move too soon, we telegraph our move to our opponent, and they can adjust. The idea in this kind of sword timing is that we cut at the same time as our opponent cuts; that is, we match their movements. Usually in swordwork, this results in *ai-uchi* (相打ち), or "mutual killing" as we end up cutting each other. However, in terms of catching our opponent's timing, the point at which would be the moment of contact, we move in a way to evade their attack as we establish a safe position from which we deliver our own attack.

In terms of Aikido training, we usually start practicing with the first kind of timing, the timing within ourselves. We start with static attacks to understand the distance between us and our opponent as we work on our internal timing-- getting our body to work together as a single unit. Once we can get our hands and feet to work together, then we can begin to understand the timing between us and our opponent.

Timing is more than just speed. If we find ourselves hurrying or feeling late when our practice partner attacks, then we should adjust our *ma-ai* (間合い) or spacing. We might need to stop reacting to the attack and move sooner, or we might need to increase the space between us and our opponent. Sometimes we have to do both.

In Aikido timing, the moment the opponent attacks they are already brought into our technique and not vice versa. Ideally, at the moment of contact, they are already thrown or pinned. Adjusting both when we move and the distance between us and our opponent – these are the basics of the concept of *ma-ai*, which is an important part of this external timing

Both this internal timing and external timing are important to practice and understand. Timing is not about going fast. Timing is so we don't feel rushed, or late. In both martial arts and in real life, whether it's driving down the street or getting to a party, we want to think about being at the right place at the right time while also doing the right thing. •

In Aikido, energy is everything. If we observe a group of people, no matter how much they try to hide certain emotions, they tend to express their state of mind through their most insignificant gestures. Furuya Sensei used to say, "You can learn everything you want to know about a person by the way they do Aikido." In other words, our inner state is reflected in our outer actions.

This reflection is most readily apparent in the daily classes as we begin with the *taiso* (体操) or traditional "warm-up" before practice. How the student moves, where they position themselves, and even how they execute the final claps echo how the rest of the class is going to go.

This is the same in our daily life. When we start the day and get ready to go out, we have an external image that we want to convey and this is reflected by our choice in clothing, hairstyle or haircut and in how we smell or how we do our makeup among other things. Most times, there are many other things that we rarely even notice but that are readily apparent to others. We tend to forget that most of our actions and behaviors are clearly visible to everyone around us and, like our clothes or nail color, they are the windows to our mind. In other words, all our actions, even the slightest blink of an eye or the imperceptible turn or nod of our heads are a clear indication of our mental state.

Our mental state becomes the basis of our *taido* (態度) or "attitude" and attitude is something that is very important in Aikido. As Sensei said, who we are is reflected in what we do and so our attitude is something very important that we should not neglect, but at the same time it is very difficult to work on and correct.

When we lead the class through the warm-up, if we have had a stressful or bad day at work, then when we lead the warm-up we might be a bit grumpy or too hurried. Because the day has not gone as expected, or perhaps we have argued or just have a headache, if we are not careful then our attitude could have an effect on the warm-up which could then inadvertently influence those around us and change the attitude or energy of the class. When our energy is down or our attitude is bad, we might notice that effects the rest of the class and we begin to see things like people not listening to the teacher's explanation or being sluggish when choosing a partner.

As an Aikidoist, we understand this idea about energy. There-

fore, we must always be aware of our energy and attitudes in everything that we do because "we" are the mirror in which the



class is reflected and so we have to be the best version of ourselves. I think that we don't have to be overly bright or cheerful, but we do have to be active, energetic, and motivating.

In the dojo, especially on the mats during practice, our attitude and state of mind are extremely important. Whether we are sad, tired, happy, or somewhere in between, it's important to maintain the right attitude for the practice.

Having a good attitude doesn't mean that we have to be overly talkative or excessively nice

either. Having a good attitude means that we have found the correct emotional, mental and spiritual balance. In swordsmanship, this balance is referred to as equanimity. Equanimity from a swordsmanship or martial arts standpoint means that no matter what happens we maintain an internal calm which enables us to act with appropriateness.

In practice, we are developing the skill to adjust the technical parts of the technique like our intensity, speed or spacing so that we can respond appropriately to an attack. Sensei used to say, "Be positive and focused on the practice." Therefore, at the same time, we are also learning how to adjust our attitude or develop the mental aspect of ourselves as well.

Energy!



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

There is one more standard of behavior that we must master in our daily practice: efficiency. In the dojo, all of our actions and states of mind must express "efficiency." Efficiency is defined as "the economy of energy and motion." We cannot have efficiency without energy, and we cannot move efficiently without energy.

I found this reflection in one of Sensei's articles that perfectly summarizes the union of the mental and spiritual state and that of practice: "If our actions in practice do not express these two ideals of 'full of spirit' and 'economy of motion and effort' then we must think there is something wrong with what we are doing. Observe yourself in every moment, even if you blink, if necessary. Every action must come from our mind, from our spirit."

That is why our energy is the standard by which all of our actions are judged. All Aikidoists know that energy or "ki" is the most important thing in the study of Aikido. This is in fact the martial technique of Aikido. •

The other day, an 11-year-old boy wrote to me saying how much he wanted to come to my dojo to train in Aikido. Of course, it is too difficult at the moment because he lives far away, he is too young to be on his own, and on and on so I advised that maybe someday in the future he may come and visit the dojo and train. The next day, I happened to watch an interview with another young 11-year-old, Mattie Stepanek, who is dying of an incurable disease, but who has already accomplished many things in his short life, including writing a best-selling book, despite that fact that he must fight his illness every day and each day he does not know if he will wake up or not. I thought, quite a brave and wonderful little kid.

I often see many young people who seem to be wasting their lives away, doing nothing, not accomplishing their dreams, not even having a dream to challenge their lives. Then I see such young kids, only 11-years old, who already know what they want to do in life. What a great start they have! And in the case of the young kid with the disease, he has not let it get in the way of having a full life. When you reach my age, there is no turning back the clock. So many of you out there should not waste your lives but do everything you can while you are able!

The Samurai of old lived like this little kid with the disease. They never expect to live to the next day, so they forced themselves to live each day to the fullest. Sometimes, we think we are gods who will live forever so we waste our time and energy and even our lives. Even at my age, I am so impressed with many young people today, always hoping they will accomplish much.

If I were to say make a horizontal line on the paper with a pencil or pen, it is easy enough. Even in Shodo calligraphy, with ink and a brush, it is easy to write. This horizontal line would be the Chinese character for *ichi* (一) or “one.” However, in calligraphy, this is one of the most difficult characters to write. It is not simply a straight line. In order to form this simple one line character, the brush must move in many ways, twisting and turning, dropping and rising, to get the proper form of the character creating a nice “head” and “tail” to the character. Even after mastering the technical aspects of writing this character, the teacher will demand that you bring out the “heart” of the character. My calligraphy teacher constantly advises that even a simple stroke must have “heart” or that the inner core area of the character have “strength” and “power” to give the whole symbol “life” and its own “character.” It takes years to accom-



plish this. This is the difference between simply writing the character for “one,” (which we call *jutsu* (術) or “technique”) and writing the character as an art (which we call *do* (道) or Way, art). Finally, once one masters the physical technique and manages to understand how to bring out the “heart” of the character, they must then “break” or “transcend” the rules and create a “free” character, not sacrificing but indeed, fully expressing their degree of mastery of all the fundamentals. Although my calligraphy teacher teaches such a complex way to write the simple character for one; as a master, when he writes, it looks like he just makes a simple stroke with no technique or effort at all! Yet, it is Different! Yet, it is Art! This is what we are trying to do in our Aikido.

Many students must try hard to grasp the “fullness of movement” in their technique. Sometimes, I say that “this movement must be very circular” but as I observe, most people are not really making it “circular” in my eyes, it is very straight, superficial and harsh to me. Maybe they themselves see it in a different light, maybe they have yet to understand what I am talking about. Circular movements in Aikido have many, many dimen-

Fullness of Movement



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

sions, very much like writing the character for “one” in calligraphy. This is something that we must watch for in our practice and constantly try to understand and refine within ourselves. For me, this is most evident when people do *kokyu-dosa*. Typically, most students use their hands in a straight line, not circular, and not fully spherical, and not with their energy moving fully and strongly outwards. Many students simply push straight forward or collapse their hands and try to give-in and throw their partner to the side. Both, I think are wrong from the standpoint of the basic principle of this movement. The way the hand moves in *kokyu-dosa* is the way it moves in many of our Aikido techniques. This *kokyu-dosa* style movement is round and circular with strong energy projecting forward and outwards from the small finger. Just as in calligraphy, we are constantly trying to create a deeper dimension to each stroke of the brush, as in our Aikido practice, we should continually try to express *ki* (氣) or greater “energy” in each and every movement. This is briefly what I am trying to convey as “fullness of movement.” Please try to look into and understand this idea in your training. •

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

- June 1st:** New class schedule begins
- June 25th:** Intensive Seminar
- July 4th:** Dojo closed for 4th of July
- July 9-10:** Volunteering at Zenshuj Obon
- July 30th:** Intensive Seminar
- 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		Wednesdays
10:15-11:15 AM	Regular	6:30-7:30 AM Fundamentals
11:30 AM-12:30 PM	Theory	6:30-7:30 PM Regular
Sundays		Thursdays
9:00-10:00 AM	Children's Class	6:30-7:30 PM Open
10:15-11:15 AM	Regular	
11:30 AM-12:30 PM	Fundamentals	
Mondays		Fridays
6:30-7:30 AM	Fundamentals	6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class
6:30-7:30 PM	Regular	
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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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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