



# The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

## 道の為、世の為、人の為 合気道

# The Aiki Dojo

Direct Affiliation: Aikido World Headquarters, 17-18 Wakamatsu-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, Japan  
Los Angeles Sword & Swordsmanship Society Kenshinkai  
The Furuya Foundation

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### Season's Greetings

### Upcoming Events

**December 24-26:**  
Dojo closed for Christmas

**December 30:**  
Osame Keiko:  
Last practice of the year

Bonenkai:  
Forget the year party

**December 31-January 1:**  
Dojo closed for New Year's

**January 2:**  
Dojo reopens

**April 24-25:**  
O'Sensei Memorial Seminar

#### **Farmers and Teachers** by Gary Myers, Iaido Chief Instructor

In a prior article I talked about the importance of the "Three Ps". During the holiday season, however it's usually the "Three Fs" that garner the limelight. The holidays are the time for gatherings with friends, family, and (if we are fortunate) FOOD. While we give thanks for our blessings, we rarely appreciate the efforts it took to produce the food set on the table. We take for granted that food will be there for us; if it's not in the refrigerator or pantry we can go to the grocery store and get it. In our modern times these foods come from the large food conglomerates that control the process from large corporate farms and ranches through to the distribution. But, traditionally, food used to come from family farms. Recently, many communities have established farmers' markets on certain weekends each month, to relive the feeling and benefits of getting produce from local growers.

Continued on page 6...

#### **Making Mountains** by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

-Chiri mo tsumoreba yama to naru  
(Piles of dust become mountains)

As December settles in, it becomes only natural to reflect on the events of the past year. The Year of the Ox, 2009 was characterized by slow-moving progress, with an emphasis on patience and rebuilding. It deeply interests me to observe how these things come into fruition. I often become impatient and have to remember that even Mount Fuji wasn't formed in one day. I feel very fortunate to have had many fantastic experiences this year and to have many great students.

We had the good fortune to have enjoyed visits from many great Aikido instructors who graciously shared their knowledge with us. Izawa Sensei and Itoh Sensei helped us commemorate the passing of O'Sensei with our enormously successful seminar.

Continued on page 2...

**Season's Greetings**

by Mike Van Ruth, Chief Instructor,  
Aikido Renbukai

I want to send everyone at ACLA the warmest of holiday greetings from my family and my students here in Arizona. I hope we all focus on giving thanks and gratitude for everything we have. I say this not so much for physical possessions but for the relationships we have with family and friends. We may love our possessions, but our possessions will not love us back. They don't care if you had a bad day; they don't listen to your problems and encourage you to persevere; they don't help you celebrate your triumphs in life.



*Van Ruth Sensei teaching  
at Veracruz Aikikai*

Let us all use this season to take some time from our hectic year to contact those special people in our lives to tell them how important they are to us. It is too easy to bustle through this life thinking we are islands unto ourselves. What a wonderful thing when you receive a letter or a phone call from those close to you only wanting to tell you how much you mean to them. What a wonderful gift!

Let us all open our hearts and share our sincere feelings with those close to us. Material gifts are nice, but they are easily forgotten. Over time the exact words you used to thank your loved ones may fade from their memory, but the feeling you left in their heart will never be lost. Happy Holidays!

**Making Mountains** *continued from page 1...*

Santiago Almaraz Sensei visited with many of his students from our branch in Spain as he has done for more than a dozen years; I think ACLA is blessed to have such a wonderful friendship with him and his school. Moriyama Sensei also paid us a visit and taught us the value of having a teacher armed with years of experience and knowledge. The highest compliment paid to our school came from Moriyama Sensei, who observed that our students tried hard just to copy the movement and to learn what he tried to teach them. This showed our students were humble and egoless; you are a credit to this dojo.

I had the chance to travel and visit other dojos this year. Izawa Sensei honored me by asking me to teach at his annual seminar in Colorado, where I enjoyed discussing Aikido with all the visiting instructors. I also visited our branch dojo in Mexico where they conducted a wonderful seminar that helped to cement our friendship with Magallanes Sensei and his students. Their hospitality was excellent and their students were enthusiastic and easy to teach, which makes me excited about returning to Veracruz in the future.

The most gratification for a teacher comes not only from the success of the students on the mat, but from all the little things that mostly get done behind the scenes to help the dojo run smoothly. So as we move forward steadily and patiently into 2010, it seems those little things add up to become bigger things in time; even Mount Fuji at one time started out as a speck of dirt. These unsung heroes do things like donate bottled water to the dojo, buy



*Mount Fuji*

new rags for cleaning, or put out the sign before class. Many students also come early and stay late to ensure that all of the chores get done every day; without them the dojo would surely fall apart. I am thankful that other students help to manage the dojo, which I know is not an easy burden. Still, there are many other little things that I probably never see or are too numerous to list that make all the difference. These unselfish altruistic actions help make the dojo a great place to train and help to build a strong community.

To improve your Aikido, focus on the seemingly trivial things in your training. Sensei used to say, "In your training, pay attention to even the smallest detail." I think he was not only speaking of our Aikido or Iaido training, but our lives as well. The dividends paid resemble brushing your teeth, day in and day out: you get no reward until you go to the dentist after six months and find that you have no cavities. There is no immediate reward for brushing your teeth or doing the little things in the dojo, but in the end it makes all the difference.

As we move into 2010 we see that it's the little things that count in the end. The success of the dojo ultimately rests on the accumulation of the little things that everyone does for each other. The most important thing is that we care for each other. Those little things, like specks of dust, become bigger things, and ultimately become a mountain that can elevate the dojo to a remarkably wonderful place. This is my hope for the future. Please continue to make the dojo a great place to train. Thank you all for a great year and for adding specks of dust to our little mountain and may you be truly blessed in 2010.



### What is Form?

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

I think the concept is “form” as it is understood in martial arts is actually more complex than most people think. I think there needs to be a little bit of explanation here.

Most of us think of prescribed movements or set sequence of techniques such as a kata. Generally, “form” (to us) has a negative nuance of hard, inflexible, old, stale, or the opposite of freedom and fluidity. Within the dojo, there is a prescribed method of training and many detailed rules. The purpose of this type of “form” is to create a context within which we refine and discipline ourselves. The concept of the individual refinement and attainment of enlightenment or self-understanding makes for a unique characteristic of almost all Eastern disciplines. There is a form in the techniques as well, but this is where people make the most mistakes, especially in Aikido. Most students idealize “free” form or something which can spring from themselves freely and “creatively.” Generally, they regrettably only generate movement which is undisciplined, lacking in foundation and skill, and self-willed, meaning that it is not based on purity of thought and action refined through mastery, but hit-and-miss guessing. “I’ll try this and see if it works,” or “This feels good, this must be right,” or “Look at me, I discovered something new!” is how many people practice. Generally, this type of focus doesn’t get anyone anywhere and eventually leads to disappointment, misunderstanding, and inevitable failure.

Have you ever studied very, very carefully and very sensitively, your own movement in a very simple action such as picking up a

glass of water or cup of tea? You want the glass and see it on the table and your hand reaches out to take hold of it and bring it to your mouth so you can take a drink. It is actually quite a numerous and complex series of actions, yet you do it freely and naturally and think nothing of it. Your hand doesn’t over- or under-reach the object; it automatically weighs the glass so that you apply enough strength to raise it, and you balance it very carefully so that you do not spill it all over yourself and it finds your mouth and your lips open and all your muscles go gulp, gulp and your tummy and throat feel happy and satisfied. This happens in a split second, almost without a thought, and so you think nothing of it. Of course, as a baby you probably spilled it many times on yourself and your mommy and as a very elderly person you might begin to spill it again, if your hand becomes too weak or unsteady. Your mastery of this seemingly simple action comes through practice over the years you are growing up and the tens of thousands of times you took a drink of water. As a matter of fact, your senses automatically and easily sense and differentiate between the hot cup of tea and cool glass of water and the way you pick it up changes accordingly. This, in martial arts, results in real technique or form. There is no wasted motion or energy to pick up the glass of water to take a drink. Within the usual method you use to pick up the glass, there is continuous and constant calculation and adjustment of distance and weight, all done freely and almost without thought. The thought or idea of having a glass of water and drinking the water move in perfect harmony. This is real martial arts technique, and this is what we call “form.” And like learning to drink water from your days as a little baby, it takes many years of practice.

“Form” means thought and action in perfect harmony. Please do not make a mistake: the “form” of training and education which is a “prescribed, literate form” of discipline which we determine on a conscious level leads to the development of the “form” of technique and which takes many years to polish and perfect. In regards to “form,” an ancient master said this, “When carving the handle of an axe, the model is not far away.” Which, of course, is the shape of your hand. Please train to understand the “form” of technique more clearly in your practice.

*Editor’s note:* Sensei originally published this article December 11, 2000 on the Aikido Center of Los Angeles’ daily message.

### Holiday Greetings from Mexico

by Dr. Roberto Magallanes Molina,  
Chief Instructor, Veracruz Aikikai

2009 has marked a great year for Veracruz Aikikai, thanks especially to Ito Sensei, Van Ruth Sensei, and everyone who visited us this year and in years past. I feel very happy with the way things are going; so much so that I feel the great Puerto Rican singer Jose Feliciano captured the best wish that I would like to send your way:



*Magallanes Sensei instructing  
his granddaughter*

Feliz Navidad, prospero año y felicidad

All of us at Veracruz Aikikai want to wish everyone at ACLA, and their friends and families, a very Merry Christmas, (as Mr. Feliciano so rightly says) from the bottom of our heart. Best wishes for a happy holiday season and a healthy 2010.

# Takamizo Sensei seminar in Hawaii



## The More Things Change

by Mark Ehrlich, *Aikido Ikkyu*

Last month, Ito Sensei, Shaun Menashe, Jason Markowski, and I ventured across the Pacific to attend the annual Aikido seminar hosted by Glenn Yoshida Sensei's Aikido Renshinkan and Gayne Sogi Sensei's Hawaii Betsuin Aikido Club. For the last four years, Mariko Takamizo, a 6th Dan Shihan from Hombu Dojo, has agreed to come and teach here. I attended last year's seminar as well and my return has given me some perspective of the overall experience of training with others not of one's own school.

Over the four days of training, our hosts treated us with a warm, collegial hospitality imbued with the aloha spirit that set us at ease almost at once. In fact, everyone I met and with whom I trained at the seminar always greeted me with a smile or a friendly nod of welcome. After greeting Yoshida Sensei and Sogi Sensei, whom I had met for the first time last year, I had the chance to renew relationships with teachers from other major dojos across the Hawaiian islands who came again this year: Donald Moriyama Sensei of Pearl City Aikido (who very kindly took us out to lunch one afternoon), Wesley Shimokawa Sensei of Lihue Aiki Kai, Barbara Klein Sensei and Robert Klein Sensei of Aikido of Hilo, and Kevin McGough Sensei and Leilani McGough Sensei of Kohala Aikikai. Another old friend of ACLA, Herald Farrington, returned to train here this year and to support the Kleins Sensei, his teachers. I very much enjoyed seeing old and new faces.

On the mat, Takamizo Sensei's classes once again expertly balanced the fundamentals (such as Tenkan Kokyu Ho, and various Ikkyo and Kotegaeshi applications) with more advanced suwari waza and hanmi handachi techniques. We maintained a pace that generated a good sweat but without any unpleasant fatigue, even after the four-hour days. What's more, our hosts invited us to

join them in taking Takamizo Sensei out to a lovely izakaya restaurant, where we ate and drank and talked and laughed late into the night, by which time Shaun and Jason had made their own friends besides the teachers.

The good impression we tried to make last year deepened this year, I think. Ito Sensei shared that he received nothing but good reports from other teachers about us, especially from the last class, in which all the chief instructors in attendance take 10 minutes to teach one technique that best represents their approach to Aikido. Ito Sensei's taught the Tenkan exercise that begins every ACLA class. The other teachers informed him that his students showed good training. When Ito Sensei asked why, they would reply something along the lines of, "Because they follow along and sincerely try to do what we've taught in the lesson!" Apparently, many students in attendance would simply practice the techniques as they knew them, without attempting to learn the points that the guest instructors tried to teach them. I know I found this information surprising, but it spurs in me a new appreciation for the quality of training I get here, a caliber of teaching that I suppose I take for granted.

In the end, it seems that the secret to making Aikido friends when traveling abroad remains the same secret to developing my practice here at home. Watch closely; copy the movement; save analysis for after practice, if at all; treat everyone respectfully; train dynamically but attentively; give thanks for my training. Doing these things paid great dividends in Hawaii, and have helped me grow in my daily practice. I hope to have other chances in the future to enjoy similar experiences as this one – moments of training coupled with good fellowship, a common passion, and a humble spirit.

May you enjoy the peace and possibilities of the holiday season.



## AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES AFFILIATED DOJOS

### INTERNATIONAL

#### Spain

**Aikido Kodokai**  
Salamanca, Spain

Chief Instructor: Santiago Garcia Almaraz  
www.kodokai.com

#### Mexico

**Veracruz Aikikai**  
Veracruz, Mexico

Chief Instructors:  
Dr. Jose Roberto Magallanes Molina  
Dr. Alvaro Rodolfo Hernandez Meza  
www.veracruz-aikikai.com

### UNITED STATES

#### California

**Hacienda La Puente Aikikai**  
Hacienda Heights, California

Chief Instructor: Tom Williams

#### Arizona

**Aikido Renbukai of Arizona**  
Surprise, Arizona

Chief Instructor: Michael Van Ruth  
www.aikidorenbukai.com



Visit us on the Web at [www.aikidocenterla.com](http://www.aikidocenterla.com)

**Farmers and Teachers** *continued from page 1...*

Not only do the produce generally seem fresher, more varied and more flavorful, but the energy and carbon footprint associated with growing and distributing appears far less than with the large corporate food processors.

The family farm is something I have a bit of experience with, since I was born and raised on one. Farming is hard work and a difficult way to make a living, which is why family farms are disappearing each year at a rapid rate. Besides being hard work, farming is a worrisome business: for those of you who don't know it, farmers are constant worriers. They worry that the seeds they plant might not germinate, they worry if it is too dry or too wet. Will a hailstorm or pests destroy the crops? They worry about picking the crops at the right time, and they worry about the price their crops will fetch. Worry seems to go with the acreage of a farm, and so it was with these thoughts of food and farming that I began to see that being a sensei felt more like being a farmer than a samurai. Most teachers of martial arts want to convey the spirit of the samurai, but when it comes right down to it, they more closely resemble farmers.

I remember Sensei often saying that everyone wants to be the teacher but they don't realize the responsibility and worry that go along with this deceptively exalted position.

Being a chief instructor of a dojo is very much like farming. Good senseis also have their share of worries. We worry about our students: Are we training them properly? Have we planted the right seeds to make the instruction germinate in the student's technique? Are we giving them the right level of instruction, in the right way? Do we seem too strict, or too lenient? Are the students all healthy? How do we ensure that they are not injured in practice? Is the environment conducive to focus on practice rather than personality clashes or cliques? Like a farmer, good sensei must provide the optimal conditions under their control to allow students to grow and flourish. They must cultivate an environment that optimizes the teaching; they worry so that classes and instruction can get better. If there are problems, they shield the students from it, just as most farmers try to shield their families from the vicissitudes of farming. Then there is the business side: Can we pay the rent and utility bills? Where will we find new students? How do we maintain our teaching standards without compromising to the demands of the business? These questions always weighed heavily on Sensei's mind.



*Sensei demonstrating at the annual Nisei Week demonstration*

I have to question anyone's eagerness to be a sensei: tease the roots of your aspiration to learn if, at heart, you long for power and prestige, or whether you truly have a calling to teach others. If you feel that this is your opportunity to gain the respect you deserve, perhaps teaching is not for you. If you feel that this seems an easy way to control others, then you will teach for all the wrong reasons, all of which you will have directed at your own self-gratification. Your technical abilities may be proficient, but in other important areas you may lack the compassion necessary to be a good teacher. Most good sensei approach their responsibilities with a certain degree of trepidation. Good sensei, like farmers, typically have less regard for themselves and more for their families. The farmer provides for her own family, the

sensei provides for his student family. Good farmers and sensei usually experience more self-sacrifice than self-gratification.

I think most good sensei really prefer the life of a student and the process of learning to living the life of a sensei. When I look back, I think Sensei was at his happiest when he became a student of tea and calligraphy. He would show me his calligraphy and how many times he practiced forming a single character; he would show

me pieces that he had acquired, such as ink stones and sticks

and brushes. A good sensei should always be studying something from the position of a student and should never lose that feeling of being a student. Farmers enjoy that learning process as well. My father would occasionally visit the local university and talk to the agriculture and horticulture professors about new methods of farming and new hybrids of flowers and fruit. Almost every night he would fall asleep reading a copy of the Encyclopedia of Gardening. Being a student offers a nice respite from the worries of being a teacher.

One has to wonder, with all this worry associated with being a good sensei, why would anyone want to be one? With the worry and hard work, why does anyone continue to farm? Of course, feelings of duty and obligation, of carrying on, play a role – be it the family farm or a martial arts school, if that is what the father or prior teacher wanted. However there has to be more than a sense of duty to offset that worry. I said earlier that good teaching involves more self-sacrifice than self-gratification; I didn't say there was no self-gratification. There has to be some feeling of enjoyment or satisfaction to make all the effort worthwhile for the individual. Good farmers feel pride and accomplishment when they see their crops grow and flourish, just as good sensei do when they witness their students learn, grow, and flourish.

## Aikido Renbukai of Arizona's One Year Anniversary

by Mike Van Ruth, Chief Instructor,  
Aikido Renbukai of Arizona

It was over a year ago that my partner Amy and I moved to Arizona so she could continue her nursing studies. One of the hardest parts of leaving California was not being near my family at ACLA. I promised Ito Sensei that I would come back at the end of each month to attend the Intensive class, and keep in touch with him and certain students to maintain my ties to the dojo here.

I now live in Surprise, Arizona, a relatively new community about an hour west of Phoenix. When I arrived, I discovered that they had no Aikido nearby; most of the Aikido schools lie in the area of central or eastern Phoenix. So with Ito Sensei's permission, I set out to open a branch dojo, Aikido Renbukai of Arizona. I had the honor of Ito Sensei naming the school. It does have a special ring to it.

I had started by checking out the martial arts schools in the local area to see if I could sublease their space. Luckily for me, the first school I went to see is the one where I presently teach. I stopped by Morning Star Karate just to peek in on the facility. They already had mats, which perfectly met my needs, and the chief instructor, Drake Sass Sensei, just happened to be there. We had an hour-long conversation about what I was hoping to do and he agreed to give me time to teach in his dojo.

Getting the space was the easy part. Getting students would turn out to be more difficult. I got the help of Paul Major to set up my Web site; I worked on building up an Internet presence; I submitted press releases; Ito Sensei helped me develop a brochure that I distributed through several local businesses; and I attended networking groups throughout Surprise and other local cities. I did all of this gearing up for the first day of classes at the Aikido Renbukai of Arizona, which would open on November 3, 2008.

On that day I expected to have at least one person walk through the door. Unfortunately, while I made it there that opening day, another person wouldn't come for two whole weeks. It felt very lonely being in the dojo all by myself, one hour a day, three days a week, for two weeks, but eventually my first student, Ken Young, arrived. A few days later Thad Gulczynski joined as well. They were my only students for a while; however, the dojo became a family affair when Ken's son Kyle and Thad's daugh-

ter Ceidee began training.

We continue to grow. Recently a dojo in Glendale, Arizona closed its doors, leaving its students without a home. Aikido Renbukai was fortunate enough to have several of that school's students join us. They are all wonderful people that share the same love as I do for the art of Aikido. I couldn't be happier with how a community of great people that train in the school has blossomed where once I just had me.



Mike Van Ruth teaching at Veracruz Aikikai

I have learned a couple of things along the way this first hectic year. One is that teaching and running my own school isn't as easy as it seemed when I first floated the idea. It takes a lot of work and responsibility. I have a responsibility to teach my students and guide them, to maintain the integrity of the art and the teachings of Sensei, and to represent ACLA and Aikido Renbukai as a branch dojo in the most professional manner possible.

I have also learned a lot about patience. I have seen students join, train for a while, and stop for one reason or another. Many people have come to watch class and said they wanted to join, but have not. I have had even more people call me saying they wanted to come watch a class, but they've never showed. I used to be disappointed by this. I had to let all that go; not everyone is going to train in Aikido. It just may not be for them. If they join, they join ... if they don't, they don't. I prefer to teach people who really want to train. I had to learn not to take personally other choices people might make.

The more I teach, the more I see the depths of Sensei's commitment to teaching. I get glimpses of his genius through trying to apply his teaching method. As a student, I couldn't understand why he did certain things, but now I am starting to see what an amazing teacher he was. He will always inspire me to become the best teacher I can.

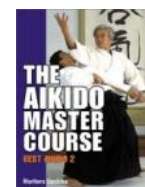
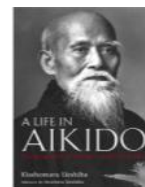
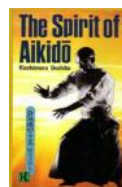
I would also like to thank Ito Sensei warmly for his help and encouragement. Without his support I wouldn't be able to write this article today. He has made himself available every step of the way to lend his knowledge, time, and assistance in the creation of the Aikido Renbukai of Arizona. I also appreciate the energy he has put into my own personal development as a teacher, student, and as a human being.

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### Recommended Readings:



by Ueshiba Kisshomaru

by Ueshiba Moriteru

# Aikido TRAINING SCHEDULE

## Sundays

9:00-10:00 AM Children's Class  
10:15-11:15 AM Open

## Mondays

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals  
6:30-7:30 PM Open

## Tuesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

## Wednesdays

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals  
6:30-7:30 PM Open  
7:45-8:45 PM Weapons

## Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Bokken

## Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

## Saturdays

9:30-11:00 AM Open

6:30 AM Instructor's Intensive: last Saturday of the month.\*

\* This class is not open for visitors to watch.

*We are directly affiliated with:*

## **AIKIDO WORLD HEADQUARTERS**

**Aikido So-Hombu Dojo - Aikikai**

**17-18 Wakamatsu-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, JAPAN**

*We are committed to the study and practice of the teachings of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba and his legitimate successors, Kisshomaru Ueshiba and the present Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba.*

The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles 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 ACLA 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.

## **SAVE THE DATE:**

O'Sensei Memorial Seminar  
April 24-25, 2010

# Iaido TRAINING SCHEDULE

## TRADITIONAL JAPANESE IAIDO SWORDSMANSHIP

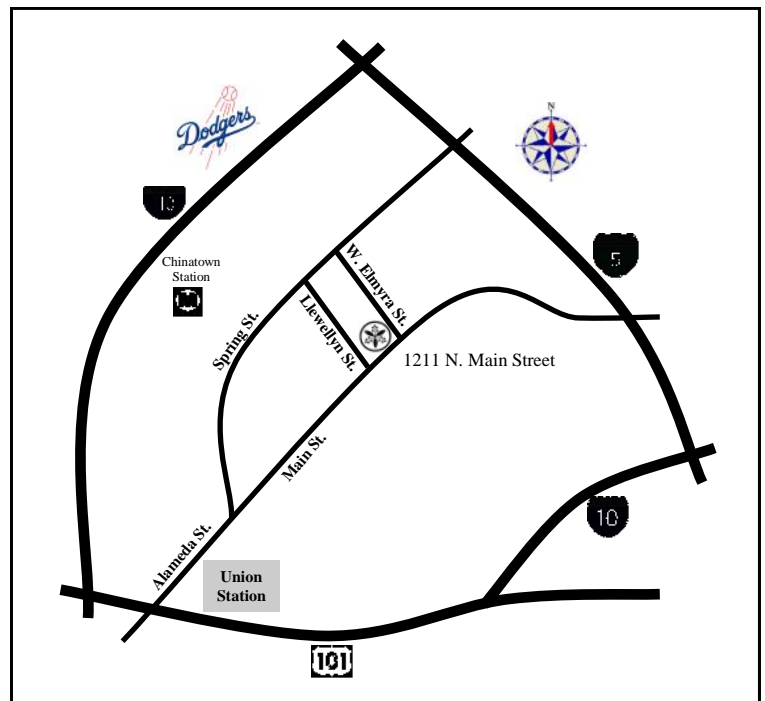
### **Saturdays:**

7:15-8:15 AM Beginning  
8:15-9:15 AM Intermediate-Advanced

**Sundays: 7:45-8:45 AM**

**Thursdays: 6:30-7:30 PM (Bokken Practice)  
7:30-8:30 PM**

*No classes on the last weekend of the month.*



## **Finding Our Dojo**

We are located at

1211 N. Main Street

Los Angeles, CA 90012

**Telephone: (323) 225-1424**

**E-mail: info@aikidocenterla.com**

We are across the street and one block northwest from the Chinatown Metro Station.

**The entrance is on Elmyra Street.**

**No appointment necessary to watch classes or join:**

You are welcome to visit us any time during any of our Open or Fundamental classes. Please come early.