



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 and Swordsmanship Society Kenshinkai
The Furuya Foundation

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From the Aikido Center of Los Angeles

Upcoming Events

December 11th:

End of Year Clean-up

December 24th-25th:

Dojo Closed: Christmas

December 31st-January 1st:

Dojo Closed: New Year's

January 8th:

Kisshomaru Ueshiba Memorial

January 29th:

Instructor's Intensive

March 6th:

Sensei Memorial

Letter From the Editor

by Mark Ehrlich
Editor, The Aiki Dojo

Contented With the Time

Our dojo recently held its annual holiday party, and I'm happy to report that it was a huge success. Gary Myers (our Iaido Chief Instructor and a frequent contributor to this newsletter) and his wife Sami kindly opened their beautiful home to us as a venue. Frances Yokota, Katy Fujitani, and Maria Murakawa contributed time and talent and delicious food, with a little help from James Doi and his wife Joan. Mike Van Ruth and Amy Ogg joined the fun after an all-day drive from Arizona, basically coming and going all that way just to celebrate with us. Students who we've not seen for a while for various reasons showed up as well as the regulars, and old friends, like Carol Tanita, brought new ones, like Mickey Komai, whose foundation just extended a generous contribution to ACLA. Larry Armstrong and Louis Lee documented many memorable moments on camera, and

Shaun Menashe, as always, kept everything running smoothly and made sure everyone enjoyed themselves, even taking time and precious battery life to introduce me to his favorite iPhone game. At one point in the evening, I looked around at all the conversation and eating and laughter and caught myself grinning ear to ear. What a wonderful time, I thought. *What a wonderful gathering.*

In this issue, as happens every year, the Chief Instructors and the branch dojos share their impressions of the year that was and glimpse the year to come. From where I sit, I'd say that in many ways, the lovely gathering I witnessed the other night seems emblematic of the year in general. Every year comes with its trials and tribulations, and many of them remain the same as we try, year after year, to balance sustaining a traditional dojo that offers very strong training in Aikido and Iaido with the practical demands of keeping the doors open and the bills paid.

Continued on page 6....

Care Packages

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

A student who lives abroad told me that one of the things he missed the most about Sensei since his death was the care packages Sensei used to send to him. Many of Sensei's students, friends, and fellow teachers have also been the recipients of one of Sensei's special care packages. I am sure it was such a delight to get something from him unexpectedly. He used to send toys, scrolls, school supplies, food, or other thoughtful gifts all around the world. What you might not know is that Sensei hand picked most of his gifts. He really seemed to enjoy sending gifts and he painstakingly took the utmost care to send the perfect gift, whether it was a meaningful scroll or delicious candies.

Sensei knew that maintaining relationships with others was very important and that even a bag of candies sent to a friend meant a great deal. When Japanese people travel they always bring back gifts for their friends or co-workers who could not go. Usually the gifts are specific to the region they visited and are usually a inexpensive tchotchke, some kind of souvenir or food item. The gift itself pales in comparison to the gesture. The giving is about group relationships and it says *please think of me because I think of you*. It reinforces the need for cooperation. This type of gift-

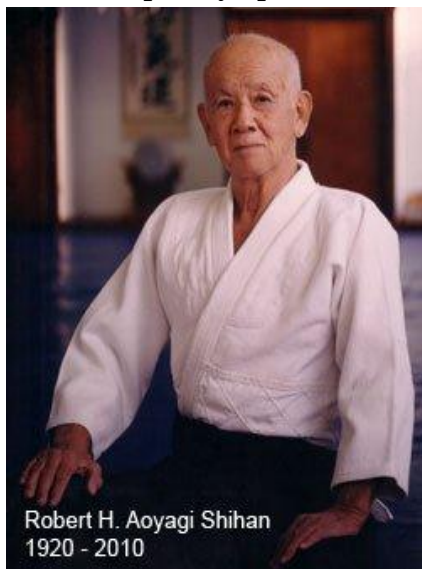
giving is lost in most Western countries, possibly because gifts are thought to be too personal or they don't need group cooperation like the Japanese do. Sending gifts is probably becoming passé much like hand-written letters, which I don't think is a good thing.

When you received a package from Sensei, I am sure that many just tore into the box to see what wonderful treat or gift was inside. I wondered if most ever looked at how it was packaged? Sensei was a stickler about how things were packaged and wrapped. I think he loved packing it even more than picking it out. His standard method was to pack it carefully in an unused box (he disliked re-using a box for gift giving) and then carefully surround the item with bubble wrap and packing peanuts. From there he closed up the box with packing tape, but not the normal packing tape dispensed from a gun. He used the cumbersome kind, which had to be cut from a roll and moistened. This tape required real skill to lay it down without accidentally twisting it or misaligning it. From there he wrapped the box in heavy-duty brown paper and he also sealed the edges with the same brown packing tape. He meticulously cut the tape so that it was measured perfectly from edge to edge with no sloppy overlap. He didn't stop there: each package was adorned with a hand-written label ready for shipping. If the package was a little bit heavy he tied a

plastic type of twine in such a way so that it formed a handle to make it easy to carry. He also included all the necessary postal forms neatly filled out and signed so that it was easy for us to mail for him. All this effort just for some five-dollar bag of *okashi* or cookies that he thought a friend in Japan might like, or school supplies for Trogawa Rhinpoche's students in Tibet! No matter what it was, he treated each package as if it contained the Crown jewels; to him, each one did.

This was just a small part of our Aikido training that occurred off the mat. Training like this seems to be losing ground in the modern era of martial arts. Today we look for ways to get more students to increase our bottom lines. Money, not training, becomes the main focus of a dojo. Sensei's way of sending a package with care was labor intensive and not cost-effective. Developing students works the same way. Thinking about money first and students second causes us to lose our focus and doing it this way, even if the effect is the same, loses something. Customers may have the technique but not the spirit of Aikido. Sensei gave us this great dojo as a place to train. Please don't overlook the way he packaged it for you and all the care and heart he put into giving you this wonderful gift. Please don't forget your training this holiday season.

Deepest Sympathies



Robert H. Aoyagi Shihan
1920 - 2010

Questions/Comments?

We welcome all questions and comments. Please send us a letter or an e-mail and our team will do our best to come up with an answer. We reserve the right to edit questions and letters for clarity and length.

Please e-mail submissions to:
info@aikidocenterla.com

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SAVE THE DATE!

O'Sensei Memorial Seminar

April 22-24, 2011

Special Guests:
Kei Izawa Sensei and
Mariquita Izawa Sensei

Everyone is invited!

With Gratitude

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

On November 3, 2008, with the permission of Ito Sensei, I started teaching Aikido in Arizona. We had a modest beginning, subleasing from a Karate dojo in the city of Surprise. While we were able to offer classes only three days a week, the school nevertheless slowly pulled together a close community of students. I was thankful.

It was always my intention, however, to have our own school. The search for the appropriate space seemed endless; there always seemed to be something not quite right with the space or the terms of the lease. But as Ito Sensei says, "There is no such thing as an accident." One day I went to see a space that I initially felt would be a waste of time. But apparently I judged too soon.



Van Ruth Sensei and his students at their new dojo in Arizona

With Ito Sensei's help, encouragement, and experience, we decided to go ahead with a new space in El Mirage, which is just south of the Karate dojo. It didn't really hit me until Allen Agapay (one of my students) and I put down the final mat and stood back to see our new dojo installed. I had a moment of realization and became a little choked up. So many emotions surfaced all at once, but mostly, I felt a great sense of gratitude.

Greetings on the Coming Bonenkai

by Roberto Magallanes Molina, M.D.
Co-Chief Instructor, Veracruz Aikikai

Soon this year of 2010 will be over, leaving us with memories of good experiences and bad, joy and suffering, and moments that made us think deeply about our lives and the lives of others. We might recall being happy or sad as well while supporting our families and friends, but we feel especially grateful to those who have share their knowledge with us, like our teachers and advisors.

Although we in Veracruz had a bad time this year in the face of natural disasters, we rose above them and kept to our chosen path, as we do in Aikido practice.

We live on a beautiful planet created by a wonderful universe that surrounds us and teaches us how small and insignificant we are, and no matter how things unfold over the years, with endurance and courage and humility and pride, we will sail through life mindfully.

On behalf of all of us at Veracruz Aikikai, I wish you the best during this *bonenkai* season. Have a nice and hard practice, be respectful to your partners and grateful to your teachers, and enjoy life. We will see each other next year, so help us God.

Many kind people have contributed of their time and treasure to make this dojo become a reality. It was wonderful to see our students step up the way they did. I could see how excited and enthusiastic they were about having their own dojo, their own place to train. I am very proud of their commitment and effort.

We held our first practice in the new dojo on November 1, 2010. It is fitting that we are in the new dojo exactly two years after I first started teaching here in Arizona. The practice was an exciting moment for everyone in attendance: our dream had become a reality. At long last, we were training in our very own dojo and our very own home.

There is still much work to be done. Right now the place feels like an empty shell with mats on the floor. But the goal is to construct a beautiful dojo by November 2011. Sensei's dojo – the original one on Vignes Street in Little Tokyo – is my inspiration. My hope is that my dojo will honor Sensei's mem-

ory, carrying on his vision, and be a place where he would want to teach.

In this holiday season, may we all cultivate a sense of gratitude. There is always someone to thank for getting us to where we are. No one has accomplished anything entirely on their own. May we not forget and keep a humble prospective on our lives and give thanks. Happy Holidays!

The Aiki 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 also will dedicate yourself to your training and to enjoying all the benefits that Aikido and Iaido can offer.

Publisher: David Ito
Editor-in-Chief: Mark Ehrlich • Photographer: Larry Armstrong

Happy Holidays

by Gary Myers, Iaido Chief Instructor

Where did the year go? Here it is the last month of the year, and the holiday season is once again upon us. My best wishes for a happy and healthy holiday season go out to Ito Sensei, all the students of ACLA, both Aikido and Iaido, and everyone else who receives the newsletter. I also want to thank the board of directors of the Furuya Foundation for their efforts over the past year to get the Foundation off the ground.

My twenty-fifth anniversary with the dojo just happened to fall on Thanksgiving Day. In those 25 years, lots of students have come and gone both in Aikido and Iaido. Although nostalgia is not something I'm particularly prone to do, I would ask that you would indulge me a paragraph or two. First I think it appropriate to thank all the Iaido students, both present and past, that I have had the opportunity to practice with and to teach.

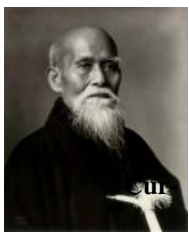
A teacher has a responsibility to his students to teach them correctly, to ensure their safety in practice, and to see them progress even beyond their teacher. To see those things accomplished is the greatest reward to the teacher. But students do one other thing for their teacher; they provide the way to make the teacher improve. I think some teachers don't express that sentiment, because they want to appear as the all-knowing authority or they feel they are giving up something by admitting it. The fact that teachers still try to refine their instruction may come as a surprise to students. But nonetheless, that is the case. A good teacher should always strive to improve along with his students.

Iaido is a particularly difficult martial art because it doesn't provide obvious visual feedback, even though it is as precise a martial art as you can practice. That is why an instructor is necessary to learn the art. Sensei and the senior students I learned from were like swordsmiths. They formed my Iaido as a smith and assistants would form a sword. It took a lot of pounding, and more pounding, and forging, but eventually I took shape, so to speak. As I became an assistant instructor, Sensei continued to shape my instruction, both through example and counsel. But a sword doesn't really present its best until it is polished. Until a skilled *togishi* places the sword against the polishing stones, the sword's qualities will remain hidden. The act of teaching is that polishing process for both student and teacher. The result should be that the best qualities of both should emerge from that process. So again I want to thank you all for helping me polish my instruction. A teacher without students is like an empty *saya*.



Kuniyoshi wood block print titled *Togishi Tazaemon from the series about the 47 Ronin called Seichū gishi den*

Now back to the present and the future. It seems that every year ACLA is faced with a new set of challenges and 2010 didn't disappoint. Ito Sensei, Mark, and Shaun have all done a great job meeting those challenges. Next year will present even more opportunities as we begin to make the Furuya Foundation more visible in the community. Ito Sensei often remarks that it takes five people to do what Sensei did on his own. I can guarantee that it is going to take more than five people to accomplish some of the goals we have established for the Foundation and ACLA for next year. We will be asking for help from all of you: black belts, senior students, and all members. If you'd like to volunteer for an assignment please see either Ito Sensei or myself; everyone can contribute their talents over the next few months. As 2010 comes to a close, I'm looking forward to next year and the next 24 after that. Happy holidays to you all.



Friday February 18th:

Evening rededication ceremony of Honolulu Aiki Dojo

Saturday February 19th:

- 9:00 - 10:00 AM: Waka Sensei
- 10:15 - 11:15 AM: Doshu
- 1:15 - 2:15 PM: Masuda Shihan
- 2:30 - 3:30 PM: Masuda Shihan

Sunday February 20th:

- 9:00 - 10:00 AM: Waka Sensei
- 10:15 - 11:15 AM: Doshu
- 1:15 - 2:15 PM: Yamada Shihan
- 2:30 - 3:30 PM: Yamada Shihan
- Evening Banquet

Monday February 21st:

- 9:00 - 10:00 AM: Doshu
- Demonstration after class

www.Aikidohawaii2011.org

Takamizo Sensei Seminar in Hawaii



Gayne Sogi Shihan



Donald Moriyama Shihan



Randy Scoville Shihan



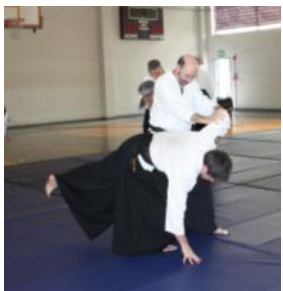
Wesley Shimokawa Sensei



Mariko Takamizo Shihan



Glen Yoshida Sensei



Good and Bad is the Same

by Santiago Garcia Almaraz, Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai

Now that 2010 is over there are surely many people who prefer to forget it, while others wish it would never end. I am among those who believe every year is important, whether I found it a good or not-so-good one, since both kinds help us to learn and grow.

For the dojo this year has not been one of the best ones, but neither was it the worst, and as I said at the outset all this is relative; the significance of words like *good* or *bad*, *easy* or *hard* shift as our experience does. We find the proof of this statement in our art. For example, when you first take up the practice of Aikido, everything feels so difficult – learning to fall, a new way of moving your body, a whole new protocol to assimilate. After several years, however, you probably find that those same things now require very little effort, and seem the easiest part of all! This is the easy part of Aikido: to attend class when everything is new is relatively easy! We have so much to learn! If we look around us, there is always someone who can help us improve, some senior or instructor to watch us at the end of class and help deepen our understanding or refine our technique, etc.

On the other hand, as time passes and we develop over the years and have started glimpsing the other side of Aikido, we pay less attention, we forget why we need to go to class regularly, and we appreciate our small achievements less than we did when we first

began. Every day this art is more demanding of us and, if we want to grow, we must constantly polish our technique down to the smallest imperceptible details, so that those just starting out can watch their more advanced fellows for the first time and think, *How easy this Aikido seems.*

Again, such notions as *new*, *advanced*, *good*, *bad*, *easy* and *hard* really depend on and stem from our point of view, as do all these feelings of frustration, lack of motivation, and effort without reward. They are normal in the Aikido learning process and only after years of practice, confronting these situations, and learning to overcome them, can we grow and improve from within as people and as martial artists.

And I think that that moment of overcoming is the time when we finally understand the true essence of this art, this philosophy, of Aikido. Every day each class offers me another beginning, a new opportunity to teach, correct, and polish my technique, to improve and to offer the best of me and my Aikido as the instructor of my students and as their companion in practice, and to guide all of us in the dojo to instill in each other the motivation and enthusiasm to follow this Way.

I hope that in the coming year everyone returns to their practice of Aikido with contagious motivation and enthusiasm, and that they share that spirit with the students at their side.

Merry Christmas and Happy 2011!

Letter From the Editor *continued from page 1...*

In the past year we have lost more than one student to the tough economic times; we've had more than our share of luck to keep current on our bills some months in the face of a shrinking dues pool, and sometimes we've had to fall behind on some accounts just to stay in good standing elsewhere. That said, I think it's easy to miss the small miracles which happen among us if we focus solely on dollars and cents.

We all came to ACLA for different reasons, and if you're anything like me you've discovered that either you've forgotten the original reasons or they no longer apply. Yet we came nonetheless, which I ponder whenever we have prospective students watch class and new students join, and for some reason I always think of a few lines of Dickens, from his *A Christmas Carol*:

In they all came, one after another; some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some pushing, some pulling; in they all came, anyhow and anyhow.

Joining a group can seem as simple as making a mindful choice; truly belonging to one, I think, involves the heart as much as the mind, not so much in a sentimental way as in the way of committing to a person or to an ideal. What's more, I harbor the notion that commitment of this kind tends to lead to other commitments, in the sense that, once we decide to start giving of ourselves, something in us seeks to give more in other ways: we see that we can be good students and good parents and good citizens and good friends

all at once, and in doing so we learn that we have always had the power to become the kind of people we suspected we could never be. This notion brings me to the small miracle I nearly missed in our dojo this year that happened all around me: people came, anyhow and anyhow, and stayed as their lives permitted. They balanced their training with their work and their children and their commute in a way I've not seen before. We've begun to talk with each other about balancing these things. We've reached out to help a branch dojo in need just because they were in need. We've begun to gather outside the dojo walls in ways we never did when Sensei was alive; we meet for coffee after class, we sit around a dining room table and laugh together, and have thus managed to create something Sensei wanted for us and for himself: a family of sorts which, more or less, finds itself (as Dickens says) "happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time." All this signifies to me that we've begun to come into our own in the post-Sensei era, and I think the coming year will demonstrate this evolution even more as we rely upon each other (in the form of the Furuya Foundation and ACLA) to steer the dojo into the future with a mission we design and a path we choose. I look forward to making this journey together.

Whatever the holiday season means to you, I hope that you and your family enjoy a safe and happy time. And whatever the past year has brought your way, I hope that you find in the coming year many moments like the one I had at the party – moments of good fellowship and empathy that stoke joy and hope within you until you glow as if bathed in the light from a shining star. Happy Holidays, and I'll see you on the mat!

Staying Hungry

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

Without respect for tradition, you will lose it. If you lose the tradition, you lose the heart of the teachings. We might think we just throw out what we don't need, but in actuality, we discard what we don't understand. Why are we afraid of what we don't understand? In reality, we are afraid of understanding itself, because understanding dissolves the ego. Our egos are the greatest gift from God, because our egos are the key to our mortality and the mysterious path to our own humanity.

Nowadays, I have to change my thinking and I believe that "aspiration" is not enough for students. Or, perhaps, students only understand aspiration to learn exclusively at an intellectual level. This level of understanding is not deep enough to do us any real good. Nowadays, I think students need to be "hungry" to learn the art. When we feel hungry and do not get something to eat, we begin to feel pain in our stomach and head. We begin to get weak and feel bad inside. This is real hunger. When you feel such hunger for Aikido, then we call this hunger – real aspiration!

We live in such a great country here that none of us truly knows what hunger is. This is a great thing because I heard that over 65% of the young children in this world today go without something to eat and very many are starving to death. From where we are in this beautiful country, we can hardly believe such a fact of life. Yet, although it is good to forget or relieve physical hunger, I think it is good to have a little spiritual hunger. I am afraid to say that I imagine more than 65% of both children and adults, like ourselves, are starving to death from spiritual hunger. We know how to cure physical hunger by supplying food, but we still have many problems trying to feed so many. My friend, Bianca Jagger, spends so much money, time, and sweat to send food to children in her home country in South America but she still encounters so many problems with politics and people. Curing spiritual hunger is

much more difficult and a much more subtle problem. We are all starving spiritually but do not even feel or recognize the pain it causes us!

The other day, someone asked me how to practice in a seminar to get the most out of it. I thought this was an obvious question but such a simple point really eludes most of us! To this degree, we have become so misdirected and confused about our train-



ing! I said simply to practice hard and enjoy it. These are not my words, really: they come from Sen-no-Rikyu, the patriarch of the Japanese tea ceremony who lived about 450 years ago. A student asked him, "What is the secret of mastering the tea ceremony?" Sen-no-Rikyu said, "Simply make your guest the very best cup of tea ever." In our Aikido, each and every time we practice, we should make it the very best practice we ever had, just as the student was advised to make the very best cup of tea for his guest each time! This is true mastery of the art of Tea, and this is true mastery of the art of Aikido! There is nothing else outside of this!

A very hungry person will take what is in front of him and eat it right away and be so grateful! Aikidoists today pick and choose, chit chat about this and that, like they are royalty at a huge banquet! Because Aikidoists are not aware that they are hungry they think they can afford to pick and choose and in this process, they become lost and misguided. The very hungry man

will go directly to the point! Can you understand what I am talking about?

When I was practicing tea, I tried to make the very best cup of tea I could each time but there was always a mistake, there was always something missing. There was always something I overlooked or forgot about. If something unexpected occurred, then I would get completely messed up! I think Aikido students feel the same way today in practice. There is only one cure – practice!

Speaking of tea, many years ago, the Grandmaster of tea came to this country to give a demonstration of tea and we all went to study this art from him. As he approached the tea kettle and sat down, he and we, at the same time, realized that he had forgotten his *fukusa*, or small towel used to wipe and purify each tea utensil. This is a great, unforgivable sin! We were all in shock! As if nothing had happened at all and as if it was the most natural thing in the world, he stood up, left, and returned with his *fukusa* tucked in at his belt, or *obi*, just as it should be and began to prepare the tea. How impressed we were! Another time, another teacher sat down to begin the tea ceremony and when she removed the lid from the tea kettle, realized that there was no hot water! She became paralyzed in shock and we all realized what had happened! Suddenly, she began to yell at her students for such a mistake. When I saw her, I knew that she was not shocked at all and entirely composed at such a mistake because she is a real veteran. I knew she was yelling to wake up all her sleeping students! Again, when you are hungry for the art, you cannot sleep! It is just like trying to fall asleep when you are physically hungry! I feel in both instances, the teachers did the correct thing!

The next time you come to the dojo, please stay awake and stay hungry!

Editor's Note: Sensei originally posted this article, in slightly different form, to his daily message board on September 30, 2002.

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

9:30-10:30 AM Open
10:45-11:45 AM Weapons*

6:30 AM Instructor's Intensive: last Saturday of the month by invitation only.*

* These classes are not open for visitors to watch.

Iaido TRAINING SCHEDULE

TRADITIONAL JAPANESE IAIDO SWORDSMANSHIP

Saturdays

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

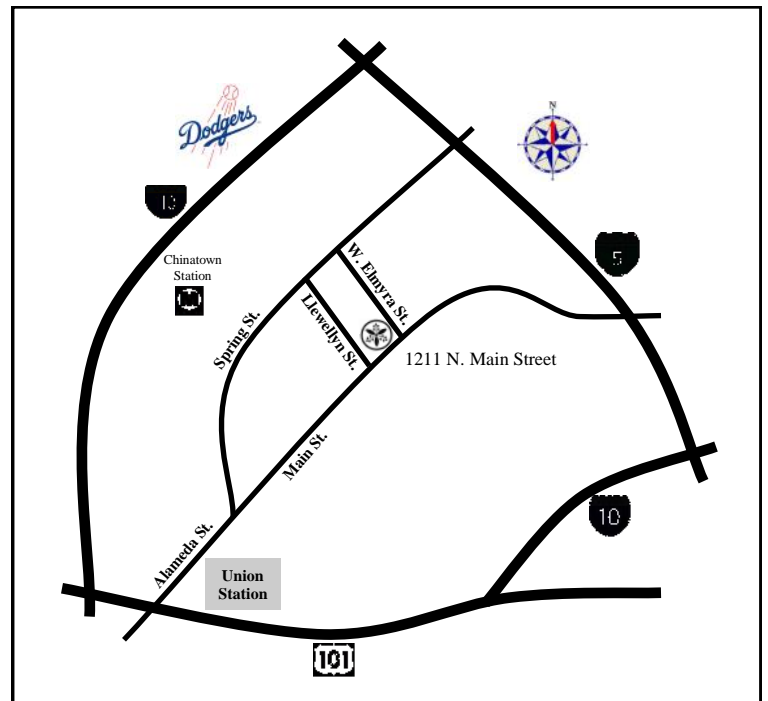
Sundays

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.

We are directly affiliated with:
AIKIDO WORLD HEADQUARTERS

Aikido 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 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.



No appointment necessary to watch classes or join:
You are welcome to visit us any time during any of our Open or Fundamentals classes. Please come early.