



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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Upcoming Events

February 18th-21st:
Aikido Celebration 2011

February 26th:
Instructor's Intensive

March 6th:
Sensei Memorial

March 26th:
Instructor's Intensive

April 22nd-24th:
O Sensei Memorial Seminar

April 30th:
Instructor's Intensive

Letter From the Editor
by Mark Ehrlich
Editor, The Aiki Dojo

The Only Constant

On behalf of everyone here on staff at *The Aiki Dojo* and ACLA, I want to wish all of our readers a very happy Year of the Rabbit. As I understand it, this kind of year in the Chinese zodiac typically portends a time of swift progress and rapid change. Perhaps you have already begun to see the signs of such momentum rolling your way; I know that, insofar as our dojo is concerned, I have.

This year will see the second crop of shodan candidates to test under Ito Sensei. Since the holiday season ended, I've noticed all of our students developing themselves and training harder; however, I've also noticed how our *dan* candidates have all thrown themselves into extra training sessions, working together to improve their execution of technique and *ukemi*, and supporting one another as the physical and mental challenges begin to make

themselves felt. Seeing such diligence boosts my morale quite a bit – no one likes to train alone – yet the selfless generosity of a handful of students who will not test but have volunteered to work with the candidates regularly gratifies me even more. Giving a helping hand to our fellow students typifies the direction I've witnessed the dojo heading; I believe we're headed the right way, helping each other to carry on what Sensei built.

I would never suggest that earning rank means the same thing as developing oneself as a martial artist and as a person, but seeing so many recent promotions, in both our Aikido and Iaido departments, seems another favorable sign that our students keep coming, keep working hard, and keep doing their best to catch the techniques. I wish all of our new promotees continued success in their training.

Speaking of training, this year will offer some exciting training opportunities to our students. In late April we will once again hold our annual O Sensei Memorial Seminar (see our ad

Continued on page 5...



Enlightenment: Training, Not Talking

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

One hour of practice is one hour closer to Your Enlightenment.
 –from Sensei's sign as posted in the men's dressing room

A while back Sensei remarked to me, "You will teach Aikido differently than me; people today don't want to learn Aikido the way I teach it." He concluded somewhat pensively, "People like you are changing the way Aikido is taught and learned. I guess that is what people want today." At the time, I really didn't get what he was saying. I studied physical education in college and I employed all the new and modern techniques I had learned. I also enjoyed giving the students all the shortcuts so that they wouldn't have to struggle like I did. I thought I would produce better students faster with my teaching style. Today, years after Sensei's passing, I finally realize what he was saying. I thought my modern, scientific pedagogy would produce a legion of proficient students. What ended up happening, to the contrary, was that I simply overwhelmed most students with all of my corrections and confused the others with my short cuts and tips. Many students always attended my classes, but few of them developed. By focusing on the end result I wanted, I had robbed students of their journeys.

Sensei taught from a more Eastern style of instruction used in martial arts schools long ago which he infused with only a hint of modern teaching techniques. He also placed an enormous amount of importance on the journey of training as a path towards enlightenment.

He tried to create an environment of self-realization based upon *mitori keiko*, or as he put it, "You have to steal the teaching." In this method of *mitori keiko* the students ask no questions. They have only one job: to train continuously. The teacher demonstrates and the students copy all the while trying to get the feeling of the technique. In this model, *understanding why* isn't nearly as important as

getting the feeling for the techniques. Sensei felt that teachers should refrain from giving many corrections and instead should try and give only a single pertinent correction delivered at the exactly right time so that the students can then take that correction home and work on it. He felt that it was up to teachers to create the space for learning and place the burden of learning upon the students. This way, students guide themselves toward their own self-realization and, ultimately, to their own salvation. The curriculum and teaching schedule Sensei also typically kept from public knowledge; they were only privy to him and a select few, since he wanted to prevent students only showing up for the things they wanted to learn or for the instructor they liked. The instructors under Sensei intuitively knew to teach only what he had taught on the previous days and to stay on topic with what he was teaching. I hope we continue with this tradition in our dojo.

Sensei also believed that the environment for training played an important role in the training process itself, and so he always demanded the students clean and maintain the dojo to the highest standard. This aspect of his teaching style was influenced by his study of Buddhism and tea ceremony, which both believe that creating order in our environment creates order within ourselves. Training also must take place in silence in order not to create any distractions for our attention. Practicing in this way requires significant discipline.

As it happened, discipline also made for a large part of the training under Sensei, and he made for a very strict teacher. On and off the mat, we students had to uphold the decorum and etiquette of the dojo. Sensei rarely committed policies and procedures to paper but rather spread them generally by word of mouth, a tactic that enabled him to learn clearly who paid attention and who let things slip by them. We had the responsibility for knowing and doing the right thing at all times whether Sensei instructed us or not. This strenuous type of discipline helped us to develop intuition; we had learned to know without knowing.

Today, after finally understanding Sensei's admonishment, I am trying to move more in his direction. I want us to talk less and practice more. I want to make class less about the teacher and more about practicing the art of Aikido. I can only do this by letting the students practice as much as they can, and they cannot do that if I or any other instructor spends the bulk of the class lecturing. When correcting someone I want to give the right correction at the right time, patiently. I recognize now that the act of training stands as the most critical element of a student's development. I also understand now that each moment our students spend getting the feel for the techniques brings them closer to their enlightenment, and that every moment a teacher spends lecturing moves them a little farther from it.

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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

Ants in the Pantry

by Gary Myers, Iaido Chief Instructor

We recently had some severe rain in Southern California, dropping the equivalent of half of a normal year's rainfall in two days. To all those people who have had flood or landslide damage done to their homes, our hearts and thoughts go out to them. My house survived fine, with one exception, and my problem from the rains is trivial compared to the problems others had. Living where we do, we have our share of wildlife, but by far the most prevalent living things are ants. Almost every home and business has an ant colony nearby. I have encountered ants almost every place I spend time: home, work, and the dojo.

Ants are certainly difficult creatures to control. It is not like you can herd ants out of your home. You can certainly try to divert them from coming in, but if they truly want to, they will find one to one hundred ways to get inside. Ants have a Goldilocks view of life: If it's too dry they come into your house, and if it's too wet they'll come also. If it's too cold or too hot, same thing. Everything has to be just right for them to keep to their own colonies.

With the constant and severe rains, it should not have been surprising that they decided to come into the house from all angles and all rooms, especially in the kitchen where the food is. If any of you have ever eaten an ant on purpose or by mistake, they are not particularly tasty. From accidental personal experience, I know that they are a little bitter tasting, and their nutritional value is negligible. They don't add anything positive to your food when they are in it. There is no other logical choice except to throw the food away, which, is wasteful. To make a long story short, it didn't end well for the ants, but there are still more of them than me, so maybe this story is not yet quite completed.

Ants are amazing creatures programmed at birth to be a certain type: workers, warriors, etc. All play their respective roles within the colony. They are already "wired" to maintain and protect the colony. There's no ambiguity as to what they are and what they are to do. In some respects, their simplicity has a certain elegance to it. Each individual does what it sets out to do. It would be easy if we, like them, were all programmed at birth and of course did not know any other way of life. But, fortunately, we are not born into that clone-type structure. We have freedom of will and thought, and opportunities are almost limitless if we don't limit our thinking.

In starting Iaido, though, it's good to start out like an ant. We learn not by being preprogrammed but by "cloning" or replicating, if you will, the movements of others. Learning by example is the

quickest and most direct way, given the limitless interpretative capacity of our minds. Each of us has our own way of processing information; thus, while the physical process is the same, our unique pathways, filtering, and interpretations make that process different for each of us. We should be more like the ant, with no ambiguity of thought and a fierce tenacity, but our brain complexity makes it impossible for that to happen.

Today, people seem to think that by simply looking at a video, they can learn almost anything. However, I must say that such a thing is not possible for everyone. I have seen people copy a video almost exactly, and I have seen others perform such that I could not recognize any similarity to the technique they watched and tried to reproduce. Yet when I ask those people how they think they did, they would all swear they performed exactly like the video.



*Shoto Bokusai Ants Hauling a Pumpkin
Hanging scroll; Ink on paper
Muromachi Period (ca. 1400)*

When we try to copy we tend to interpret what we see. Our minds not only manipulate the image (they automatically right the reverse image projected on our retinas), but they also process those motions through the neurons in our brains, and send the electrical pulses to our muscles to try to replicate what we see. It is quite remarkable that we can come so close, yet it is almost impossible to replicate any movement exactly. Scientists have recently discovered that we forget or don't process information at an amazing rate of speed. So all information coming in doesn't get processed

unless there is an additional step to fire up the neurons. How and why the brain does it for some information and not all is still a mystery. When all the information doesn't get processed, we begin to interpret. The old masters would say this is our ego getting in the way and that is probably the best explanation.

Science and robotic engineering are just getting close to replicating human movement exactly. To get closer to replicating truly what we see, we need feedback, which is the role of the instructor. The instructor, or the guide if you will, corrects us when our minds interpret incorrectly. One of the responsibilities of an instructor is to ensure that the student has good fundamentals and maintains them. Once fundamentals become second nature, new movements become easier to learn. But if fundamentals are not correctly learned, new movements will seem harder to learn and assimilate. That's why in the old days students did not advance until they correctly learned the fundamentals. Everyone's fundamentals should be the same, like the ant, but that doesn't mean that everyone's Iaido looks the same. We all are different sizes and body shapes; some of us have longer arms and legs than others, or our bone structure and musculature is different. These differences make our Iaido individual to us. Therefore each person's Iaido is his or her own. But we should never confuse these individual movements with bad fundamentals.



Our Neighbors, Our Food

by Maria Murakawa, Aikido 2nd Dan

Have a Ball at Kouraku

If you ever have a late night hankering for Japanese *shokudo* (diner food), Kouraku is the place to go. True to Japanese greasy-spoon fashion, they serve the typical fare of *ramen*, *gyoza*, *katsu*, and curry rice – foods which occupy a special place in the hearts of the Japanese people, from the five-year-old child to the senior salaryman. In fact, one step into the long dining hall and you will be greeted not by the fabulous decor but the line cooks behind the counter swigging vats of ramen and tossing fried rice, guys burying their faces in shrimp omelets and *manga*, vinyl booths reminiscent of Denny's complete with young couples sharing beer and families sipping tea, and almost on every table, a platter of *nikudango*.



No meal would be complete without an order of these meatballs, which strike a succulent cord within the deep reaches of the soul regardless of gender, race, or age. Deep fried to seal in their juices, the hot pieces of ground beef and chives are quickly bathed



Kouraku

314 E. 2nd St.

Los Angeles, CA 90012

(213) 687-4972

Hours: Mon-Sat. 11AM-3AM

Sun. 11AM-12AM

Cash only

in a steamy, syrupy, sweet and sour sauce. Bite into them immediately and you will enjoy your lips being drenched in the humid sweetness, the brittle crust of the meat giving way to an explosive onrush of juicy beef flavors, your taste buds eagerly absorbing every mouthful. The dish, simply translated as “meatball”, is unassumingly delicious.

Another surprise hit is the *tonkotsu ramen*. This the same type of *ramen* as that served by nearby Daiko-kuya, so if you don't feel like waiting an hour in line with them, Kouraku's version more than satisfies. Kouraku's tender noodles, milky and savory broth, and thick-cut *chashu* pork definitely will quell any *ramen* cravings. Add a side of pork fried rice and you'll experience comfort food at its best, Japanese-style.

Kouraku is one of the old reliable restaurants in Little Tokyo, the one you might drop by years after all the trendy places around town have come and gone, the one you might remember like mom's cooking. (As a side note, Sensei used to frequent this place, and enjoyed it very much.)



Letters

Hello Ito Sensei,

Happy (belated) holidays! I hope that you enjoyed the day with your family and friends. I apologize for not writing to you sooner, especially for your birthday. I would like to thank you for everything that you taught me while I trained at ACLA and the e-mails that you sent me. I really enjoyed my time there; the dojo helped me a great deal while I was going through some changes. I would like you to know that I'm doing well, and I hope the same for you, your family, and everyone at the dojo. Take care Sensei.

Collin Robinson

Editor's note: The following communications come from fans of Sensei's Facebook page:

Thank you for befriending Fly Fishing Dojo, one of my weblogs. I enjoyed Furuya Sensei's book, *Kodo: Ancient Ways* and was sorry to hear of his passing. May his eternal soul rest in peace.

John Szmikowski Sensei, Goshin-Do Karate-Do 6th Dan

It is an honor for me to be counted among Sensei's friends since I'm a particular fan of Sensei and his work for Aikido in the USA. Thanks for having created this page in his memory, and greetings from Argentina.

Daniel Alejandro Brisuela

in this newsletter, on page 7). Our own senior instructors will of course teach, along with our very special guests, Kei and Mariquita Izawa. The Izawas Sensei have been good friends of ACLA for many years, and we appreciate their generously making the time to come teach, especially since Kei Izawa, as the General Secretary of the IAF, has many demands on his time as a leader and as a teacher. A great many dojos around the world and across the United States have invited him to teach them, and so I'd like to extend a special *thank you* to both sensei for joining us this year. Please mark your calendars now and prepare yourselves for a weekend of fellowship and joyful, vibrant practice!

Another special opportunity this year presented itself, and a handful of our students will journey to Honolulu later this month for the Aikido Celebration 2011 Seminar (see our ad in this newsletter, on page 6), which, in addition to featuring our friends from the various dojos across Hawaii, will also feature Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba and Waka Sensei Mitsuteru Ueshiba, as well as other elite Hombu *shihan* and direct students of the Founder. This event promises to make for an unforgettable experience for all participants; we hope to present a synopsis of the entire trip in our March issue.

Last, but certainly not least, this year the dojo will unveil a new training schedule that will allow for more practice opportunities for everyone. While I cannot say more here, I will tell you that our Chief Instructors have begun collaborating on an updated schedule, and they and the teaching staff will make announcements later this year, most likely in the Spring after our annual seminar. By the look of things we'll have a more integrated process by which to welcome and initiate new joiners while enabling experienced students to find a level of intensity or pacing that works more seamlessly with their training goals.

If this sounds like a lot of news, I agree that it is, and thinking about what this year might hold for ACLA, I feel somewhat breathless. I also find myself recalling my graduate school days, when I read far more than I think anyone ought, all in the name of learning for its own sake. Somewhere during that time, I encountered Greek philosophy, and one of its influential practitioners, Heraclitus. In the interest of keeping this newsletter from landing in the recycling bin prematurely I will only say that in a

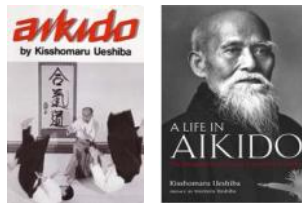
compendium called *Lives of the Philosophers*, written by Diogenes Laertius, the author quotes Heraclitus as saying, "The only constant is change." Different translators might write this sentence somewhat differently, but the message feels as true to me now as it probably did to old Heraclitus way back then. It seems an inevitable byproduct of human endeavor that, no matter how steadfast we try to make the beginnings of our enterprise, the nature of time and society gently but irresistibly nudges our ship free from its mooring, and we drift along with the currents, some which we anticipate, and some we had never imagined.

I would suggest that, just as change remains a constant, so too do other things. Our students change in how they practice as they grow and develop, but practice they must if they indeed want to grow and develop in the first place. Our teaching schedule may change its form, but its content will never do so, for if that happened we would no longer be doing the Aikido that brought us this far. Some of us might not quite wish to go any farther at the moment: no one told us at the start that with proper training not only come technical challenges but also meeting and conquering ourselves. Our own inner demons will run amok if we let them, and so I hope we all, in this Year of the Rabbit, train diligently to shift our hearts and garner the only real victory, which is self-victory – right now.

Recommended Readings:



by Ueshiba Moriteru



by Ueshiba Kisshomaru



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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

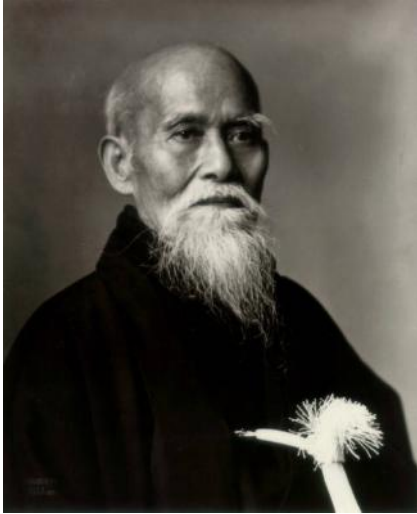
Hacienda La Puente Aikikai
Hacienda Heights, California
Chief Instructor: Tom Williams

Arizona

Aikido Renbukai of Arizona
Surprise, Arizona
Chief Instructor: Michael Van Ruth

Visit us on the Web at www.aikidocenterla.com





Aikido Celebration 2011 is an organization composed of Aikido dojos and students throughout the state of Hawaii and the mainland USA dedicated to the public celebration of the 50th anniversary of the first and only visit made to Hawaii by Morihei Ueshiba Sensei, the Founder of Aikido. A commemorative seminar and banquet with Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba and Waka Sensei Mitsuteru Ueshiba will be held President's Day weekend: February 18-21, 2011.

In addition to classes taught by Doshu and Waka Sensei, Seijuro Masuda Sensei, 8th Dan from the Aikikai Hombu Dojo, and Yoshimitsu Yamada Sensei, 8th Dan from the New York Aikikai, will be special guest instructors at this event.

The seminar will take place at McKinley High School where O Sensei gave a demonstration in 1961.

Current Schedule (subject to change):

Friday February 18th:

- Evening rededication ceremony of Honolulu Aiki Dojo

Saturday February 19th:

- 8:30 AM: Group Photo
- 9:00 - 10:00 AM: Doshu
- 10:15 -11:15 AM: Waka Sensei
- 1:15-2:15 PM: Masuda Shihan
- 2:30-3:30 PM: Masuda Shihan

Sunday February 20th:

- 9:00 - 10:00 AM: Doshu
- 10:15 -11:15 AM: Waka Sensei
- 1:15-2:15 PM: Yamada Shihan
- 2:30-3:30 PM: Yamada Shihan
- 6:30 PM: Banquet at Japanese Cultural Center

Monday February 21st:

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



Registration is currently under way.

Visit their website for more information, registration forms, and payment details.

www.Aikidohawaii2011.org

Better Than Different*by Reverend Kensho Furuya*

Sometimes, the Aikido instructor wants to innovate and experiment in class, try new things, have fun, do something different or exotic, whatever. Perhaps I am too strict or too narrow-minded because I concentrate so much on the basics and teach only fundamental techniques which students must practice over and over again. I am willing to try something different myself, if I see that it may be worthwhile, but generally I do not experiment on my students.

Time is too valuable and, as it is, we have not enough time for everyone to master the basics. Sometimes, even I feel a need to do something new and creative but, if I concentrate and think about it carefully, I realize that, more often than not, only my distracted mind produced the urge, nothing more.

Before class, I would like to advise my instructors to calm themselves for a minute or two before O Sensei's photo and focus their minds on what they plan to do or, at the very least, draw up their spiritual determination to teach a good class. For this reason, I myself hate to be distracted right before class.

*The kanji for "tiger"*

Just before a battle, samurai would draw nine lines in the air known as a *kuji* to draw up their spiritual power and focus their minds. Just before the performance, a kabuki actor would draw the character for *tiger* with his finger on his hand and then "swallow" it. This act supposedly gave him the power of a tiger to give a good performance. In ancient times, we were very concerned about our mental or spiritual state before undertaking any task. Today, we are more informal about it; I think this is why some teachers may lack focus in their class. I shouldn't say this but I want to advise my young instructors about this matter: You are teaching Aikido techniques but, at the same time, you are also teaching correct focus and concentration. For that matter, you are also teaching things such as dignity, respect, beauty, art, wisdom. . . .

Furuya's Law: Do not teach "new" techniques; stay close to fundamentals. Rather, teach "old" techniques with "new" energy; this is the secret of a competent teacher.

Editor's Note: Sensei originally published this essay, in slightly different form, to his daily message board on April 9, 2001.



O Sensei Memorial Seminar

April 22-24, 2011



Special guest instructors from Aikikai Tanshinjuku



Kei Izawa Sensei



Mariquita Izawa Sensei

Everyone is invited to attend!

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.

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.



Iaido TRAINING SCHEDULE

TRADITIONAL JAPANESE IAIDO SWORDSMANSHIP

Saturdays

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

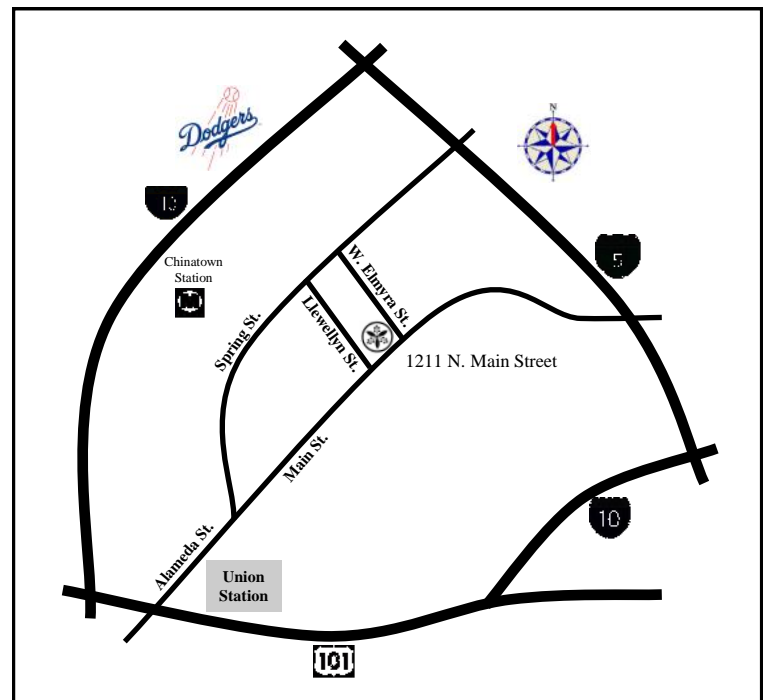
Sundays

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 Fundamentals classes. Please come early.