

Aikido Center of Los Angeles, LLC, 1211 N. Main Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012, Tel: (323) 225-1424 www.aikidocenterla.com



# 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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The candidates (from right: Lucas Plouviez, Leonard Manoukian, and Mark Ehrlich) face the examiners at the start of last month's shodan test.

### Upcoming Events

**October 9th:**  
JANM Demonstration

**October 30th:**  
Instructor's Intensive

**October 31st:**  
Children's Class Halloween Party

**November 25-26th:**  
Dojo Closed: Thanksgiving

**November 27th:**  
Instructor's Intensive

**December 4th:**  
Dojo Christmas Party

**December 11th:**  
End of Year Clean-up

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

So, we all passed our test last month; now the real training begins. On behalf of all the candidates, many thanks to Ito Sensei, the examiners, and observers for your support and candid feedback. You help us improve, every day. As for Jason Markowski, words cannot adequately express all he did to help us achieve this milestone. He has demonstrated a selflessness and sense of duty that I believe we all will see more of in the future.

This month, we focus on the responsibility that comes with wearing the black belt, or indeed with pursuing any course of study seriously, martial or otherwise. Ito Sensei muses on how the wee specks of our daily efforts can, if we give enough effort, accumulate over time to become a mountain of achievement. Myers Sensei reflects on the

importance of the fleeting opportunity training offers: whether in the way of the sword or the way of tea, he shows us that each moment of practice is precious and will never happen again, so we must make the most of the time we're given to hone our skills as well as our character. Mike Van Ruth, Chief Instructor of one of our branch dojos, offers his congratulations to the candidates of the shodan test and reminds us of its significance. And our resident epicurean Maria Murakawa rounds out this issue with a review of a great place to get warm comfort food now that the days have become shorter, cooler, and grayer. Fall has arrived to Southern California at last, so we'll need to eat more to keep up our strength for training! *Itadakimasu!*

As always, I invite our students to submit letters, articles, or photos on any Aikido- or Iaido-related subject. We'll look to see your contributions (and holiday greetings) in an upcoming issue soon. See you on the mat!

## Becoming Mountains

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

I would like to congratulate all the students who successfully passed their black belt examination last month. I know that this past year's preparation seemed like a long and arduous road. I hope that you all know that the entire test preparation process, which culminated with the examination, was designed to push you past your comfort zone and toward your utmost potential. I am proud of all of you. I hope you never forget the camaraderie and friendships forged through the testing process or what you learned about yourselves along the way. Great job!

塵も積もれば山となる

*Chiri mo tsumoreba yama to naru.*

(Even specks of dust piled up can become a mountain.)

I am fond of this particular proverb because it champions the ideal that I strive for in my own life and the one that I desire my students to exemplify as well. Most of us find ourselves feeling clumsy and uncoordinated when we launch into any new venture. When we begin, our confidence is low and our skills seem poor, but somehow with perseverance we press on and reach some level of expertise. To finish something takes a special skill, which is not always innate. Some call the desire to see things through to their end *courage, heart, or character*; for me, having the character not only to challenge something but to finish it was a learned trait.



I grew up uncoordinated and physically ungifted. I was all thumbs, had two left feet, and not a speck of athletic ability. Aikido wasn't the first physical endeavor that I tried; I attempted the Boy Scouts, soccer, Karate, and Kendo. They all ended the same way: I'd quit because I found each pursuit too hard. When I came to Aikido, I was overweight and uncoordinated. After the first couple of weeks and numerous classes, I was embarrassed because I still couldn't roll and I didn't know my left from my right. I felt truly hopeless and this feeling was compounded when the black belt that was assigned to teach me beat me up when he got frustrated. I can remember going home and telling my friend that I would only stay for six months so that when I quit I could make up some lie about it not being for me.

Three years later, nobody was more surprised than me when Sensei added my name to the list of black belt candidates for the next year. I remember getting instantly scared and embarrassed when people started telling me about how much they had to prepare and the horror stories about their black belt tests. My mind instantly went back to the prior year, when Sensei failed two students because of poor performance who I thought were much better than me. I had never accomplished anything prior to that time and I still believed that I was too physically awkward ever to deserve a black belt, let alone pass the examination in front of Sensei. It was hard enough making it to the black belt candidate list, which was by no means the same list to take the test, let alone to pass it.

Sensei was notorious for taking people's names off the list that he felt were not working hard enough to prepare for the test. Over the years many names made the candidates list only to disappear from the test list, and the people who went with those names would often disappear from the dojo as well.

It was a cold, crisp morning when I woke up early the next day after seeing my name on the black belt candidate list and somehow, overnight, my apprehension had turned into resolve. I made a pact with myself to work harder than I had ever done before and to make the test the first thing I would ever accomplish. In those days the test prep process solely involved the candidate and his or her *uke*. There weren't any special classes, seminars, or short cuts; Sensei forbade them. I only knew the names of the techniques because I had to stand in for someone who needed an *uke* for a black belt test six months earlier. The only help candidates could receive was before or after class when a black belt was available to give pointers on their technique, but there were no special considerations. The only time we had was before and after class, and we had to train every day. If Sensei or the other black belts thought you were slacking off, your name would never make it from the candidates list to the test list.

I never worked so hard for anything in my life. I worked out every day for over one year until my body ached and bled. Preparing for the test wasn't easy, but I never once thought of quitting. I faced hurdles: my *uke* dropped out after six months because his name was taken off the candidates list, I sprained both of my thumbs along with both of my big toes, and so on. Yet I remained undeterred by any physical pain or other distraction. Passing was the only thing on my mind. The fruits of my labor paid off when I passed my shodan examination; I felt overwhelming joy when Sensei told me that it was one of the best tests he had seen in years. The testing process had taught me many things – such as hard work, determination, goal setting, and perseverance – that I would take with me and use for the rest of my life.

Years later, I went to a ropes obstacle course with some people in my graduate school class. During that experience, I realized the significance of preparing myself for my shodan test those many years ago. The activities at the ropes course play upon people's fear of heights. Many of the people in my class were marital artists and I remember not wanting to embarrass myself. I climbed up this 100-foot ladder to a small platform, and when I was about to jump off, I suddenly realized that, 10 years earlier, doing something like this would have not only have scared me to death, but would also have caused me to create some bogus excuse so that I could run away. Preparing for my black belt taught me to have the courage to face my fears, and I realized in that moment how the test had changed me. The change was my ability to face myself in the face of adversity. As I realized this and a smile came over my face, I dove backward off of the platform.

*Continued on page 4...*

## Tea Ceremony and Swordsmanship

by Gary Myers, Iaido Chief Instructor

In 1992, Sensei provided the opportunity for his students to study the tea ceremony at the dojo. I was eager to study it, since it was one of the pastimes of the samurai class. I was also in the process of starting my antique business and felt that the tea ceremony was important to learn since it encompassed many different areas of study. Within the process of making and serving tea one must also be acquainted with ceramics, metalwork, flower arranging, calligraphy, poetry, garden design, architecture, and cuisine. The one thing I didn't associate with the tea ceremony was swordsmanship. After all, it was the expected custom of the tea ceremony to leave all swords in a sword rack outside the tea hut before entering. In *Cha-no-yu* or *Chado*, class differences were suspended, and the symbol of samurai supremacy, the wearing of the swords, was suspended as well.

The development of *Chado* is similar to many cultural pursuits. Originally tea drinking was a Zen Buddhist practice that was brought over from China. The caffeine in the tea kept the monks more alert during meditation. Over time, tea drinking became an aristocratic pursuit. The famous priest Murata Shuko was the guiding influence of tea for the *shogun* Ashikaga Yoshimasa in the latter part of the 15th Century; he felt that *Cha-no-yu* should be a vehicle for spiritual enrichment rather than an extravagant display of tea ware.

Development of the tea ceremony advanced to its highest level during the 16th Century through the efforts of two prominent Sakai merchants, Takeno Joo and his student, Sen no Rikyu. These most famous tea masters believed that *Cha-no-yu* should be simplified, reduced to serving within a small hut as opposed to an opulent setting, and that indigenous ceramics should be used instead of expensive tea pieces from China. Tea would be prepared and served within the same simple and austere room. It was this simplification that attracted the samurai class, for much the same reasons that they embraced Zen Buddhism. It ushered in the *sabi* aesthetic, which became so much a part of Japanese culture.

The tea garden, which leads to the tea hut, and its "dewy" path, the *roji*, were all a part of the transcendent experience, designed to remove the tea guests from the everyday cares of the world so that they could experience the purity and simplicity of tea. Along the way, the guests are exposed to the calligraphy principle of *shin-gyo-so*, from formal to semiformal to informal, so that their transition was easier from structured society to the idealized classlessness of the tea ceremony. Of course, humans can't help being human, and often the tea ceremony was used as a pretext for political machinations, and strategy talks by samurai lords. A poem by Rikyu seems to bemoan this situation:

While the *roji* is meant to be a passageway  
 Altogether outside this earthly life  
 How is it that people only contrive  
 To besprinkle it with the dust of the mind?

So, what connections can be made between the tea ceremony and swordsmanship, other than the samurai pursuit of both arts? Concepts shared by both offer linkages: like the transitions for the tea garden and tea hut, the dojo is the place that transcends the outside world; it is the place to concentrate and learn. We leave the outside world behind in the dojo, and here, unlike in the tea hut, we can bring the swords inside. The dojo and its furnishings are there to place us in another plane of consciousness, to make us more keenly aware. Of course, it's human nature that the more exposure we get to something, the less we appreciate it. We take it for granted if we see the same things day after day.

Both *Chado* and *Iaido* seek simplicity. Whether we are making a sword cut or a bowl of tea, the aim is to reduce the movement down to its basic elements. Our thoughts, concepts, and interpretations tend to complicate matters by adding movements that are not necessary or productive to the process. In this way tea and sword are both done in the most natural and simplest way.

As for the practice of *Chado* and *Iaido*, the elements that make up the tea ceremony and the *kata* have their own timing and space. During the tea ceremony, the lid of the *mizusashi* (fresh water container) is removed and propped up against the side of the container. This is not as easy as it sounds, because most such containers are cylindrical and the lid rests on one point of the curved surface. In order to ensure that the lid doesn't fall or roll away, one has to make sure it is in place and balanced before one lets go of the lid. A practiced hand gets a feel for the weight of the lid, the amount of curvature of the container, the texture of both, and then places the lid on the first try. We cannot hurry this movement because haste will invariably cause the lid to fall. In *Iaido* all movements have their own timing as well. If we hurry the slower movements, the quicker movements suffer. The components that make up how well we do *Iaido* are also the same as *Chado*: manners, etiquette and attitude, which are called *reigi*; technique, or *wazamae*; and State of Mind, which pertains to unity of mind, body, and implement(s). These are all qualities that tea or sword teachers look for in their students as they evaluate their progress. Whether drawing a sword and cutting or folding a *fukusa* (napkin) all these qualities are important and need to appear within the techniques.

There is an old poem that basically says, "We may never meet again so if I can serve you the best cup of tea I can, I will live with no regrets." The last point is that in serving tea, sword cutting, or any endeavor, we should make it the best it can be since we should view every human encounter as a single occasion. In *Chado*, the aim is to make the tea guests feel as welcome and accommodated as possible. In the *tokonoma* area of the tea hut, there is usually hung a scroll appropriate for the occasion. It may have a particular significance to the guest of honor or it seems fitting for the season and occasion. The host's choice of the scroll is the act of showing the guests that this is truly a single occasion, even before serving them. Swordsmanship has that same feeling in that each encounter and moment of time is precious; it is an opportunity for us to do our best and we should not lose it.



### Our Neighbors, Our Food

by Maria Murakawa, Aikido 2nd Dan

#### Honda Ya: Pub Food That Will Bring You Back

If you ever wanted to try Japanese pub food, dubbed *izakaya* in Japan, Honda Ya is a good place to acquaint yourself with this homespun and satisfying cuisine. Located on the top floor of the Little Tokyo Shopping Center, the restaurant's interior decor is rustic Japanese, from the *tatami* room (where, if you are so inclined, you can sit cross-legged or in *seiza* to eat old-school style) to the a large communal table boasting an antique fire pit as a centerpiece.

You can also sit at the bar and watch the *kushiyaki* (tasty tidbits of all kinds of meat and vegetables grilled on bamboo skewers) being made behind a glass enclosure by a two-man crew. These men approach their work seriously: at the exactly right moment, they deftly turn each tiny skewer, some of which may be chicken (thigh, tongue, gizzard), lamb, *wagyu* beef, or pork belly, with accents of asparagus and quail eggs. What may be the best choice you can make out of this *kushiyaki* selection is the *tsukune*. They come three to a stick – small, delicate balls of ground chicken all engorged, juicy, and hot from the grill, they sport just the right char for that smoky flavor, lightly glazed with teriyaki sauce.

Besides skewers, *izakayas* serve a vast array of small plates, meant to accompany drinks and to share among friends. But at Honda Ya the food is definitely what you come for. They offer



#### Honda Ya

Little Tokyo Shopping Center  
333 S. Alameda (at 3rd St.)

Ste. 314

Los Angeles, CA 90013  
(213) 625-1184

Parking is validated

freshly made and refreshing *tofu*, with the delicate texture of custard, and so good you may never want to go back to the packaged variety. The *kalbi* (beef short ribs) quickly becomes addicting, every fiber of the meat enrobed with the sweet and salty marinade reminiscent of Korean barbeque but with a more refined edge in its savory accent.

They also feature *yaki-udon*, or grilled *udon* noodles. Honda Ya's version is reminiscent of Japanese street food, which typically gets grilled on a *teppan* (iron griddle) in little storefronts, and provides sustenance to the masses. The noodles, like most of the rest of the menu, come perfectly charred in all the right places, happily mingling with curled bits of pork and green onion; the sauce is a sweet and tangy glaze of Worcestershire sauce, the Western accent to Japanese food. A squeeze of mayonnaise and a sprinkling of *katsuobushi* (shaved dried fish) tops off this heavenly mound like snow drifts atop Mt. Fuji. (Ours came on a *teppan* plate and looked so irresistible we attacked it as soon as it arrived on the table, so sorry no pictures!) You're going to have to go there and taste it to believe it.

Another must-try is *agedashi mochi*, basically three round *mochi* balls deep fried in batter and covered in *dashi* broth: puffy and round, soft and crispy at the same time, the *umami* flavor bursts in your mouth. Round out the meal with their honey sweet potato: two compact Japanese yams wrapped in foil contain a potato so moist, sweet, and tender you almost don't need the butter which comes with the dish. (Well, almost!) Honda Ya begs repeat visits – coming back again and again seems the only way to try everything from their vast menu, the only way to experience a different type of Japanese food in Little Tokyo.

#### Congratulations!

by Mike Van Ruth, Chief Instructor, Aikido Renbukai

I would like to congratulate personally Mark Ehrlich, Leonard Manoukian, and Lucas Plouviez on their promotion to shodan. I know you all put in many months of hard work in preparation for the test, and I commend your dedication and effort. This achievement stands as a milestone in your journey of learning, but it is only the beginning. I know for myself, I never felt I deserved it, but rather felt driven to strive to become worthy of the honor. Keep the right attitude and you will all do great things. Keep up the hard work.

I would also like to thank Jason Markowski for helping with those months of preparation and the test itself by taking *ukemi*. With having three black belt candidates, someone had to bridge the gap; Jason did so, and much more. Many thanks for a job well done.

Congratulations, gentlemen!

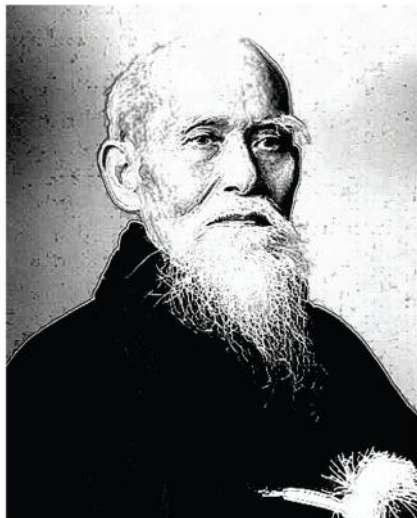
#### Becoming Mountains *continued from page 2...*

The black belt test has always been touted as transforming people's lives and designed to build character. The test itself should be easy, but the prep work is supposed to be hard, and for each person it becomes difficult in different ways. I guess this process epitomizes one of Sensei's favorite old saws, *Cry in the dojo, laugh on the battlefield*. I now realize that no matter who we are, hard work makes anything attainable, and facing our fears is the only way we can grow. If we work hard even a speck of dust can become a mountain; if we face ourselves, even the most ungifted among us can become a black belt. Hopefully, the new black belts will use what they learned in preparing themselves for their black belt examinations to propel themselves forward in other parts of their lives and build mountains. However, this mountain is not created as a way to look down upon others, but built as a pillar to show others the way. Thank you to our newest black belts for allowing yourselves to become mountains.



### Shodan Test September 25, 2010





## AIKIDO 2011 Celebration

The 50th Anniversary of OSensei's visit to Hawaii

Aikido Celebration 2011 is a public commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the first and only visit made to Hawaii by the founder of Aikido, OSensei Morihei Ueshiba. A commemorative seminar and banquet with Sandai Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba, the grandson of Aikido founder Morihei Ueshiba, will be held in Hawaii.

**February 18th -21st, 2011**

Aikido Celebration 2011 is the collaborative effort of more than 20 Aikido dojo throughout the state of Hawaii.. Would you or your organization like to participate in the commemoration of the Founder's visit to the United States?

We invite and appreciate the support of individuals and groups from both inside and outside Hawaii. Please join us.

[www.aikidohawaii2011.org](http://www.aikidohawaii2011.org)

### Current Schedule (subject to change):

**Friday February 18th:** Evening rededication ceremony of Honolulu Aiki Dojo

**Saturday February 19th:** 4 classes (morning and afternoon)

**Sunday February 20th:** 4 classes (morning and afternoon)

**Sunday February 20th:** Banquet (evening)

**Monday February 21st:** 1 morning class with Doshu followed by demonstration

*Registration is currently under way. Please sign up and support our friends in Hawaii. Visit their website for more information, registration forms, and payment details.*



### 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](mailto:info@aikidocenterla.com)

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## 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

**Advancement Means Commitment***by Reverend Kensho Furuya*

Many black belts think that receiving their first black belt is an honor reserved for themselves alone but this is mistaken. When a student in a dojo receives her black belt or *dan* promotion, it is an honor for the whole dojo. What this means is that she did not receive the black belt or promotion entirely on her own merits; she had quite a bit of help from her teacher, fellow students (even beginning students), dojo, etc. Everyone contributed to her growth and experience in which she is finally recognized. The honor, being communal in this way, gets shared by everyone, so the new shodan will likely feel a little humble and modest that although everyone helped her to receive her promotion, only she is rewarded on this particular occasion.

When someone receives such a promotion, it is not really a reward; it is only a step or rung on a very tall ladder, and there are many more steps ahead and much more time and practice await. If anything, the promotion becomes a sign of trust and an acknowledgment that you are preparing yourself for the long journey ahead. Some students think that a black belt or promotion is the end in itself. This idea is entirely mistaken and merely a selfish and lazy excuse which shows that the person did not deserve

the promotion in the very first place. It is always very sad when this happens. Many times, a teacher presents a promotion as a sign of trust and encouragement to throw yourself further into your Aikido training. Obviously, it wasn't presented so you can gloat and be arrogant! When a student is promoted and immediately becomes proud and thinks he knows everything, the teacher only thinks, "What a bad mistake I made!"

Today, I think it is easy to get a black belt. But if you don't try hard for it and if you don't use it properly, what good is it? If

*"When you receive a rank or promotion, you can certainly feel proud of yourself, but then you must throw yourself into your training more."*

you do not wear it with honor, what could it possibly mean then? If you abuse it by becoming too proud and arrogant, what kind of shame have you brought upon yourself? When you receive a rank or promotion, you can certainly feel proud of yourself, but then you must throw yourself into your training more. It is an encouragement and sign that you are recognized to go further and further in your training. When I see a student receive his black belt, I am so happy and proud; but when I see a student take advantage of it, abuse it, and also take advantage of everyone's trust and confidence, I am very sad.

Sometimes we only think of ourselves, much to everyone else's shame. Likewise, in the long run, we only shame ourselves, too. It is a great responsibility to wear an Aikido black belt because it means that you are officially in O'Sensei's great family of students which contains many great and wonderful people. Of course, how can you be anything but humble and modest? One naturally feels humility when she receives a real honor. When one becomes arrogant and disrespectful, it only means she wasn't deserving of everyone's trust, good wishes, encouragement, and respect. I am happy to present such a promotion and I am happy to see the student happy. But all of this must continue with a good result to encourage the student's training and development into a good Aikidoist. The belt without the teacher's blessing and approval is only, after all, just a belt colored black.

True happiness only comes when you sacrifice yourself for others or do something for others without thought of reward. When you think that doing for others will only cause yourself loss or disadvantage or you think that you should only think about yourself, it only means that you have forgotten God or the Buddha.

*Editor's Note: Sensei originally published this article, in slightly different form, to his Daily Message board on April 22, 2002.*

**AIKIDO CENTER OF LOS ANGELES AFFILIATED DOJOS****INTERNATIONAL****Spain****Aikido Kodokai**

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**Arizona****Aikido Renbukai of Arizona**

Surprise, Arizona

Chief Instructor: Michael Van Ruth



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



# 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.\*

\* 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

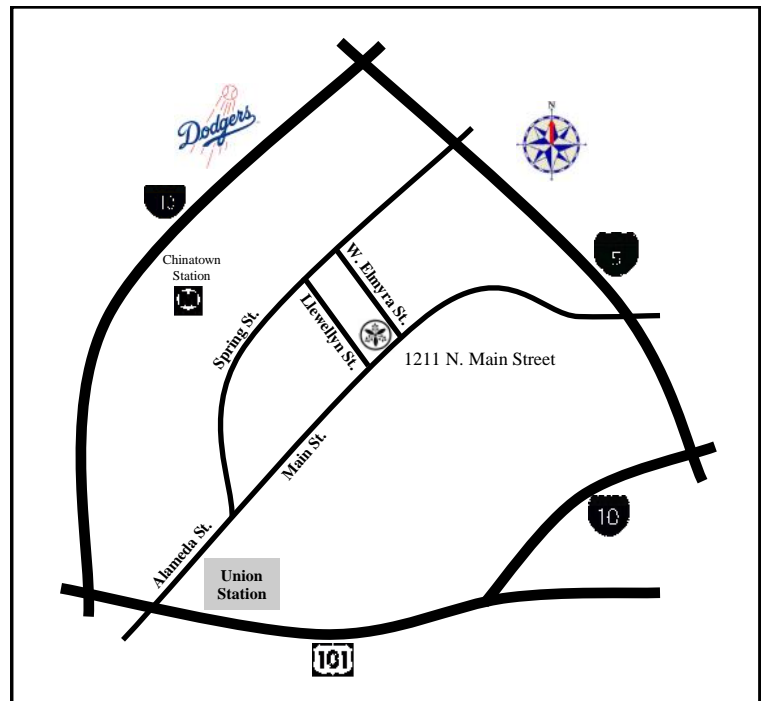
**Sundays**

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.



*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 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.



**Finding Our Dojo**

We are located at

1211 N. Main Street

Los Angeles, CA 90012

Telephone: (323) 225-1424

E-mail: [info@aikidocenterla.com](mailto: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.*