

The Aikido Center of Los Angeles



道の為、
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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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Letter From the Editor

by Mark Ehrlich
Editor, The Aiki Dojo

I hope this newsletter reaches our readers while they enjoy the hazy, lazy days of summer. We've had lots of warm, dry weather, by turns starting with overcast mornings as our so-called "June Gloom" begins a month late, switching over to hot, bright, skies, pale blue and flat as a griddle.

This summer will see ACLA demonstrate once again during Little

Tokyo's 2014 Nisei Week festivities, and the dojo has begun to hum at a higher pitch as our newer students find partners and practice routines, nervous about this rite of passage they've yet to experience and, understandably, find a bit daunting. I like this spike in energy: people's awareness broadens, deepens; they come to more classes and I can see the resolve on their faces as they doggedly try to do better today than yesterday. I think Sensei would say, "If only they showed this much discipline and effort all the time!" As you can see in the photo above, Sensei felt demonstrations played an important role in training. Doing them brought ACLA to the attention of the broader community, exposed all kinds of people to Aikido and Iaido as we

practice it here, and also gave our students invaluable training in how to manage time (each pair typically takes less than 2 minutes), perform under pressure, and release stress while sharpening focus. I believe I've heard an old chestnut among Aikido teachers along the lines of, "You can always tell when someone has studied sword," by the way they



perform techniques. Similarly, I believe you can always tell when someone has experienced performing demonstrations: they have a certain calm, smoothness, and pacing that allows their training partners (whether

to perform at their best. I hope to see you all practicing hard and preparing to demonstrate. Note that we also need support staff on hand who will not demonstrate, but help set up and take down mats, distribute flyers, and the like. Thanks for helping out.

This issue, we consider teaching and teachers. Watanabe Sensei examines how traditional teaching can work and why, Ito Sensei proposes a way forward to enable us to benefit from our practice by preparing ourselves with the right mindset, and as he tends to do, Sensei revisits us from the archives to correct misconceptions surrounding form. We also pay homage to a dear departed friend. Take care until next time. I'll see you on the mat!

Upcoming Events

July 4th
Dojo Closed
Independence Day

July 26th
Instructor's intensive

August 9th/10th
Nisei Week demonstration

August 30th
Instructor's intensive

September 1st
Dojo Closed
Labor Day

September 27th
Instructor's intensive

The Way Out

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

“Fighting is in our DNA” is a popular expression that has made the rounds in the professional fighting world today. I find it interesting but a bit off-base. Actually, it is not that fighting is in our DNA so much as survival is in our DNA. Survival happens when we exercise our ability to adapt and manipulate our surroundings in order to continue to live. From prehistoric times through today, human beings have never been the most physically dominant, but we have excelled in our readiness and ability to think. The two things that most distinguish us from beasts are our opposable thumbs and our ability to think critically and introspectively.

Some think that survival primarily involves fighting. This notion most likely comes from an aspect of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, where he offers the hypothesis that only the strong survive, yet our parroting the phrase “survival of the fittest” actually misrepresents the real thrust of Darwin’s work. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin only mentions the “survival of the fittest” twice but wrote about the concept of love nearly 100 times. As we grow and mature, we begin to see that surviving involves more cooperation and harmony than taking and fighting. In the past our very first experience in the world used to be when the doctor spanked us to get us to cry and, therefore, our first experience came in the form of fear and violence. It makes me wonder if violence begetting violence stems from our first lesson about life. Today, doctors clear the nose and mouth and wait for the babies to cry. Waiting and not forcing babies to cry means that their life begins with harmony and non-violence and thus their first lesson addresses harmony. No matter how we came into this world, our second and subsequent experiences saw us receiving our families’ nurturing – we couldn’t survive without it. In almost all cases, then, our survival had love, and not fighting, as its basis. Where exactly does fighting factor into nurturing? It doesn’t. When someone gives us food or clean clothes, do we punch them in the face? Only if we are spoiled or have some mental disorder. So, then, where does fighting come from?

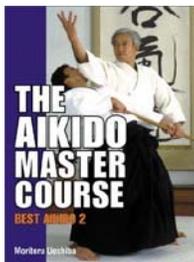
Figuratively speaking, we can find the urge to fight in the DNA of

our ego. Our ego is designed to protect us and keep us safe, but its actions come from a place of fear and from a place of scarcity. We fight to protect ourselves from a threat, but as we grow and mature we realize that there are no real threats, only perceived ones. Epicurus said, “It’s not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters.” We cannot choose the things that happen to us nor can we change them, but what we can control is how we internalize them. Bad things don’t cause unhappiness; we only need to look at people living with illnesses to see that many of them enjoy happy lives despite their trying circumstances. How do they do this? They are able to do this by choosing how to live and how to see the world rather than trying to control what happens to them. Fighting is not harmony, and harmony is not fighting. Harmony concerns itself with love and abundance, which possibly explains why O Sensei based his philosophy of Aikido and life on nothing else but love.

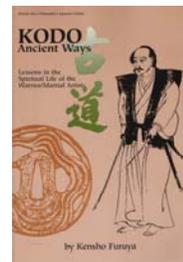
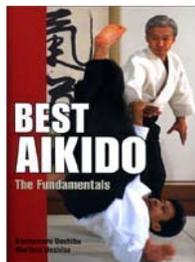


Sensei’s teacher Bishop Kenko Yamashita said, “Nothing goes the way you want it.” Things happen good and bad, but we get to choose how we react to them. Modern psychology dictates that the three reactions to stress are fight, flight, or freeze, but through Aikido we have a fourth option. In Aikido we don’t fight, we don’t run, and we don’t freeze: we harmonize with our attacker. Aligning with our opponent allows us to see something different. If we can see something different then we can react differently. But, who exactly is this opponent with whom we must harmonize? The only true opponent that exists is our own self. We are our own worst enemies and we alone have the power to sabotage our own happiness. The way out begins with how we see the world. The world is not our enemy and in fact it exists to serve us, not fight with us. We don’t make our own clothes and grow our own food, right? Therefore, we only exist due to the efforts of others who are there nurturing us. Prior to his death, Sensei once commented on one of his closest assistants who he thought was inconsiderate and lacked this idea of nurturing, “He gets everything handed to him on a silver platter – yet he has no awareness that he must, in turn, serve others with this same silver platter.” If we can carry a plate, then life looks like a buffet where everything and everyone can nurture us. If we carry a hammer then everything looks like a nail that needs pounding. The choice is ours.

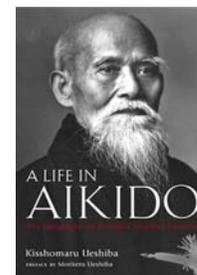
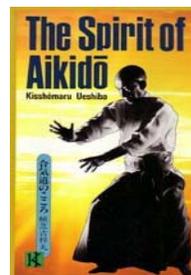
Recommended Readings:



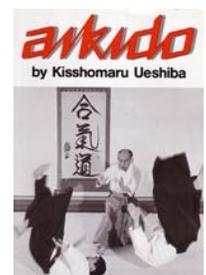
by Ueshiba Moriteru



by Kensho Furuya



by Ueshiba Kisshomaru



Black & White

by Ken Watanabe, Iaido Chief Instructor

Almost every martial arts student has heard this story: the interview between the new student and the master. During the interview, the master tells the new student, "I am the most selfish person in the world." Then, the master will show a sheet of paper to the new student and say, "If this sheet of paper is black, then it is black; if I say it's white, then it is white!"

My teacher, Reverend Kensho Furuya, was familiar with this story, but when he became a student and a Zen priest under the tutelage of his teacher, Bishop Kenko Yamashita, he experienced that story firsthand. When the bishop interviewed Sensei, he said in the same fashion, saying almost word for word, "I am the most selfish person in the world. If I say this paper is black, then it is black; if I say this paper is white, then it is white!"



Hearing these words from the bishop was quite different from reading about it; on the contrary, it was quite shocking. When you hear the teacher say it to you with sincerity and conviction, it's a completely different experience.

We would probably dismiss the mindset of that saying as old-fashioned and archaic. On the surface, a listener might think that this seems too extreme, bordering on cult-like: whatever this so-called "sensei" says to you sounds irrefutable, like an unquestionable law from a god. Nowadays, I would think most modern people with their sense of self-entitlement and inflated self-esteem would not be able to accept this. "I don't have to listen to anybody!" A feudalistic or caste-like society feels too confining for a modern person accustomed to "freedom" and "independence".

Besides, who needs to follow a teacher when everything we need lies just a mouse click away on YouTube, Google, or Wikipedia? Information is everywhere, right at our fingertips, mere keystrokes away. Besides, we all know anything written on the Internet is true, right?

In this wired, online world, it's easy to think, "I have everything; I know everything." Even I love how easy it is to go online, collecting information on whatever I want. A student might think, "Why do I need to be oppressed by this "master" and listen to everything this person says when I could just get the information online? I know the best; I don't need anyone to tell me how to do anything."

It's easy to misunderstand the student-teacher interview story as the establishment of a pecking order or hierarchy. To think that it merely demands, "You're going to listen to what I say. And you're going to LIKE it!" is an overly simplistic interpreta-

tion. When the teacher tells the student, "I am the most selfish person in the world. If a paper is white then it's white, and if I say it black then it's black," the student is not being oppressed. It is the student's ego that causes this feeling – ego that is not needed for training.

The teacher is not, although it might seem like it, asking for mindless obedience from students; an automaton is the last thing a teacher needs. What the teacher needs is trust from students. In

the course of training, students will hear the teacher say things that seem completely unreasonable and often, ridiculous and impossible to understand. Instead of trying to figure out or interpret the instruction, students must trust in their teacher, so much so that truly, if the teacher says that a white sheet of paper is black then it is truly black. Students may even hate their teacher, as good teachers are not known for their wonderful personalities, yet good students still follow the teachings

because they trust the teacher. Many times, the teacher will say something that is difficult to understand at the time only to become clear to students years later.

Likewise, the teacher must trust that students can receive and accept the teaching no matter how harsh or merciless it might seem. The teacher must trust that students are mature enough to handle the physical, mental, and spiritual hardships in their training. Nowadays, it's way too easy for students to hop from school to school, or style to style, running away when the training gets too hard, things don't go their way, or when they get their feelings hurt. Many times the teacher will seem like the most selfish person in the world. Students will think that their best interests are farthest from their teacher's mind. The teacher must trust that students will, indeed, cut off their heads at the door and train without their ego getting in the way.

The initial interview between teacher and student is only one part of a larger picture showing the importance of the student-teacher relationship. An art like swordsmanship or Aikido requires the teachings to be passed from person to person, known as heart to heart transmission. The art is not passed along merely to transfer information; anyone can learn how to do a technique, get instructions how to make a bomb, or download the recipe to poison gas. There are many stories in the news about shooters who, without years of rigorous training or attaining mastery in the fighting arts, go into public places and kill lots of people.

Continued on page 6...



Isamu Ichizuka

December 26, 1937 – July 2, 2014



David Ito with Ichizuka Sensei at Hombu Dojo in 1995



Members of ACLA and Omiya Dojo have visited each other several times over the years.



In Memoriam: Ichizuka Isamu Sensei

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

On July 3, 2014, Ichizuka Isamu Sensei, the chief instructor of Omiya Dojo in Saitama, Japan, passed away. He was 76 years old.

I first met Ichizuka Sensei and some of his students nearly two decades ago when he headed a group that came to LA to sight-see and participate in a *gasshuku* (joint dojo training) with ACLA. Their group numbered over 20 people! His Aikido technique always felt smooth and powerful, and he carried himself with a sense of character in a way that inspired you to stand a little taller when you were with him. Yet he never seemed overbearing or cold. I found him very approachable and I always admired how much he and his wife, Toshie, smiled and laughed. Over the years he visited ACLA many times and I often visited Omiya Dojo as well.

Ichizuka Sensei would often send me letters encouraging me to train hard, be a good student, and persevere. I think he felt sorry for me because I was always getting into trouble with Sensei. I always greatly respected Ichizuka Sensei because he seemed the type of teacher, and had the type of school, I hoped to be and to have in the future. From the outside looking in, he seemed like someone who advocated a life lived through balance, where the students didn't feel compelled to place training above all else, but rather chose to weave their Aikido practice into the fabric of their lives. To me, it seemed that training played an important part of, but did not dominate, their lives, which in turn seems like a happier and healthier way to approach training. I try to advocate this approach to my own students today.

At the end of his first visit to ACLA, Ichizuka Sensei gave me his *zori* before he left. I didn't understand his gesture at the time, and his *zori* were too small to fit my feet. Days later I asked Sensei about it and he told me that it was a great honor to have a teacher give a student his *zori*. I still didn't quite get it back then, but today I do. In a sense he meant, "I have broken these sandals in for you, please take it the rest of the way." It was a symbolic gesture as well as a sign of affection. I only hope today that I can fill those shoes and become a teacher like Ichizuka Sensei.



Ichizuka Sensei and members of Omiya Dojo demonstrated for Children's Day during a visit to ACLA.



David Ito demonstrated at the All Japan Aikido Demonstration with Omiya Dojo in 1995.



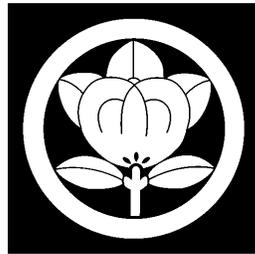


Black & White *continued from page 3...*

Training in traditional martial arts is not for learning how to hurt people, collecting lots of different techniques, or creating strong fighters. That is a superficial way of viewing training. The training students receive under a good teacher enables them to discover what it means to be human, and hopefully, to pass the art down to future generations of practitioners. Traditional training, as unreasonable as it may seem, allows students to go beyond the smaller, ego-driven self and find their larger self, and this starts with finding a good teacher.

In the past, finding a good teacher wasn't as simple as opening our MacBook and doing a five-mile radius Google search in our neighborhood. Today, it's easy for people to go online to find the dojo with the best deal, the most convenient training schedule, or the most trophies in the display window, treating the search for a good school or a good teacher like looking for a deal on a restaurant or a dry cleaner's.

Finding a good teacher – someone whom we trust enough to believe that sheet of white paper is black – can make or break our practice; it means the difference between mastery or a lot of wasted time. For students, finding and recognizing a good teacher in our chosen art is the first hurdle to training. Choosing to believe between white and black is only a start. Make sure to choose well.



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Member News

Congratulations

On Your Baby Boy!

Joshua Minha (珉緞) Sisk, born June 18th at 4:31PM KST



ACLA extends our deepest congratulations to Stan and Cheyenne Sung on the happy occasion of their wedding in Shanghai, China on June 6, 2014. Best wishes to the happy couple! (Take care, Stan; we hear Cheyenne wants to take up Aikido!)

What is Form?

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

I think the concept of “form” as it is understood in martial arts is actually more complex than what 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 any other words that connote the opposite of freedom and fluidity.

Within the dojo, there exists a prescribed method of training and many detailed rules. This type of “form” creates a context within which we refine and discipline ourselves. The concept of individual refinement and attainment of enlightenment or self-understanding is 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, I suppose, “creatively”. Generally, though, this movement, regrettably, oftentimes 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!” seem to serve as the mottoes of how many people practice. As a rule, 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 a 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 an elaborate and complex series of actions, yet you do it freely and natu-

rally 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 are happy and satisfied.

This happens in a split second, almost without a thought and we think nothing of it. Of course, as a baby, we probably spilled it many times on ourselves and our mommy, and as a very elderly person we might begin to spill it again, if our hand becomes too weak or unsteady. It comes through practice over the years as we



grew up and the tens of thousands of times we took a drink of water. As a matter of fact, our senses automatically and easily sense and differentiate between the hot cup of tea and cool glass of water and the way we pick it up changes accordingly. This, in martial arts, is real technique or form. We waste no motion or energy to pick up the glass of water to take a drink. Within the usual method we use to pick up the glass, there is continuous and constant calculation and ad-

justment 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 is in perfect harmony. This exemplifies real martial arts technique, and this is what we call “form”. And like learning to drink water from our days as a little baby, it takes many years of practice. “Form” embodies thought and action in perfect harmony. Please do not make a mistake; the “form” of training and education – a “prescribed, literate form” of discipline which we determine on a conscious level – leads to the development of the “form” of technique and 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 our hand. Please train to understand the “form” of technique more clearly in your practice.

Editor’s Note: Sensei originally published this article, in slightly different form, to his daily message board on December 11, 2000.

The Furuya Foundation and The Aikido Center of Los Angeles



The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles (ACLA) admit students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, and national or ethnic origin in administration of their educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.



Aikido TRAINING SCHEDULE

Sundays

9:00-10:00 AM Children's Class

10:15-11:15 AM Open

Mondays

6:30-7:30 AM Open

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals

6:30-7:30 PM Open

Tuesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Advanced*

Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 AM Open

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals

6:30-7:30 PM Open

7:45-8:45 PM Weapons*

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

Saturdays

9:30-10:30 AM Open

10:45-11:45 AM Advanced*

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

8:00-9:00 AM

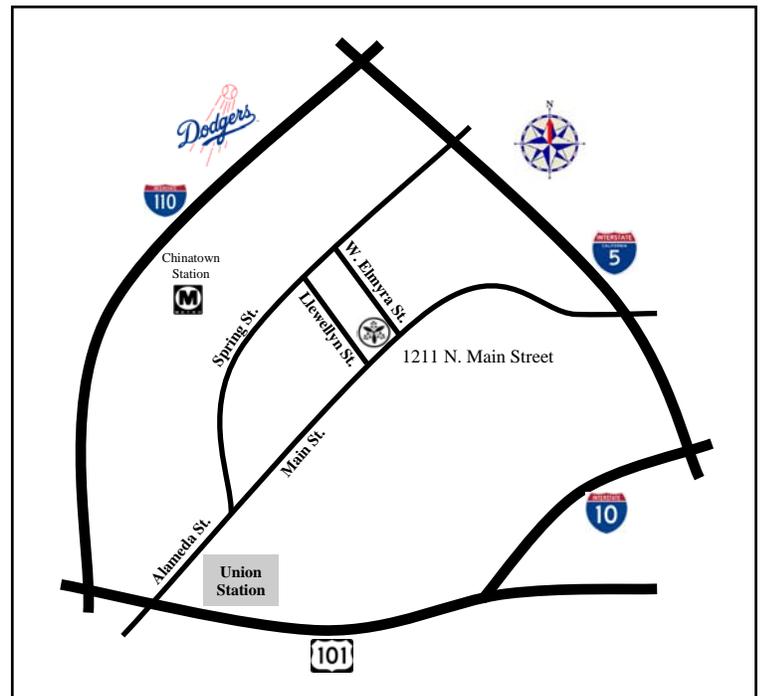
Sundays

7:45-8:45 AM

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM

No weekend classes on the last weekend of the month.



We are directly affiliated with:

AIKIDO WORLD HEADQUARTERS

公益財団法人 合気会

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.



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The Aiki Dojo
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the Aikido Center of Los Angeles

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



Finding Our Dojo



We are located at

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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.