

## Rules of the Dojo

August 31, 2016

Aikido is not a sport. It is a discipline, an educational process for training the mind, body and spirit. An Aikido dojo is not a gymnasium. It is the place where the discipline of the Way is revealed. Physical technique is not the final objective, but a tool for personal refinement and spiritual growth. The correct attitude of respect, sincerity and modesty, and the proper atmosphere are essential to the learning process. And as Aikido is a martial way, they are essential to the safety of each individual. The following rules are necessary to the maintenance of this atmosphere and vital to your study of Aikido.

This dojo follows the traditional rules of proper conduct. Its spirit comes directly from the Founder of Aikido and it is the place of the succession of his teachings. It is the responsibility of each student to act appropriately and to honor those teachings.

- Cleaning is an active prayer of thanksgiving. It is each student's responsibility to assist in cleaning the dojo and to cleanse his or her own mind and heart.
- You cannot buy technique. The monthly membership dues provide a place for training and a way in which to show gratitude for the teaching received. It is each student's responsibility to pay dues on time.
- Respect the Founder and his teachings as succeeded and handed down by Saotome Sensei. Respect the dojo, respect your training tools and respect each other.
- It is necessary to respect the way in which the instructor of the class directs the training. Receive instruction and carry out suggestions for training sincerely and to the best of your ability. There is no room for argument on the mat.
- It is the moral responsibility of each student never to use Aikido technique to harm another person or as a way to display his or her ego. It is a tool to develop a better society through the character development of the individual.
- There will be no competition or conflicts of ego on the mat. The purpose of Aikido is not to fight and defeat an enemy, but to fight and defeat your own aggressive instincts.
- The strength of Aikido is not in muscular force, but in flexibility, timing, control and modesty. Be aware of your limitations.
- Everyone has different physical abilities and reasons for study. These must be respected. True Aikido is the proper and flexible application of technique appropriate to any changing situation. It is your responsibility to cause no injury to your training partner or yourself.
- There will be no power struggles within the dojo. The dojo membership is one family and the secret of Aikido is harmony.

## Proper Dojo Etiquette

Aikido is not a religion, but the education and refinement of the spirit. You will not be asked to adhere to any religious doctrine, but only to remain spiritually open. When we bow it is not a religious performance, but a sign of respect for the same spirit of universal creative intelligence within us all.

- The opening and closing ceremony of each Aikido practice is a formal bow directed to the *shomen*, two claps, another bow to the *shomen* and a bow between the instructor and students. The bows directed to the *shomen* symbolize respect for the spirit and principles of Aikido, and gratitude to the founder for developing this system of study. The two claps symbolize unity, "*musubi*." You send out a vibration with the first clap and receive its echo with the second. The vibration you send and the echo you receive are dictated by your own spiritual beliefs and attitudes.
- The words spoken at the beginning of practice between the students and instructor are, "*Onegai shimasu*." Loosely translated it is a request which when spoken by the student means, "Please give me your instruction." When spoken by the teacher it means, "Please do what is expected of you." Or "Please receive my instruction." The words spoken by the student to the instructor at the end of practice are, "*Domo arigato gozaimashita*." "You have my respect and gratitude for what you have just done." This is the most respectful way of saying thank you.
- Upon entering and leaving the practice area of the dojo make a standing bow.
- Always bow when stepping on or off the mat in the direction of the *shomen*.
- Respect your training tools. *Dogi* should be clean and mended. Weapons should be in good condition and in their proper place when not in use.
- Never use someone else's practice *dogi* or weapons.
- A few minutes before class time you should be warmed up and formally seated in quiet meditation to rid your mind of the day's problems and prepare for study.
- It is important to be on time for practice and participate in the opening ceremony. If you are unavoidably late you should wait, formally seated beside the mat until the instructor signals his or her permission for you to join the class. Quietly perform a simple seated bow as you get on the mat.
- The only proper way to sit on the mat is in *seiza* (formal sitting position). If you have a knee injury you may sit cross-legged, but never with legs outstretched, never reclining, and never leaning against walls or posts.
- Do not leave the mat during class except in the case of injury or illness, or to re-hydrate.

- During class when the instructor demonstrates a technique for practice, sit quietly and attentively in *seiza*. After the demonstration bow to the instructor, then to a partner and immediately begin to practice.
- When the end of a technique is signaled, stop immediately, bow to your partner and quickly line up with the other students.
- Never stand around idly on the mat. You should be practicing or, if necessary, seated in *seiza* awaiting your turn.
- If it is necessary to ask a question of the instructor, you should go to him or her and bow respectfully (standing bow). Never call the instructor over to you.
- When receiving personal instruction, sit in *seiza* and watch intently. Bow formally when the instructor has finished. When another near by is being instructed you may stop your practice to watch. Sit formally and bow as before.
- Respect those more experienced. Never argue about technique.
- Respect those less experienced. Do not pressure your ideas on others.
- If you understand the movement and are working with someone who does not, you may lead that person through it. Do not attempt to verbally correct or instruct your training partner unless you are authorized to do so.
- Keep talking on the mat to an absolute minimum. Aikido is experience.
- Fingernails and toenails must be short. Feet must be clean. Shoes or sandals are never allowed on the mat.
- No eating, drinking, smoking or gum chewing on or off the mat during practice.
- No jewelry should be worn during practice, including rings and pierced earrings.
- Never drink alcoholic beverages while still wearing practice *dogi*.

You are welcome to sit and watch a class at any time, but the following rules of etiquette must be followed.

- Sit respectfully, never with legs propped up on the furniture or in a reclining position.
- Do not talk to anyone while they are on the mat and class is in progress.
- Do not talk or walk around while the instructor is demonstrating or during the opening and closing ceremony.

Although there seem to be many forms of etiquette to remember, they will come naturally as you continue to train. Please do not resent it if you are corrected on a point of etiquette for each one is important to your safety and to the learning experience.