

Etiquette

“A man is judged by how he opens a door and a woman is judged by how she shuts it”

This old Japanese saying points out that much can be determined by how we execute routine tasks. The same is true in the dojo; how you enter the space, clean the mats, even remove your sandals reveals much of your sincerity and attentiveness to training.

Arrival at the dojo

Be punctual. Enter the dojo and be on the mat at least five minutes before the class starts; meditate until the sensei (instructor) begins class. You are encouraged to come earlier, help set up and clean the mats, and then do warm-up exercises on your own.

If you are late, wait just off the mat until acknowledged by the sensei. Step onto the mat and perform a kneeling bow to the shomen (the small altar bearing the picture of O-Sensei, the Founder of Aikido). Join in warm-up exercises or, if these are over, do your own warm-up at the edge of the mat and then join the class. Occasional lateness caused by unforeseen events is acceptable, but lateness caused by poor planning or persistently arriving late indicates a lack of order in one's mind. As we are a family of aikidoka that are concerned for your well-being, please notify a sempai (senior student) if you are going to be absent or late for class.

About "rei"

Be sincere. Aikido is not a sport or an exercise; it is a means to better understand ourselves through physical interaction with others and the world around us. We are thankful for this opportunity, which we express through the concept of *rei*. For our purposes here, *rei* means demonstrating appreciation and respect through proper etiquette. *Rei* most apparently manifests itself in the dojo in the form of the bows we give during the course of practice. *Rei* is in appreciation to the dojo for a place to train, to O-Sensei for providing us with a *do* (art, path, or way) to better understand the universe through ourselves, to our sensei for leading us on our path of understanding, and to fellow aikidoka for their help along our path.

Entering the dojo

Upon entering the dojo building, do a standing bow towards the shomen by bending the body 30-45 degrees with the arms held by the side of the body. At all times, while in the dojo and not on the mat, please wear footwear of some kind, preferably something other than the shoes you wear outside. Put on your zori (sandals) or equivalent when getting changed, and leave them neatly at the side of the mat during the practice.

Stepping on and off the mat

The mat is the training surface in the dojo; you must be in the proper mindset when entering this area for training. Upon stepping on the mat, kneel down in *seiza* (sitting on the heels with

the back straight), compose yourself, and then bow to the shomen. If for any reason it is necessary to leave the mat during class, first ask permission from the sensei then leave the mat after a standing bow; if you are ending your practice, perform a kneeling bow.

Rei to O-Sensei

The spirit of the Founder is present in the dojo. In our training, we cannot practice without thanking his spirit for the gift of his art. We do a standing bow to the shomen when entering the dojo and kneeling bow to the shomen at the beginning and the end of the class. If we must correct our uniform, we turn away from the shomen to make necessary adjustments. We never point the soles of our feet directly towards the shomen as this is disrespectful.

Rei to the Sensei

After the rei to O-Sensei to open class, we do a kneeling bow to the sensei. This is repeated at the end of the class as well. At the beginning of the class it is customary to bow to the sensei and say *Onegai-shimasu* ("on-eh-gae-sheemass" - please help me in my practice); at the end of the class, one says *Domo arigato gozaimashita* ("domo-arigato goz-ae-ma-sheetah" - thank you very much for what you have done). During class, take a knee or sit in seiza when sensei is teaching unless directed otherwise, this is respectful and for your safety. When the sensei has finished; bow and return to your training. If you must ask the sensei a question, go to him/her – do not attempt to call the sensei over to you.

Rei to your partner

Failing to recognize your responsibility for your partner's safety and self-esteem violates the spirit of aikido. Your partner is not someone to compete against, but a person to train and improve with. Show respect and consideration of your fellow practitioners in every aspect of practice. Partners bow to each other when starting or finishing practicing together. Sempai are precious helpers for you. Regardless of age, sex and social status, they deserve your consideration. Listen to them sincerely and follow their directions in practice. Similarly, sempai will not take advantage of their position. They will remain humble and sincere, both in attitude and behavior, and serve as good role models.

Rei to weapons

Before and after the use of the bokken (the wooden sword), the jo (the 4-foot stick), or tanto (the wooden knife) hold the weapon at eye level with both hands, face toward O-Sensei, and do a standing bow. If you are using a bokken or tanto, point the cutting edge toward you. Throwing around, stepping on or jumping over the weapon is disrespectful. When handing a weapon to another, hold it with both hands, cutting edge toward you and bow with the weapon at eye level. When placing it on the mat, ensure the point and cutting edge are directed away from the shomen.

General manners

Practice alert. Careless practice causes accidents and makes no improvement in one's aikido. Do not waste your and your partner's time in unnecessary talk during the practice. Never sit or stand idly on the mat, have a purpose. Watch your sensei and sempai for unspoken lessons on aikido training on and off the mat. Hone your attention.

Do not hesitate to let your partner and the sensei know when you cannot continue the practice because of sickness, injuries, or genuine fatigue. When a short rest is necessary, go quietly to the corner after bowing to your partner and the sensei, sit in seiza or another alert posture, and watch the class. If you feel sick, and still want to practice, see the sensei and ask permission. It is your body, take good care of your health and prevent accidents.

Be mindful of your impact on others. Wash your keiko-gi (the uniform worn during practice) regularly; pay attention to personal hygiene and keep your toenails and fingernails short and filed; to prevent injuries to you or your partner, never wear jewelry, watches, hairclips, etc. at any time on the mat. The only exception may be wedding bands that you are unable to remove or hair bands to pull back long hair.

The dojo is a reflection of its students and is in the care of the membership. It is our responsibility and pleasure to see that the dojo is clean inside and outside at all times. This is accomplished after each practice and at the sensei's discretion. Do not wait to be directed, but show initiative and do whatever is necessary to ensure that all areas are kept clean. We only collect dues to upkeep the dojo and the organization; please pay your dues promptly.

Aikido is joyful expression of life. Learn to approach it in a joyful and positive manner.

Train, train, train; there is no other way!