

Aikido Etiquette

Arrival at the dojo

Please be punctual. Enter the dojo (the building where we practise) and be on the tatami (mat surface) at least five minutes before the class starts and meditate until the sensei (instructor) arrives. When you come earlier, do warm-up exercises and practise by yourself or with other students.

If you happen to be late, wait just off the mat until acknowledged by the instructor. Step onto the mat and perform a kneeling bow to O-Sensei (the Founder of Aikido). Join in the warming-up exercises or if these are over, do your own warm-up at the edge of the mat. As always, be aware of anyone moving or being thrown near you, and move if necessary.

Occasional lateness or lateness caused by special commitments such as one's work schedule is acceptable, but lateness caused by poor planning or lack of conscientiousness is an indication of a lack of order in one's mind, and unless corrected will hinder one's learning and progress in aikido.

About "Rei"

Aikido is more than a sport; it teaches a way of life. Because of this, aikido deserves our respect. That respect is expressed through the concept of rei, which means "appreciation and respect", and through the manner in which rei is performed. Rei literally translates to a bow given during the course of practice. Rei is done to O-Sensei, the dojo (the place of the Way), the sensei, and other practitioners. Through rei we express our appreciation and respect for life itself. Rei to the dojo

Upon entering the dojo building, do a standing bow towards the Kamiza (shrine) by bending the body 30 to 45 degrees with the arms held by the side of the body. At all times, while in the dojo when not on the tatami, footwear of some kind must be worn. Put on your zori (sandals) or equivalent when getting changed, and leave them neatly at the side of the tatami during the practice. Leaving sandals in disorder indicates disorder in one's mind.

Rei to the tatami

The tatami surface is the training surface in the dojo and as such it is important to bow there as well. Upon stepping onto the tatami, kneel down in the position known as seiza (sitting on the heels with the back straight) and bow putting both hands in front of the knees keeping the back straight. That bow is also required upon leaving the tatami. Furthermore, if for any important reason it is necessary to leave the tatami during the class, first ask permission from the sensei, then leave the tatami after completing a standing bow, if it is a temporary absence, or a kneeling bow if it is the end of your practice.

Rei to O-Sensei

The spirit of the Founder is always present in the dojo. In our aikido training, we cannot practise without thanking him for the gift of his art. We do a kneeling bow to the Kamiza at the beginning and the end of the class. If one arrives late for the class, one kneels and bows to the Kamiza upon stepping onto the mat.

Rei to the Sensei

After the rei to O-Sensei, the practitioners do a kneeling bow to the sensei. This should be repeated at the end of the class as well. At the beginning of the class it is customary to say Onegai-shimasu (Please help me in my practice) as one bows to the sensei; while at the end of the class, one says Domo arigato gozaimashita (Thank you very much).

Rei to your partner

Your partner is the mirror of yourself. Ignoring your partner's individuality and self-esteem is against the spirit of aikido. Your partner is not someone you compete against, but a person to train with and improve with. Show respect to and consideration of your fellow practitioners in every aspect of the practice.

Again, do not forget that your partner is the mirror of yourself and helping your partner is helping yourself. Partners should bow to each other when starting or finishing practising together. Senior practitioners 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. On the other hand, senior students should not take advantage of their position. They should remain humble and sincere, both in attitude and behaviour, and try to be good role models for beginners.

Rei to the weapons that are used

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 toward O-Sensei and do a standing bow. Even a piece of wood can be a great help in one's aikido training. When one practises with it, it becomes a part of one's body. Thus, throwing around, stepping on or jumping over the weapon is disrespectful.

General manners

While you practise, always be alert. Careless practice causes accidents and makes no improvement in one's aikido. Do not waste both your and your partner's time in unnecessary talk during the practice. Do not hesitate to let your partner and the sensei know when you cannot continue the practice because of sickness, injuries, or genuine tiredness. When a short rest is necessary go quietly to the corner after bowing to your partner and the sensei, and watch the class. If you feel sick, and still want to practise, see the sensei and ask permission. Since your body belongs to nobody else, take good care of your health and prevent accidents. As to hygiene, wash your keiko-gi (the uniform worn during practice) regularly. Pay close attention to personal hygiene and be sure to keep your toe and finger nails short and filed at all times. Never wear jewellery, watch, hair-slide etc at any time on the tatami. This will help prevent accidents to both yourself and your partner. The dojo, where we practise, is in the care of the membership. It is the responsibility and the pleasure of the members to see that the dojo is clean at all times. This is accomplished after each practice. Do not wait to be directed, but show initiative and do whatever is necessary to ensure that the building is clean