

South African Aikido Association's Little Book of Dojo Etiquette



合気道

Why Dojo Etiquette?

Aikido is a martial art and because of this the etiquette of the dojo is based on the militaristic traditions of Japan. The appropriate behaviour expected on the mat is there to instil respect for the **Sensei**, **other students** and, most importantly, for **yourself**. This discipline is as much a part of the training as learning the techniques of Aikido.



Entering the Dojo and Opening Class

- **Always be on time** (If you are late do not disturb the lesson. Wait patiently and quietly in **seiza** at the side of the mat, until the Sensei invites you to join).
- Try to arrive before the official training time so you can warm up or sit in meditation to prepare your mind and body for training.
- Perform a **standing bow on entry into the dojo** and **on leaving**, always facing the **kamiza** (image of O'Sensei).
- On the edge of the mat perform a **bow** towards O'Sensei. This bow may be made standing, but in more traditional settings it is preferable to bow in a **seiza** position (kneeling). The same is done on leaving the mat.
- When the Sensei arrives an official ceremony is performed:
 1. All students sit in **seiza** (peaceful kneeling – toes and feet flat on the mat). Students arrange themselves from right to left according to rank. **Highest rank to the right**.
 2. Sensei will enter the mat and then bow to the **kamiza** and invite the whole dojo to do the same.
 3. Always **bow lower** than the more senior students to your right and **stay in a bow until they rise** from their bow.
 4. Sensei will turn to face the dojo, the most senior student will then invite all students to bow to the Sensei saying: "**Sensei nirei**"
 5. As you bow to the Sensei you say: "**Onegaishimasu**" (pronounced: oh-neh-guy-she-mahs. Meaning "**please teach me**") – Class will then proceed at the Sensei's discretion
 6. The same is performed at the end of class, only when bowing at the close students say "**Domo arigatou gozaimasu**" (pronounced: domo-ah-ree-gah-toe-go-zye-mahsh-tah. Meaning "**thank you very much**")

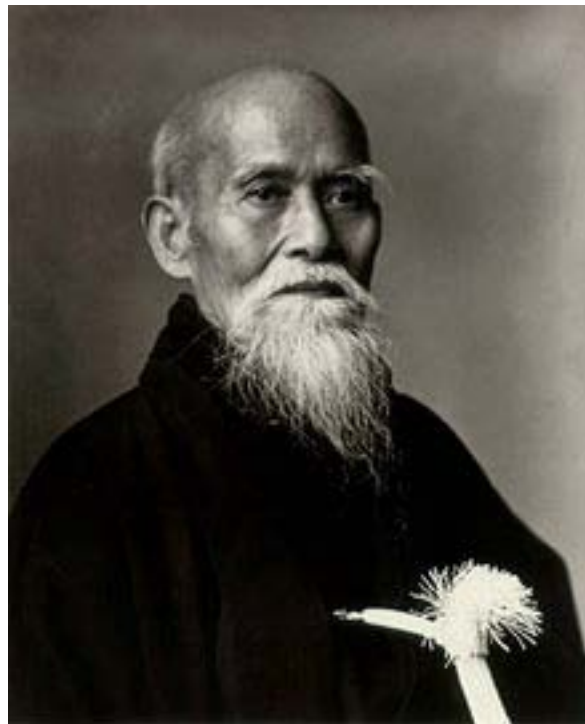
General Guidelines During a Training Session

- The teacher is addressed as "**Sensei**"
- When the **Sensei** demonstrates a technique, **sit quietly in seiza** and watch intently. After the demonstration, bow to Sensei and then to an available partner. Before practicing bow and say: "**Onegaishimasu**" to your partner.
- There is no differentiation in rank when practicing. **Hakamas** (black belts) are expected to train with junior students and vice-a-versa.
- It is traditional for the junior student to be the attacker first.
Attacker = "**Uke**".
The more senior student usually receives the attack and practices the technique first. Defender = "**Tori**"
- During class technique is normally done in **pairs with four turns each**. If there are an odd number of students in the class, a group of three may be formed, with practice proceeding in **attack turns by twos**.
- The **end** of a technique practicing session is signalled by a **hand clap by the Sensei**. On hearing the clapping signal thank your partner and sit in **seiza**.
- If you need to ask a question of the Sensei, go to him/her, bow respectfully and then ask your question about the technique.
- When receiving personal instruction during class, sit in **seiza**, watch intently and acknowledge with a bow after a technique has been demonstrated.
- It is preferable **not to correct the technique of another student** while they are mid-technique. Rather respond according to the technique being used. If it is successful go with it, if it is not then **respond honestly**.
- Focus on **active practice**. You can discuss and theorise about technique after class. Practice time is exactly that, **time to take action and learn**.
- Most of all approach your training with a mood of **intensity and fun**. The dojo is an environment of learning.

Basic Respect and Safety

- In Aikido a **tap-out protocol is used**, particularly in the more uncomfortable locking techniques. If you are **Uke** and you are in discomfort, **tap your hand repeatedly**. Similarly, if you are **Tori** and your **Uke** is tapping repeatedly then **stop the technique**.
- If you are carrying an **injury** it is up to you to inform your **partners** so that they do not make the injury worse through ignorance.
- **Uke** is expected to be **alive and dynamic in his/her attack**. It is **disrespectful** to be a **lazy Uke**, this is a martial art, **be committed in your attack**.
- **Uke** is also expected to take care of him/herself. If you are not comfortable being thrown, **let the Tori know**. **Tori will respond to your attack in accordance to your speed and energy**, so if you attack hard and with intensity, be prepared to roll or react to the technique with equal intensity.

- **As Tori, respect your partner's safety.** Always be in charge of the amount of pressure and discomfort you apply in the technique.
- To avoid injury to yourself and others **remove all jewellery and keep your nails trim.**
- If you begin bleeding, immediately approach the Sensei and request permission to leave the mat. It is recommended that you keep a pack of plasters with you in case of emergency.
- Your **Gi** (your practice suit) should always be clean and mended.
- It is everyone's responsibility to keep the dojo clean. In some dojos all students are expect to sweep the **tatami** (the mat) and dojo.
- No eating, drinking, smoking or gum chewing in the dojo.
- Your phone should be off or on silent during training.
- Only leave the mat during practice in the case of injury or illness. If you have over exerted yourself excuse yourself and sit in **seiza** on the mat until you have recovered.
- Carry a **cloth** in your Gi to wipe your face before each practice session with a new Uke. It is considered very rude in Japan to wipe your face while the Sensei is demonstrating a technique, so only wipe your face before/during your practice sessions.
- Most importantly, **Be Willing to Receive Instruction.** The greatest Senseis approach every training session with the intent to learn. You are no exception. Learn with humility and commitment and in time your technique will become fluid.



Morihei Ueshiba (O'Sensei)
Founder of Aikido