

# Notes for New Students



## ABOUT THIS LEAFLET

This leaflet is written to give new students an idea about the etiquette required in a dojo and how an Aikido class is run.

A brief outline of the history and philosophy of Aikido is also provided, but if you are looking for more detailed information a good place to start is the Aiki Kai Australia website at [www.aikido.org.au](http://www.aikido.org.au).

## ABOUT AIKIDO

Aikido is a modern, non-competitive Japanese martial art. The founder, Morihei Ueshiba, was known to his students as O Sensei. Although often portrayed as a gentle, aging teacher, O Sensei was a warrior, legendary for his martial skills within his own lifetime. He passed away in 1969 at the age of 86, having devoted the latter half of his life to developing and refining the art of Aikido. Aikido continues to evolve under the guidance of O Sensei's original live-in students (uchi deshi).

Aikido is a true form of Budo, a path in which the keen edge of martial training is utilised as a Way, or process, by which to achieve spiritual and personal growth. The oriental concept of ki (energy, spirit) is central to Aikido practice, which seeks to harmoniously unite the ki of the individual with that of the universe. In the thinking of the Founder, "The Art of Peace is a celebration of the bonding of heaven, earth and humankind."

## TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Aikido training requires a self-disciplined approach and continuity of practice. Techniques are repetitively practised in a variety of forms, until movement becomes spontaneous. Through training, one aspires to flowing movement and a relaxed and centered posture. Aikido is a dynamic art and control of an assailant is achieved by redirecting his/her energy and movement, rather than by the use of brute force. Accordingly, an individual's body size and strength is of less importance than in many of the other martial arts, although improvements in fitness, agility, flexibility and muscular strength number among the benefits of consistent training. Over time, practice also enhances mental focus and alertness.

Aikido techniques are grounded in the ancient traditions of samurai warriors. A series of hand combat (tai-jutsu) techniques have evolved from sword movement and form the basis of Aikido training. Practice with Japanese wooden weaponry (jo = staff, bokken = sword, tanto = knife) is a component of training sessions.

## TRAINING IN AIKIDO

Aikido is a personal endeavour; it is non-competitive. You progress at YOUR own pace and will be taught most often by example rather than through explanation. This form of teaching will require application and honing of the mental, life skills of focus, attentiveness and awareness.

Focus requires you to keep your mind on what you are doing.

Attentiveness to your instructor's demonstration allows you to observe the movements and subtleties needed to execute the technique – the body movement, hand positions, position of feet etc. Awareness of yourself and what is happening around you keeps us all training safely.

O Sensei, the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, exhorted his students to train in a pleasant and joyful manner. So relax. Don't expect too much of yourself initially and, most importantly, ENJOY the challenge and physicality of this fascinating activity. It takes several months to become comfortable with Aikido.

In each class, we all train with one another, irrespective of each student's level and rotate through all attendees. As a new student, you will have the more senior students assigned to train with you, where possible. This provides a supportive environment while you develop your skills. Do not feel uncomfortable or unworthy to train with a black belt. It is part of

their training to be able to adjust and harmonise with varying abilities and capacities.

Aikido training takes place in a hall known as a DOJO (place of the way). The dojo is considered a sacred place of learning; it must be kept clean and free of distractions. Normally the Kamiza is the point of focus within the dojo where you will see O Sensei's photo displayed.

## MEMBERSHIP

You must be a member of Aiki Kai Australia and be a registered student with the Aikido Foundation in order to train. You will be required to complete an application form and your instructor will assist you with this, if it hasn't already been completed by now.

## INSURANCE

The membership provides insurance to cover our organisation and some financial assistance in the event of an accident while training. It is a sliding scale of prescribed payments for rehabilitation costs and some limited compensation for loss of wages. Self employed people are strongly recommended to carry personal, loss of earnings insurance cover as our cover provides only small recompense. Complete information is available within the dojo so talk to your instructor if you need further information.

## BASIC DOJO ETIQUETTE

There are a few points of etiquette to be observed from the beginning.

### a) Asking Questions

Students are encouraged to train through observation and silently, so it is unusual to ask questions during the class. However, your instructor or senior students will happily answer your questions, address your concerns or explain issues further after class.

Don't hesitate to ask at that point, please refrain from questions during an instructor's demonstration.

### b) Bowing (Rei):

You will observe students bowing in the situations outlined below. It is done as an acknowledgement and there is no religious connotation or overtone in the Aikido bow. Observe what others are doing and try to copy them as best you can.

- Upon entry to the dojo execute a shallow, standing bow by inclining from the waist. This is an acknowledgement that you have come to train and as such set aside all your daily concerns and preoccupations for a short period while you focus on your training.
- Stepping onto the mat edge ready to train, kneel down, facing the kamiza; place your hands flat on the floor in front of you and bow deeply (head to the floor and, where possible, backside kept as low as possible, preferably still touching feet). This is to acknowledge the commencement of your training and the presence of other students. The kneeling position is called "sitting in seiza" described in more detail later. If the instructor is already on the mat, bow to that person as well.
- Commencement of teaching is usually marked by the instructor sitting in seiza at the front of the class. In unison, Instructor and all students bow deeply to the kamiza. This is an acknowledgement of O Sensei as the founder. The instructor will then turn, still in seiza, to face the students and they then bow deeply to the instructor; who bows in return.
- Leaving the mat during training requires a shallow standing bow towards the kamiza from the edge of the mat before leaving and the same upon returning before recommencing training. If you feel unwell or are injured, you must let the instructor know and do not leave the mat alone, or without the instructor's knowledge.
- At the end of class you will follow the instructor in the same bowing process as at the commencement.

# Notes for New Students

- Leaving the Dojo requires the same bow as upon entry to the dojo. This acknowledges your completion of training and return to your daily activities.

## c) Clothing

All students wear a white keikogi. Initially, new students can train in a track suit or loose clothing. Be sure they fully cover arms and legs and allow easy movement. Jeans should not be worn – as they restrict movement and will chaff you.

The type of gi worn is a personal preference – many wear the heavy reinforced, judo jacket, year round. Some wear the lightweight karate jacket in summer. Talk about the options available with your instructor or senior students before purchasing a gi.

Student safety during training necessitates removal of **all** jewellery. Ear rings, body piercings, necklaces, bangles, watches or rings should be removed before training. If a ring cannot be removed, it should be taped over. Chewing gum is prohibited.

Spectacles – plastic and/or sports glasses/contact lenses should be used. Spectacles made of glass pose a hazard to all students. Ask your instructor for advice if required.

There is only one visible distinguishing mark of rank – All kyu grades (mudansha) wear a white belt; all dan grades (yudansha) wear a black belt. The dark skirt (hakama) is always worn at yudansha level. It is optional for women to wear a hakama at an earlier level and is at the discretion of the local senior instructor. Junior students (under 16 years) wear coloured belts.

## d) Health Issue or Existing Conditions / Hygiene

Let your instructor know of any health issues or existing conditions which may impact upon your ability to train.

At all times, only clean bare feet are allowed on the mat. Wear footwear such as thongs when walking to/from the mat. Leave them neatly arranged at the outside edge of the mat facing outwards.

Fingernails need to be kept short. Long hair needs to be restrained.

## e) Titles in Aikido

The Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, is known as O Sensei (Great Teacher). The head of Aikido worldwide is called Doshu, to date this has always been a member of the Ueshiba family with O Sensei's grandson as the current Doshu.

In Australia there are three instructor levels: Shihan (Master teachers), Shidoi (Instructors) and Fuku Shidoi (Assistant Instructors). Shihan is, literally, a teacher of teachers. The honorific Shihan can be used before or after the person's family name and generally, only in the third person – e.g. Smith Shihan. In person you would address them as 'Sensei'. The Shihan title is awarded to individuals from the World Headquarters in Japan. Shidoi specifies a 'licensed' instructor of Aiki Kai Australia and the position is renewed every 3 years. Shidoi titles are awarded to grades 4th Dan and above.

Like Shihans, all grades 4th Dan and higher, are regularly referred to as 'Sensei', both on and off the mat. When talking in the third person it is usual to use their family name and then the title Sensei – e.g. Smith Sensei.

Fuku Shidoi positions are also renewed every three years and to be recognised as an assistant instructor they must hold either a 2nd or 3rd Dan black belt. The respect expressed through etiquette is an important part of our training, if you are unsure of someone's grade, ask, or listen carefully to how other dojo members address certain people.

## f) Body Language.

Most cultures have body language etiquette and martial arts are no exception. So be aware during training and avoid:

- Standing with arms crossed in front of you
- Sitting on the mat with your legs outstretched, soles of feet pointed at O Sensei. Sit in seiza or legs crossed
- Sitting on the mat with your back to O Sensei
- Leaning on weapons or walls during a class
- Sitting on chairs or stools in the dojo unless injured
- Avoid standing with hands behind your back

## ORDER OF TRAINING

Arrive on the mat changed and ready to train at least 5-10 minutes before the start of class. Take this time to help lay the mats if required, do warm-up exercises on your own, practise quietly with others, or talk quietly with other students. Be observant for the commencement of the class.

The class may begin with the senior student clapping for student attention or the instructor may sit in seiza in front of the kamiza. Immediately, students sit in seiza in one line at the edge of the mat opposite the kamiza. All together, the class follows the bowing process. At this stage, the bow to the instructor is accompanied by the Japanese phrase "Onegaishimasu" pronounced "oh-neh-guy-she-muss" and means, literally "Please show me your favour".

To get on the mat if you are late and class is in progress,

- Sit in seiza at the edge of the mat.
- Bow to the kamiza and the instructor then wait for acknowledgement from the instructor to come on to the mat.

Observe the instructor who will demonstrate an aspect with a selected student. There may be some, a little or no explanation. Observe the instructor's movements carefully as you will be expected to reproduce them in practice. Often, there will be a variation between what was demonstrated and what you are able to reproduce. Simply do your best to repeat the demonstration. Part of your journey is to learn effective observation - it just takes time and practice!

Practice what was demonstrated. The more senior student will execute the technique first. That is, the junior student will attack first and receive the technique. Even in groups, the training order remains from senior graded student to the junior graded student in both executing the technique (nage) and receiving the technique (uke). This will allow you to observe others doing the technique before it is your turn. Watch each execution carefully.

To indicate reasonable discomfort or pain in a joint lock or pinning technique, uke taps the mat or his/her body. When applying such techniques nage must be looking for this sign and immediately release the pressure.

When the instructor halts practice, usually with a clap, stop what you are doing immediately; quickly return to the line up on the edge of the mat; be seated either in seiza or crossed legged; and be attentive to the instructor. Please, do not keep the rest of the class waiting for you.

End of class is indicated by the instructor. Return to the line up at the edge of the mat, sit in seiza and in unison the class will bow to O Sensei and then the teacher. At that stage, the bow to the teacher is accompanied by the Japanese phrase Domo Arigato Gozaimashita, pronounced as "Domo-aree-gahto-gozai-mushta", meaning "Thank you, very much". Finally, everyone then bows and thanks each person they trained with during that session (juniors to search out their seniors).