



ASU Training Handbook



Ai - Harmony, unity; to be in accord with or to join.

Ki - Spirit; life force or universal creative energy.

Do - The way or path.

Introduction

The movement of Aikido is the dynamic movement of the universal energy forces. The power of Aikido is the power of a strong and unified spirit, mind and body moving in harmony with everything around it. Its origin is Budo. Its development is the result of two thousand years of a cultural process of change and refinement, a continuing martial contest of natural selection. It is an evolution etched in blood.

The study of Budo and the development of Aikido was the life work of Morihei Ueshiba, a figure of great renown who traveled the length and breadth of Japan studying under the greatest masters of many arts. Hard work, severe discipline and all the money he could earn were poured into his mastery of the sword, the spear and the arts of self defense. Deeply interested in the study of spiritual thought, he also practiced many different spiritual disciplines. Still, he was as yet unable to unite his spiritual beliefs with his physical accomplishments.

A short time after returning from military action in the Russo-Japanese War, he retired to a small house located on a mountain outside his village. There he lived and studied silently; his days spent training his body and his nights spent deep in prayer. It was at the end of this time of severe training that he had the realization he had been seeking all of his life. At that moment, nature's process became clear and he knew that the source of Budo is the spirit of protection of all things.

"Budo is not felling the opponent by force; nor is it a tool to lead the world into destruction by arms. True Budo is to accept the spirit of the universe, keep the peace of the world, and correctly produce, protect and cultivate all beings in nature."

Morihei Ueshiba intimately recognized and understood the harmony and power of the creative process from which

all things evolve. His art was the sword; his creative way was Budo. His understanding and enlightenment is creatively expressed by the protection of all life through a powerful and graphic application of universal truth. Aikido is creation, not destruction. It is a positive energy which creates harmony and justice out of violence.

To talk of harmony and justice is simple. To apply those principles to the conflicts which we face every day, though, requires a deep understanding and sincere trust. Logic may tell us that truth lies within the process of harmony, but the moment something of value rests on the outcome of a situation, we no longer trust that logic. The beautiful ideas and eloquent phrases are forgotten under the pressures of reality. In philosophy, a theory of truth is expressed in words, but the truth of Aikido is expressed in action and the theory proven in practice. By the physical application of its principles we develop a deeper understanding in the heart instead of the mind. Through practice and experience, we learn to trust its power.

Aikido training is to challenge yourself, not the other. You will develop confidence by facing your fears, and negative fighting spirit will become creative fighting spirit. The stress and pressure of serious Aikido training brings this spirit to the surface, exposing it so that it can be examined and refined in a controlled atmosphere of respect and mutual study.

Discovering your physical limitations will cause you to reflect on the deepest meanings of harmony and conflict, and to strive for a level of consciousness above the selfish ego, closer to a universal consciousness.

The physical movement of Aikido is the embodiment of the principles of the spirit. Negative force is not met with conflict, but joined, controlled and redirected through the power and balance of spiral movement. This is the shape of Aikido and the dynamic shape at the foundation of all the energies of existence. Aikido movement can only be understood from its roots in universal law and the processes of nature. Its sincere practice and study deepens our appreciation for the perfection of nature's balance and brings us back into harmony with our environment, with other people, and with ourselves.

This is the essence of Budo. It is not the art of fighting, of narrow technique, but an art of personal refinement and of protecting the quality of life. Aikido is first and always Budo. Without the heart of a warrior and the deep desire to protect society, to protect all life, Aikido becomes an empty dance. Budo is its spirit.

These principles are the life blood of Master Instructor Mitsugi Saotome. For fifteen years until the Founder's passing in 1969, Saotome Sensei lived as his personal disciple, studying under his guidance the practice and philosophy of Aikido. In 1975, Saotome Sensei left a highly respected position as a senior instructor at the World Aikido Headquarters in Tokyo to come to the United States. When asked why he made this decision, he replied, "I meditated on O-Sensei's (Great Teacher) spirit for three days and three nights and I felt it was his wish that I should go. This country is a great experiment, a melting pot of people from many different cultural backgrounds living together, the world condensed into one nation. The goal of Aikido and O-Sensei's dream is that all the peoples of the world live together as one family, in harmony with each other and with their environment. The United States has the opportunity to set a great example."

Saotome Sensei spends most of his time at his headquarters dojo, Aikido Shobukan in Washington, D.C. He also travels to Aikido Schools of Ueshiba (ASU) associated dojos which he and his students have opened throughout the country. There, he leads seminars and training camps.

Saotome Sensei has given many demonstrations of his art both here and abroad, among them demonstrations for the International Peace Academy and Diplomatic Community at the Japan House in New York City. He has written two books: *Aikido and the Harmony of Nature*, an in depth study of the relationship of Aikido with the movement and processes of natural phenomena, and *The Principles of Aikido*, both published by Shambhala Publications, Inc.

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 way of the discipline 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.

Rules of the Dojo

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

It is the responsibility of each student to cooperate in creating a positive atmosphere of harmony and respect.

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.

The dojo is not to be used for any purpose other than regularly scheduled classes without the direct permission of the head instructor.

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.

Rules of Training

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 conflicts of ego on the mat. Aikido is not street fighting. You are on the mat to train and purify your aggressive reactions and embody the spirit of the samurai by discovering your social responsibility.

There will be no competition 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 Aiki 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 relationship, 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. Gi 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 gi 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.

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 nearby 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 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 your practice gi.

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.

Requirements for Examination

The examination system in Aikido is not structured on competition. You will be graded on the following points:

Your understanding of basic technique appropriate to your level.

Your spontaneous movement and response appropriate for the attack.

Your ability to adapt your movement to the force of the attack.

The concentration and awareness you maintain throughout the examination.

Continuity of movement is important, not speed.

Confidence and courage are important, not ego.

Be prepared to act as uke for someone else of your same level during the examination period. You will be graded on your ukemi.

A technique should be demonstrated continuously both right and left until there is a signal to stop. Both irimi and tenkan movement should be used whenever applicable. You will be expected to know and respond to the Japanese terms. It is necessary to have completed the required hours of training (only one hour per day may count in computing time requirements), and it is necessary that the waiting period between each examination has expired before making application.

Procedure for Yudansha Examinations and Promotion

All examinations for the ranks of shodan and nidan will be held at a regional seminar in the presence of a board of qualified examiners. Examination for sandan and above must be by Saotome Shihan or Ikeda Shihan.

It is necessary that the training period between examinations has expired before making applications and that the training process has been followed. Note that the training period is a minimum . Time does not guarantee promotion. Also note the words "consistent training" on the time requirements. This is very important.

A candidate must be an ASU member in good standing, which means that the candidate must be current with ASU dues and must have been an ASU member in good standing throughout the student's training years. For transfer students who were not previously members of ASU, their present rank will be recognized, but at least one year needs to have expired since becoming an ASU member before making application for promotion. ASU will respect ranks given by other organizations but a student cannot request a yudansha promotion higher than shodan if the previous yudansha rank is not registered with Hombu. Hombu requires that each yudansha promotion, beginning with shodan, be applied for in order and registered through them with an appropriate waiting period between each promotion.

For shodan promotion a candidate must have made a serious effort to attend as many seminars with Saotome Shihan and Ikeda Shihan as possible. For nidan and above the candidate must have attended at least one Winter or Summer Intensive Training Camp, and have made a consistent effort to train under Saotome Shihan and Ikeda Shihan. Candidates should be pointed out to Saotome Shihan or Ikeda Shihan by their instructor during the six months leading up to the proposed examination.

Time and Technique Requirements for Kyu Promotion

Rokyu - 6th (30 hours/3 months)

Tenkan

Shomenuchi ikkyo and iriminage

Munetsuki kotegaeshi

Katate dori shihonage

Yokomenuchi shihonage

Kokyu tanden ho

Gokyu - 5th (60 hours/4 months)

All previous techniques plus:

Shomenuchi nikyo

Kata dori ikkyo and nikyo

Munetsuki kaitennage

Yonkyu - 4th (60 hours/4 months)

All previous techniques plus:

Shomenuchi sankyo and yonkyo Yokomenuchi ikkyo, kotegaeshi and iriminage

Ryote dori tenchinage and shihonage

Katate dori ryote mochi kokyu tanden ho

Sankyu - 3rd (70 hours/4 months)

All previous techniques plus:

Ushiro ryokata dori ikkyo

Ushiro ryote dori shihonage

Ushiro kubi shime kotegaeshi

Ushiro waza kokyunage

Nikyu - 2nd (80 hours/6 months)

All previous techniques plus:

Yokomenuchi nikyo, sankyo and yonkyo

Koshinage from shomenuchi, yokomenuchi, katate dori and munetsuki

Hanmi handachi: Katate dori shihonage, Ryote dori shihonage

Suwariwaza: Shomenuchi ikkyo, Kata dori ikkyo, Yokomenuchi ikkyo

Ikkyu - 1st (90 hours/6 months)

All previous techniques plus:

Jiyu waza: Standing, Hanmi handachi, Suwariwaza

Tanto dori: Munetsuki, Shomenuchi, Yokomenuchi

Any student applying for a kyu promotion must be an ASU member in good standing. It is necessary to have completed the required hours of training (no matter how many hours you practice in one day, one day's training only counts as one hour) and it is necessary that the waiting period (number of months) between each examination has expired before applying.

The fee for a kyu certificate is \$45.00 for each kyu grade.

Time and Technique Requirements for Dan Promotion

Shodan (120 hours and 12 months after receiving ikkyu)

All basic techniques and previous requirements plus:

Kumi tachi: First five basic kata.

Tanto dori: A different technique from each - shomenuchi, yokomenuchi, tsuki, two different techniques from ushiro.

Tachi dori: A total of five different techniques. Attacks will be shomenuchi, yokomenuchi, tsuki.

Randori: Three people attacking.

Nidan (Minimum 30 months and approx. 400 hours of consistent training after receiving shodan.)

All basic techniques and previous requirements plus:

Kumi tachi: First twelve basic kata.

Kumi jo: First six basic kata.

Randori: Three people attacking with shinai.

Sandan (Minimum 3 years of consistent training after receiving nidan.)

All basic techniques performed to demonstrate the student's understanding of the principles of kokyū tanden ho, and all previous requirements.

Yondan

Only by recommendation at the discretion of Saotome Shihan or Ikeda Shihan.

True Budo is a work of love. It is a work of giving life to all beings, and not killing or struggling with each other.

Master Morihei Ueshiba