

ASU Handbook - Second Edition



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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 had also practiced many different spiritual disciplines. Yet he was 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 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, 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. But to apply those principles to the conflicts which

we face everyday 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, 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, or 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 part of his time at his headquarters dojo, the Aikido Shobukan Dojo in Washington, D.C. He also travels to Aikido Schools of Ueshiba associated dojos which he and his students have opened throughout the country leading 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. Its spirit comes directly from the Founder of Aikido and it is the place of the succession of his teachings. 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 Aikido 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 religion, 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 near by 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 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.

Time and Technique Requirements For Kyu Promotion

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 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.

Rokyu (30 hours/3 months)

Tenkan
 Shomenuchi ikkyo and iriminage
 Munetsuki kotegaeshi
 Katate dori shihonage
 Yokomenuchi shihonage
 Kokyu tanden ho

Gokyu (60 hours/4 months)

All previous techniques plus:

Shomenuchi nikyo
 Kata dori ikkyo and nikyo
 Munetsuki kaitennage

Yonkyu (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 (70 hours/4 months)

All previous techniques plus:

Ushiro ryokata dori ikkyo
 Ushiro ryote dori shihonage
 Ushiro kubi shime kotegaeshi
 Ushiro waza kokyunage

Nikyu (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 (90 hours/6 months)

All previous techniques plus:

Jiyu waza:

Standing
 Hanmi handachi
 Suwariwaza

Tanto dori:

Munetsuki
 Shomenuchi
 Yokomenuchi

Requirements For Yudansha Examination

Aikido has a basic structure, kihon waza, which allows you to study the fundamental principles of the art. The structure of this training process is the same as a scientific formula. As a formula is an exacting international language that allows scientists to communicate and explore the depths of scientific principle, kihon waza is an international language allowing Aikidoka from all over the world to communicate and explore the basic truths of Aikido. If this basic structure is lost, Aikido is lost.

During the examination you are expected to demonstrate an understanding of the principles of the art through this very exacting structure of kihon waza, clearly and precisely, not your personal ideas or your personal expression. Yudansha examination is not performance art.

The following points are critical:

- The execution of formal kihon waza, an understanding of it's proper application and of the fundamental principles it demonstrates - most importantly kokyu; musubi; irimi tenkan.
- Hanmi at all times; before, during, at the conclusion of and following the technique.
- Control of your own center; control of your partner's center; control of the technique.
- Application of power appropriate to the attack.
- The proper pinning technique to demonstrate the conflict is finished.
- Timing.
- Zanshin.
- Attitude.
- Martial Awareness.

The Proper Role of Uke in Yudansha Examination

Taking ukemi for yudansha examination is a very serious responsibility. Each technique is developed to study a specific direction and application of force. As uke you must understand this and have the ability to give an honest, strong and focused attack that is appropriate for the technique required.

A weak attack is unacceptable. A deceptive attack is unacceptable. Since you know the technique your partner is being asked to demonstrate it is easy to stop it's execution.

There are no friends or enemies during examination. It is not uke's job to make value judgements. You do not take ukemi to make your partner look bad. You do not take ukemi to make your partner look good. Do not jump into a spectacular fall if the power is not there. Do not make a point of taking a bored and resisting fall to make it look as though your partner didn't really throw you. Either way is dishonest. Remember, you take ukemi to avoid injury. You are not taking ukemi to show off. Uke must only do what is appropriate to the situation. This requires much training and much soul searching.

Time and Technique Requirements for Dan Promotion

Shodan (120 hours and 12 months after receiving ikkyu)

A candidate must have attended at least two seminars with Saotome Shihan and/or Ikeda Shihan since attaining ikkyu grade. During the seminar it is the responsibility of the regional instructor to inform the Shihan so that he may observe the candidate more closely.

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 approximately 400 hours of consistent training after receiving Shodan)

A candidate must have attended at least one Winter or Summer Intensive Training Camp since attaining shodan rank and within one year of the scheduled examination date. It is the responsibility of the regional instructor to inform the Shihan at that camp so that he may observe the candidate more closely.

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 more understanding of the relationship of basic principle to the technique with maturity and clarity.

It is necessary that the waiting period between examinations has expired before making application. The ASU application form, Request for Examination, for yudansha ranks must be submitted to ASU well in advance of the examination in order to validate qualifications. Please note the words "consistent training" on the time requirements. This is very important.

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

Glossary

This is a list of Japanese terms which you will hear used in the dojo. By studying these definitions you will discover many facets of Aikido philosophy. It is important to your practice that you have a basic understanding of them. Quotation marks indicate the words of the Founder.

Atemi Waza: Techniques of striking.

Bokken: Wooden practice sword.

Budo: Literally to stop the thrusting spear. "A mind to serve for the peace of all humanity is needed in Aikido, not the mind of one who wished to be strong and only practices to defeat an opponent. There are neither opponents nor enemies for true Budo. Therefore to compete in techniques, winning or losing, is not true Budo. True Budo knows no defeat. Never defeated means never fighting."

Bushido: The way of chivalry.

Deai: The moment of truth. The moment of the meeting of two forces.

Deshi: Student.

Dojo: The place where the way is revealed. A place for the strengthening and refinement of spirit, mind and body.

Hakama: Wide skirted pants worn over the gi. You will be expected to wear hakama (dark blue or black) after receiving the 6th kyu grade.

Hanmi: The relaxed triangular stance of Aikido. It is stable yet flexible enough to move quickly in any direction. All technique begins, moves through and ends in hanmi.

Hanmi Handachi: Techniques practiced with nage sitting and uke standing.

Hara: The lower abdomen. The center of life energy, physical and spiritual. All movement must originate from this point.

Irimi: Entering, moving into and through the line of attack with no thought of escape.

Jiyu Waza: Free technique. In testing usually against one opponent.

Jo: Short staff.

Jo dori: Techniques of staff taking.