



Welcome To Aikido Shugyo Dojo!

We are located at 2203 Gerrard Street East. Please refer to our brochure for dates, times and costs of classes. Visit our website at www.shugyo.com. The following is a list of common questions that people might have about Aikido—and please—do not hesitate to address one of your friendly classmates with any concerns that you might have.

Am I too old, or too little, or too young to learn Aikido?

Aikido is for all ages; men and women; boys and girls. You do not have to be strong or big to do Aikido. Aikido is not about the strength that you have, but in using the strength of the attacker (uke). O-Sensei, the founder of Aikido, was formidable in his practice even into his eighties.

Do I have to be in good physical shape to do Aikido?

You don't need to be in good physical shape to start Aikido. As with any kind of regular exercise, doing Aikido several times per week can only improve your physical condition and stamina.

Can I learn to defend myself with Aikido?

Aikido is a martial art, and can be used in self-defense. It takes time and practice however, to become proficient in Aikido—ideally, Aikido practice is a lifetime study... If you are interested in self-defense of an immediate nature, take a reputable self-defense course. Aikido is much more than self-defense—just ask any student!

Is there a lot of kicking and punching?

In Aikido, there is very little punching, and even less kicking. Aikido students learn, rather, how to fall properly and to roll safely. Students also learn to move more flexibly and improve their posture.

Why do I see only black belts and white belts in classes?

Aikido has no visible ranking system, although there are ranks. One is promoted to the next level by means of testing. After you have completed the practice-day requirement, you are expected to show proficiency executing those techniques at your level.

How long does it take to become a Black Belt in Aikido?

A black belt status, or Shodan, in Aikido requires approximately seven years of study.

Are there competitions in Aikido?

Aikido does not hold competitions or tournaments to see “who is the best fighter”. The philosophy of O-Sensei, the founder, stressed harmony—not competition. In Aikido, we learn to control ourselves, not another. Randori, or practice with multiple attackers, is used to test how well Aikido principles are incorporated into a student’s practice.

What is the ratio of women to men in Shugyo Dojo?

On average, there are more women who practice and become instructors of Aikido than in other martial arts. At Aikido Shugyo Dojo for example, 30% of our membership is female.

Why do people bow to the picture at the front of the Dojo?

We bow to the picture of O-Sensei in order to show our respect for the martial art that he developed and that has spread worldwide.

Do I need to get a uniform to practice Aikido?

A t-shirt and loose-fitting pants are fine to start with. If you decide that Aikido is for you, you can purchase a keikogi at the dojo.



Beginner's question #1: How do you keep your clothes on?

Cartoon by Hamish MacDonal

RULES DURING PRACTICE

- 1) One blow in Aikido is capable of killing an opponent. In practice, obey your instructor, and do not make the practice period a time for needless testing of strength.
- 2) Aikido is an art in which one learns to face many opponents simultaneously. It therefore requires that you polish and perfect your execution of each movement so that you can take on not only the one directly before you but also those approaching from every direction.
- 3) Practice at all times with a feeling of pleasurable exhilaration.
- 4) The teachings of your instructor constitute only a small fraction of what you will learn. Your mastery of each movement will depend almost completely on individual, earnest practice.
- 5) Daily practice begins with light movements of the body, gradually increasing in intensity and strength; but there must be no over-exertion. That is why even the elderly continue to practice with pleasure without bodily harm, and will attain the goal of training.
- 6) The purpose of Aikido is to train both body and mind and to make one sincere. All Aikido arts are secret in nature and are not to be revealed publicly, nor taught to rogues who will use them for evil purposes.

First it is proper to obey the instructor and remember his/her instructions, rising above yourself. No matter how much you may study, if you cling to yourself you will not develop your ability.

Secondly, budo is for countering any attack from any direction at any time. When you are ready merely for only one opponent, without being prepared for others, it will be only a common fight. A tight, on-guard posture with an immovable spirit is the basis of every exercise of budo. People generally say, "Man behaves irreproachably," or "An excellent artist is completely on guard." Those who study Aikido should thus spend their daily life thoroughly on guard, even if they are not consciously watching every direction around them.

Thirdly, it is fairly painful to keep on earnestly studying. But if you keep up the discipline of budo without tiring, you will at last reach a really enjoyable stage. Some people misunderstand that it is best to suffer while studying, but real study is pleasant at all times. Concentrating ourselves, not having any painful experiences, we are able to enjoy the practice sessions.

The fourth rule relates to the assimilation of the techniques. Aikido has a few thousand variations of the techniques. Some students are apt to pursue an accumulation of quantity rather than quality. However when they look back on themselves, they are sorry to learn that they have gained nothing. Soon they lose interest. An innumerable variation of each technique are possible. Instructors always emphasize the significance of "repetition" to beginners. When you

practice each basic technique, over and over again, you master it and then are able to use the variations. When the Master first came to Tokyo, among his earnest students was Admiral Isamu Takeshita. He wrote down all the techniques that he learned under the Master. They amounted to more than two thousand, and yet there were more. He was deadlocked in that he could do none of them well. After careful consideration of several days, he understood the meaning of the Master's caution, "You should study, using the sitting exercise as the base." He practiced it and then at last became able to manage the techniques: so well that he could acquire the others, which he had not yet been taught by his instructor. For an elderly person of sixty years, it is the same: repetition of the exercise is the secret of improvement, no matter how awkward or unskillful one may be.

The fifth rule is not to contradict nature. Excessiveness is to be avoided in anything. Moderation is the key. No matter how little the excess is, the whole posture and the condition of the body are unbalanced. Young lively students are apt to have an idea that they will not be strong unless they force power. This is not true. Natural exercise creates true strength. For this reason, it was possible for Dr. Niki, a man more than eighty years old, to practice Aikido.

Lastly, the aim of Aikido is not to merely produce a strong individual, but to create an integrated person. Any educated person knows how brute strength is meaningless in the present day of advanced civilization. For this reason the Master forbade Aikido to be misused and severely cautioned everyone. He would not permit the publication of his art techniques and required introductions and guarantees for each student. In summary, those who wish to study Aikido should have a righteous and fair mind, obey the instructors, and study naturally. As a matter of consequence, the techniques will be cultivated skillfully and a noble character will be created in this atmosphere.

AIKIDO SHUGYO DOJO ETIQUETTE

An atmosphere of respect is of vital importance to the practice of Aikido, and etiquette is a group of actions affirming that respect. "To respect" is to extend consideration, courtesy and gratitude toward one's teacher, one's fellow students and oneself. Etiquette is also a means of providing a safe and harmonious environment for training.

1. Bowing can convey humility, respect, gratitude and apology. Let your ego become more flexible through sincere bowing.

Sitting bow (from seiza)

- to O-Sensei's picture when first stepping onto and leaving the mat
- to O-Sensei's picture and the instructor upon the official beginning and end of class

Standing bow

- to O-Sensei's picture when entering or leaving the dojo
- when temporarily leaving and returning to the mat

2. Expressions

"Onegaishimasu" or "(please help me/practice with me)":

- to your partner at the start of a technique
- to the instructor at the beginning of class
- to the instructor after giving instruction to the entire class

"Arigato gozaimashita" or "thank you very much":

- to your partner after each technique
- to all partners at the end of practice
- to the instructor when you have been given personal instruction
- to the instructor at the end of class

3. Arrive 15 minutes before class, change into your uniform and line up in seiza before the scheduled start of class. Hydrate and use the washroom before class to prevent disruptions during class.

4. Leave your shoes neatly on the shoe shelf.

5. If class has begun and you are late for warmup, wait at the edge of the mat until the instructor indicates that you may join the class. Step onto the mat and bow from seiza. If you are late after warmup is completed, please watch the class.

6. After the instructor has demonstrated a technique, quickly find a practice partner.
7. Students of any rank may practice together. Junior students are encouraged to seek out advanced students and ask them to practice. Yudansha (black belts) or visitors should not hunt or wait for a partner, approach them immediately.
8. The junior student is uke (the attacker) first and the senior student is nage (the defender). Usually the technique is practiced four times (alternating left and right) and then the roles of uke and nage are reversed.
9. Keep conversation to a minimum during practice. If you are seriously confused, ask the instructor for help.
10. When you or your partner accidentally bump into another practicing couple, extend an apology and bow.
11. Ask permission if you need to leave the mat during class. Obtain the instructor's permission before the beginning of class if you must leave practice early.
12. Create a respectful and attentive atmosphere during class: do not lean on walls, do not sit or stand with your back to the picture of O-Sensei, do not fold your arms during class. Be mindful of your personal hygiene. Do not wear jewellery or anything else that may result in injury to yourself or your partner.
13. Keep your uniform clean and in good condition. If you wear a hakama, do not allow your dogi pants to show below your hakama. If practicing with an injury, put a piece of tape on your dogi to show that you have an injury.
14. Keeping the dojo clean is part of your training. The junior students should be the first to obtain a mop and sweep the mats after class. Obey the instructor's requests for cleaning the dojo after class.

The above are guidelines that we follow at Aikido Shugyo Dojo. When visiting other dojos, be attentive to their practices.

Every human being is potentially enlightened; each one of us is a miniature shrine of the divine. But, in order to manifest the treasures within, we need a suitable path to follow, proper vehicles for training and good teachers to point us in the right direction.

*The kind of path we finally select as our own Way is not important.
But, whatever we choose, it must be practiced.*

SHUGYO

BY JOHN STEVENS

"Practice of the Way" is known in Japanese as *shugyo*, "hard training that fosters enlightenment." The purpose of shugyo is "to tighten up the slack, toughen the body, and polish the spirit."

One aspect of *shugyo* is *keiko*, an elegant term that signifies "using ancient wisdom to illuminate the present." Every Way has a pantheon of illustrious predecessors-trailblazers who established their particular paths after passing through dangerous, uncharted territory and who have left us an important legacy. It is that legacy that we encounter daily in *keiko*.

In the practice of calligraphy, for example, a beginning student (after spending at least three years mastering the basic strokes) is set to work making exact copies of the masterpieces of Chinese and Japanese brushwork. Following ten or even twenty years of reproducing all manner of scripts and styles, the practitioner has absorbed five thousand years of tradition and is ready to be turned loose to develop a fresh, individual approach.

In *keiko*, the supreme virtue is patience. Once, a young man petitioned a great swordsman to admit him as a disciple. "I'll act as your live-in servant and train ceaselessly. How long will it take me to learn everything?"

"At least ten years," the master replied.

"That's too long," the young man protested. "Suppose I work twice as hard as everyone else. Then how long will it take?"

"Thirty years," the master shot back.

"What do you mean?" the anguished young man exclaimed. "I'll do anything to master swordsmanship as quickly as possible!"

"In that case," the master said sharply, "you will need fifty years. A person in such a hurry will be a poor student."

The young man was eventually allowed to serve as an attendant on condition that he neither ask about nor touch a sword. After three years, the master began sneaking up on the young man at all hours of the day and night to whack him with his wooden sword. This continued until the young man began to anticipate the attacks. Only then did formal instruction commence.

A second key element in *keiko* is *kokoro*, "heart, mind, spiritual essence." All technique flows from the practitioner's *kokoro*, and no amount of technical skill can compensate for inadequacies caused by an immature, disturbed, or stagnant mind.

Once I complained to a calligraphy teacher that my many obligations prevented me from practicing more. She replied, "Don't worry; if you are improving your mind, you are improving your calligraphy." Similarly, practitioners who demand to be taught an art's secret techniques are told, "If your *kokoro* is true, your techniques will be correct."

Morihei Ueshiba O-Sensei, the founder of Aikido, often spoke of the four virtues of *keiko*: bravery, wisdom, love, and empathy.

Bravery is at the top of the list, for we need to be sufficiently strong and determined to make a firm commitment to practice. We need valor to help us contend with all the obstacles that block our path.

Wisdom, which is acquired through deep meditation and wide-ranging study, enables us to make intelligent decisions and to maintain things in proper perspective.

When one's practice is sound and balanced a natural kind of love forms between one's teacher and one's fellow trainees. One also falls in love with his or her Way and becomes completely devoted to it. (Such affection can even extend to one's training uniform. I was so fond of my *keikogi* that I mended and patched it until the cloth disintegrated; I sorely grieved the passing of what other people would think of as a rag.)

At the highest levels of training, a profound empathy is felt for all creatures, along with the fervent hope that everyone else will also be able to perfect his or her own Way. One of the meanings of "Aikido" is "Arm in arm, let's travel the Path together." Like *bodhisattva*, we want all others to reach the goal with us.

Sometimes a concentrated effort is needed in our practice. OSensei wrote, "Iron is full of impurities that weaken it: through forging, it becomes steel and it is transformed into a razor sharp blade. Human beings develop in the same fashion."

Such a forging, *tanren* in Japanese, can take a variety of forms. For one of my Kendo teachers, it consisted of 1,000 strokes (3,000 on Sunday) of a heavy sword every morning for nearly half a century. For one of my calligraphy teachers, it was copying the Heart Sutra 10,000 times. For me, it was 1,000 straight days of outdoor training at a mountain temple.

O-Sensei concluded, "In your training, do not be in a hurry, for it takes a minimum of ten years to master the basics and advance to the first rung. Never think of yourself as an all-knowing perfected master; you must continue to train daily with your friends and students and progress together in the Way of Harmony."

Perhaps the most important element of Practice of the Way is transmission. Civilization is sustained by the person-to-person, heart-to-heart transmission of the cultural treasures of human-kind.

I have had many fine teachers over the years, but they all had one thing in common: through long years of *shugyo* they had become one with their Way. They taught by example—"What you are is far more important than what you say"—and they manifested the teaching in their entire being.

A true master delights in the Way. Even after sixty years of training, my Aikido teacher Rinjiro Shirata loved being in the dojo, and his favorite saying was, "Make the techniques anew each day!" Shirata Sensei was a peerless martial artist—when he was 75 years old he pinned Japan's top pro wrestler—but the image that lingers strongest in my mind now that he is gone is his wonderful smile. It was the smile of enlightenment.

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