

## TRAINING & AIKIDO IDEOLOGY

If you are unsure of what to do in a particular situation, ask a senior student, or simply follow your senior's lead. Although there seems to be many forms of etiquette to remember, they will come naturally as you continue to train. Please do not be resentful if you are corrected on a point of etiquette, for each one is important to your safety, and to the learning experience.

Aikido is not a religion, but the education and refinement of the spirit. You will not be asked to adhere to any religious doctrine, 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 that is within us all.

The opening and closing ceremony of each Aikido practice is a formal bow directed to the shomen, followed by clapping the hands twice, followed by another bow to the shomen and then a bow between the instructor and students. The bows directed to the shomen symbolise respect to the spirit and the principles of Aikido and gratitude to the Founder for developing this system of practice and study.

The two claps symbolise unity, masubi. The first sends out vibrations to the spiritual world. The second receives the echo of that vibration and connects your spirit with the spirit of the Founder, and with the Universal Consciousness. The vibration that you send and the echo you receive is dictated by your own spiritual beliefs and attitude.

There is no right or wrong way in Aikido. If a movement obeys the physical laws of the universe, it is correct. By following these laws, you are following the Path (the Will) of the Universe. Therefore, Aikido is not technique training. It is wisdom training.

There is no individual kata in Aikido, for Aiki is the harmony of relationships, and Do is the way (path). On the Aikido mat you will find people of different social backgrounds and status, different cultures and languages, different political and religious philosophies. They are coming together, not to compete, not to press their own ideas on someone else, but to learn to listen to each other, to communicate through Aikido "kinship". On the mat we cannot hide our true selves, we show our weaknesses as well as our strengths. We sweat together, face stress together, help each other, and we learn to trust. Everyone is studying the same universal principles, and the essence that is the same in each individual becomes brilliantly clear as the mask of insecurity and ego is shed. We are all individuals, but we are a part of each other. If you were all alone in the universe with no one to talk to, no one with which to share the beauty of the stars, to laugh with, to touch, what would be the purpose in life? It is other than life, it is love that gives your life meaning. This is harmony. We must discover the joy of each other, the joy of challenge, the joy of growth.

In Aikido training you do not win. In trying to win you lose. If you see training as competition, you lose, your training partner loses, everyone loses. If you see life as competition, you cannot win, for eventually you must die. But if you see life as a process of universal creativity, you will never die, for you are a part of the process. If you see the growth of your body and your mind as a prelude to spiritual growth, your strength will last forever.

A mind of challenge is not a mind of competition. The greatest challenge is to challenge yourself. You must not spend your life searching for security. If you cover yourself with layer after layer of heavy armour, you will be unable to move, unable to fight and protect yourself and others. You will never feel the warm touch of the sun nor the sharp sting of a hard rain. Joy will be lost. Your freedom and independence will be lost.

If you spend your life in the safety of a cave at the foot of the mountains, you will see only darkness. Your experience will be narrow and you will never feel the sweet pain of growth. You must leave that protection and security and challenge yourself on the mountains above you. You must climb higher and higher, your vision, ability, and experience expanding with each peak. And as you stand open and unprotected from the wind, with the sun and the snow touching your heart, you will experience the grand panorama of the universe all around you. You will reach out and touch the galaxies, and perhaps you will touch creation itself.

Bushido is challenge and sacrifice. It is the power and strength of an independent spirit. A dependant spirit is weak and cannot sacrifice it's own selfish ego and greed. To be truly independent and taste the challenge of freedom, the spirit must be empty. In the final analysis, you and you alone are responsible for your own growth. You make your own reality.

You feel pain, you are afraid, but you are intensely alive. Climbing a mountain of frozen rock, cold, hungry. Exhausted, you are alone with the sound of the wind. Give up and you die. Maybe one foot, maybe one inch in one day, but try. Life is the same, cold, hungry, and lonely. You must depend only on yourself. This is Bushido. This is my Aikido world. The search for the top of the mountains.