

# AIKIDO: AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE

Welcome to Kiku Matsu Dojo! the headquarters of the Aikido World Alliance. This guide contains some items that will help you as you start your practice of Aikido.

When coming to the introductory class, there's no need to purchase a **gi** (uniform). Just wear comfortable workout clothing like a t-shirt and sweatpants. If you are coming from another activity, we have changing rooms in the back of the dojo.

## BASIC DOJO ETIQUETTE

- Please arrive with enough time to change and be on the mat before the class starts. Upon arrival, put your shoes in the rack by the door and put any coats and clothes you have in the changing rooms.
- Bow towards the **shomen** (literally front, but the gray wall with the picture, flower, and shelf) when coming on and off the mat.
- When walking across the mat, you should walk behind others along the back wall, keeping away from the shomen wall.
- Since Aikido training involves working in close physical contact with others, we ask that you please regularly shower and launder your uniform.
- Always call your instructor "Sensei." There are no exceptions. When you receive advice or a correction from Sensei, the proper response is "**Hai/Yes, Sensei,**" or "**Thank you, Sensei.**" Casual acknowledgements are considered rude.
- If you need to leave the mat for any reason, first ask permission from Sensei. Remember to bow when leaving the mat. When ready to return, sit **seiza** at the edge of the mat and wait to be invited to rejoin the class. When invited, bow to the shomen and resume practicing.

## CLASS ORGANIZATION

Line up facing the shomen before class and when the **Sensei** (class instructor) is demonstrating. The Sensei or students will show you where. At the start of class, we line up in rank order so you should be on the left side closest to the office. After the class starts, don't worry about sitting in rank order, just return to the closest spot to you on the line. You should sit in **seiza** (Japanese

formal sitting) but if that is uncomfortable, you may sit cross-legged.

At the start and end of class, the highest-ranking student will direct everyone to bow (out of respect) to the shomen ("**shomen ni rei**") and then to the Sensei ("**sensei ni rei**"). Then everyone will say, "**onegaishimasu**" (please/thank you for teaching me). The class will then start with a warm-up. The exercises mimic many of the movements we do in Aikido. **Exercises always start with the left side first**, then the right. For those that require switching sides, that is typically done after the count of 3-4 (**san-shi**).

After the warm-up, Sensei will demonstrate a **tai sabaki** (body movement exercise) with a partner. The partner will grab or strike and Sensei will show a body motion in response. Sensei will then have the class take partners and practice this exercise. Typically, you will practice each role 4x and then switch. During the practice, Sensei and/or your partner will help you with the technique. When Sensei claps their hands, students should stop and return to sitting on the line from the start of class. As a student, please refrain from clapping during classtime.

After the tai sabaki, Sensei will demonstrate a technique with a partner based off the tai sabaki motion practiced prior. Please watch and listen to Sensei's explanation. When Sensei is done, the class will practice the technique, usually changing partners with each turn. When you are applying a pinning technique, you should apply the pin slowly with increasing force until the **uke** (receiver) taps the mat. When being pinned, be sure to slap the mat loudly with your free hand as you feel the pressure being applied before it hurts you. The intent is for the uke to let the **nage** (thrower) know they are applying the pin correctly without the uke getting hurt.

When the class is over, we bow again to the shomen and Sensei like we did at the beginning. It is then traditional to thank the Sensei for teaching class with the phrase "**domo arigatou gozaimashita sensei**" (thank you very much for what you have done, Sensei). After the last class of the day, we sweep the mat (after the Monday intro class).



## QUESTIONS

This guide is meant to cover the basics and is in no way comprehensive. There are many points of etiquette, technique, practice and procedure you might have questions about. Please ask your classmates or instructor outside of class time unless the question is on the technique you're currently practicing.

## BASIC MOTIONS

There are four basic motions in Aikido: slide, step, pivot, and **tenkan**.

### SLIDING

The feet stay in the same relative position. The first movement should be the front foot in the direction that you're moving. Then the back foot should be moved in the same direction so you end up in the starting position.

### STEPPING

This is just like walking. The forward foot changes, either by the back foot moving forward or the front foot moving back (as in walking backwards).

### PIVOTING

The feet rotate in place, on the balls of the feet, and your body changes 180 degrees in direction. Back becomes front, front becomes back. Your weight should also shift so it's more on the front foot (about a 70/30 split).

### TENKAN

This is a circular turning motion. The front foot is used as the center. The back foot sweeps an arc backwards, turning the body 180 degrees (much like a drawing compass). The direction you are facing changes, but the forward foot remains the same. Your weight should remain mostly on the front foot throughout.

### ROLLING

In Aikido, our practice is always with partners. This means half of the time you will be being thrown and pinned. It's important to learn how to roll and fall so you can avoid injury as you become more advanced. The beginning technique for this is koho tendo undo. Practice is started sitting with one leg extended. Rolling back and then returning to the original position. The can also be done from kneeling and

standing positions.

## PRACTICE

Aikido is a continual process of learning and re-finement. At first, as with any new endeavor, the movements will seem awkward and uncoordinated. Everyone in class was in your exact same position when they started and had similar feelings. Over time, you will gain an understanding of the motions and techniques. Please attend as many introductory classes as you are able. More practice will speed the pace of your development. Feel free to ask others about their experiences as a beginning student. Some of us still occasionally struggle with the differences between right and left or slide and step!

