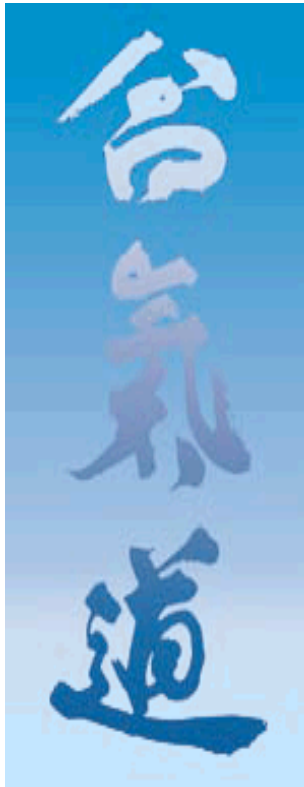


AIKI KAI (AUSTRALIA)

TRAINING IN AIKIDO

**Information For
New Students**

**Aikido Victoria
Issued Jan 2010**



About Aikido

Aikido is a modern, non-competitive Japanese martial-art. The founder, Morihei Ueshiba, was known to his students as O'Sensei. Although often portrayed as a gentle, aging teacher, O-Sensei was a warrior, legendary for his martial skills within his own lifetime. He passed away in 1969 at the age of 86, having devoted the latter half of his life to developing and refining the art of Aikido. Aikido continues to evolve under the guidance of O'Sensei's original live-in students (*uchi deshi*).

Aikido is a true form of Budo, a path in which the keen edge of martial training is utilised as a Way, or process, by which to achieve spiritual and personal growth. The oriental concept of *ki* (energy, spirit) is central to Aikido practice, which seeks to harmoniously unite the *ki* of the individual with that of the universe. In the words of the founder, "The Art of Peace is a celebration of the bonding of heaven, earth and humankind."

Teaching Philosophy

Aikido training requires a self-disciplined approach and continuity of practice. Techniques are repetitively practised in a variety of forms, ensuring that movement becomes spontaneous. Through training, one aspires to flowing movement and a relaxed and centered posture. Aikido is a dynamic art and control of an assailant is achieved by redirecting his/her energy and movement, rather than by the use of brute force. Accordingly, an individual's body size and strength is of less importance than in many of the other martial arts, although improvements in fitness, agility, flexibility and muscular strength number among the benefits of consistent training. Over time practice also enhances mental focus and alertness.

Aikido techniques are grounded in the ancient traditions of Samurai warriors. A series of hand combat (*tai-jutsu*) techniques have evolved from sword movement and form the basis of Aikido training. Practice with Japanese wooden weaponry (*jo* staff, *bokken* sword, *tanto* knife) is a component of training sessions.

TRAINING IN AIKIDO

Aikido is a personal endeavour. It is non-competitive; it is not a sport. You progress at YOUR own pace and will be taught by example rather than through explanation. This form of teaching will require application and honing of the mental, life skills of focus, attentiveness and awareness.

Focus requires you to keep your mind on what you are doing.

Attentiveness to your instructor's demonstration allows you to observe the movements and subtleties needed to execute the technique – the body movement, hand positions, position of feet etc.

Awareness of yourself and what is happening around you keeps us all training safely.

O'Sensei, the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, exhorted his students to train in a pleasant and joyful manner. So relax. Don't expect too much of yourself initially and, most importantly, ENJOY the challenge and physicality of this fascinating activity. It takes several months to become comfortable with aikido.

In each class, we all train with one another, irrespective of each student's level and rotate through all attendees. As a new student, you will have the more senior students assigned to train with you, where possible. This provides a supportive environment while you develop your skills. Do not feel uncomfortable or unworthy to train with a black belt. It is part of their training to be able to adjust and harmonise with varying abilities and capacities.

Aikido training takes place in a hall known as a **DOJO** (place of the way). The dojo is considered a sacred place of learning; it must be kept clean and free of distractions. Behave no differently in the dojo than you would in a church or temple.

The **Kamiza** or tokonoma is the point of focus within the dojo with, at least, O'Sensei's picture and the Japanese characters for Aikido displayed. When training is in progress you may notice the instructor's weapons are also laid out at the kamiza.

Membership

You must be a member of Aiki Kai Australia and be a registered student with the Aikido Foundation in order to train. You will be required to complete an application form. Your instructor will assist you with this.

Insurance

The membership provides insurance to cover our organization and some financial assistance in the event of an accident while training. It is a sliding scale of prescribed payments for rehabilitation costs and some limited compensation for loss of wages. **Self employed** people are strongly recommended to carry personal, loss of earnings insurance cover as our cover provides only small recompense. Complete information is available within the dojo so talk to your instructor if you need further information.

BASIC DOJO ETIQUETTE

There are a few points of etiquette to be observed from the beginning.

a) Asking Questions

Students are encouraged to train through observation and silently, so it is difficult to ask questions during the class. However, your instructor or senior students will happily answer your questions, address your concerns or explain issues further after class. Don't hesitate to ask!

b) Bowing (*Rei*):

You will observe students bowing in the situations outlined below. It is done as an acknowledgement. There is NO religious connotation or overtone in the Aikido bow. Observe what others are doing and try to copy as best you can.

- **Upon entry to the dojo**, face the kamiza; and execute a shallow, standing bow by inclining from the waist. This is an acknowledgement that you have come to train and as such set aside all your daily concerns and preoccupations for a short period while you focus on your training.
- **Stepping onto the mat edge** ready to train, kneel down, facing the kamiza; place your hands flat on the floor in front of you and bow deeply (head to the floor and, where possible, backside kept as low as possible, preferably still touching feet). This is to acknowledge the commencement of your training and the presence of other students. The kneeling position is called "sitting in seiza" described in more detail later.
- **Commencement of teaching** is marked by the instructor sitting in seiza at the front of the class, then turning to face the kamiza. In unison, Instructor and all students bow deeply to the kamiza. This is an acknowledgement of O'Sensei as the founder. The instructor will then turn, still in seiza, to face the student line up and all will bow deeply to each other.
- **Leaving the mat during training** requires a shallow standing bow towards the kamiza from the edge of the mat before leaving and the same upon returning before recommencing training. If you feel unwell or are injured, let the instructor know. Do not leave the mat alone.
- **At the end of class** you will follow the instructor in the same bowing process as at the commencement.
- **Leaving the Dojo** requires the same bow as upon entry to the dojo. This acknowledges your completion of training and return to your daily activities.

c) Clothing

All students wear a **white gi**. Initially, new students can train in a track suit or loose clothing. Be sure they fully cover arms and legs and allow easy movement. Jeans should not be worn – they restrict movement.

The type of gi worn is a personal preference – many wear the heavy reinforced, judo jacket, year round. Some wear the lightweight karate jacket in summer. Talk about the options available with your instructor or senior students before purchasing a gi.

Student safety during training necessitates **removal of all jewellery**. All ear rings, body piercings, necklaces, bangles, watches or rings should be removed before training. If a ring cannot be removed, it should be taped over. Chewing gum is prohibited.

Spectacles – plastic and/or sports glasses/contact lenses should be used. Spectacles made of glass pose a hazard to all students. Ask your instructor for advice if required.

There is only one visible distinguishing mark of rank – All kyu grades wear a white belt; all dan grades (yudansha) wear a black belt. The dark skirt or hakama is always worn at yudansha level. It is optional for women to wear a hakama at an earlier level, however, in Victoria, this practice is not customary. Junior students (under 16 years) wear coloured belts.

d) Health Issue or Existing Conditions / Hygiene

Let your instructor know any health issues or existing conditions which may impact upon your ability to train.

At all times, only clean bare feet are allowed on the mat. Wear footwear such as thongs when walking to/from the mat. Leave them at the outside edge of the mat facing outwards.

Fingernails need to be kept short.

Long hair needs to be restrained.

e) Titles in Aikido

The Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, is called O-Sensei (Great Teacher)

The Founder of Aiki Kai Australia, Seiichi Sugano, is called Sensei at all times and also holds the title of Shihan.

Sensei is used to show respect to someone who is instructing a class. To speak directly to the instructor while on the mat, use the word sensei –“Thank you Sensei”; “excuse me, sensei” etc. The honorific of sensei is added after the person’s name when using it in the third person. Sugano Sensei has directed that Yondans (fourth dan) and above should, both on and off the mat, be referred to by students as “sensei”. Initially, it may be difficult to identify these senior students. There are not too many of them so just follow the lead of your seniors in the class.

Shihan is, literally, a teacher of teachers. The honorific Shihan can be used before or after the person’s name and generally, only in the third person. It is not used to address the person directly, as is the title Sensei. Currently there are only three Shihans resident in Australia.

f) Body Language. Most cultures have body language etiquette and martial arts are no exception. So be aware during training and avoid:

- Standing with hands on hips or arms crossed in front of you. Both are considered aggressive and challenging.
- Sitting on the mat with your legs outstretched, soles of feet pointed at O'Sensei .
- Sitting on the mat with your back to O'Sensei – both are considered very rude.
- Leaning against the walls.
- Sitting on chairs or stools in the dojo unless injured.

ORDER OF TRAINING

Arrive on the mat changed and ready to train at least 5-10 minutes before the start of class. Take this time to help lay the mats if required, do warm-up exercises on your own, practise quietly with others, or talk quietly with other students.

The class may begin with the **instructor** clapping for student attention and/or sitting in seiza in front of the kamiza, facing the students. Immediately, **students** sit in seiza in one line at the edge of the mat opposite the kamiza. All together, the class follows the bowing process. At this stage, the bow to the instructor is accompanied by the Japanese phrase “*One-gaishimasu*” pronounced “*oh-nay-guy-shee-muss*” and means, *literally* “Please show me your favour”.

To get on the mat if you are late and class is in progress,

- Sit in seiza at the edge of the mat
- Bow to the kamiza and wait for a bow/acknowledgement from the instructor
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Observe the instructor who will demonstrate an aspect with a selected student. There may be some, a little or no explanation. Observe the instructor's movement carefully as you will be expected to reproduce them in practice. Often there will be a variation between what was demonstrated and what you are able to reproduce. **Simply do your best** to repeat the demonstration. Part of your journey is to learn effective observation - it just takes time and practice!

Practice what was demonstrated. The more senior student will execute the technique first. That is, the junior student will attack first and receive the technique. Even in groups, the training order remains from senior graded student to the junior graded student in both executing the technique (nage) and receiving the technique (uke). This will allow you to observe others doing the technique before it is your turn. Watch each execution carefully.

To indicate discomfort or pain, uke slaps/taps the mat or body. On hearing/feeling the slap/tap, the nage must immediately disengage the technique.

When the instructor halts practice, usually with a clap, stop what you are doing immediately; return to the line up on the edge of the mat; be seated either in seiza or crossed legged; and attentive to the instructor. Please do not keep the rest of the class waiting for you.

End of class is indicated by the instructor. Return to the line up at the edge of the mat, sit in seiza and in unison the class will bow to O'Sensei and then the teacher. At that stage, the bow to the teacher is accompanied by the Japanese phrase *Domo Arigato Gozaimashit*, pronounced as “*Domo-aree-gahto-gozai-muss*”, meaning “Thank

you, thank you very much”. Finally, when you stand, everyone goes along in a line and thanks each person for training, generally, for training with you.

CONTACTS AND OTHER INFORMATION

Area Representative for Victoria is:

Linda Godfrey
0418 391 674
9802 7211 (AH)
Linda.godfrey@iinet.net.au

Aikido Victoria takes issues of equal opportunity, discrimination and harassment seriously and has established a process to deal with complaints.

For further details contact Adrienne Cleaver (0403 527 793) or Bill Birnbauer (0412 956 741).