

Grass Valley Aikikai Customs and Etiquette

The underlying philosophy of Aikido is deeply rooted in the customs and etiquette practiced in the dojo. Correct etiquette promotes a meditative atmosphere and is based on the martial principle of respect. The dojo is a family or community of friends and an attitude of caring and friendliness is expected of Grass Valley Aikikai members. There are many rules of behavior derived from Japanese culture that are gradually learned as one's training progresses.

Attendance

Regular attendance is expected. Traditionally Aikido is practiced on a daily basis. The development of skill is time-dependent. While beginners often find a twice-weekly pattern is best as their bodies adapt to new patterns of movement, students should try to attend as many classes as they are able.

Traditionally dues are not considered a fee for service, but represent membership in a club. Therefore, unless you apply for an official leave of absence, payment is expected regardless of how many classes are taken.

It is expected that each student keep in touch with the chief instructor. If you cannot attend class, please notify the chief instructor (530-274-1453 voice or text) or email (whitecloud24601@gmail.com). It is not necessary to give a reason. If you cannot call in advance, please call, text, or email as soon afterward as possible. This is a gesture of respect and is part of training. Keeping in close contact with the teacher encourages the development of the student-teacher relationship which is the basis of Aikido transmission. As time goes by, please let the chief instructor know if you plan to be away, or if you are ill. Be sure to report injuries immediately. If you are unable to be at the dojo, a good rule of thumb is to make contact once a week, unless you have made a different arrangement. If you should decide to stop training altogether, it would be very polite and a kindness to let us know.

Dojo Maintenance

“Cleaning practice” is a form of “misogi” (purification) and is as important a part of training as the training done during class. Student responsibilities include sweeping, dusting, cleaning and maintaining the mat, providing fresh flowers, vacuuming the carpets, cleaning the bathroom, washing the windows and mirrors, general tidying up, and emptying the trash. In addition, regularly scheduled dojo cleanups provide an opportunity for more thorough cleaning.

Forms of Address

The word “Sensei” is a title. It translates as teacher, however doctors and other specialists are also called Sensei. The literal translation is “born before”. It follows the last name, as in “Ramos Sensei”. “Sempai” is not really a title, but sometimes it is used like one, for example, “Marci Sempai”. Sempai means senior.

Bowing

Bowing is a gesture of respect. It is not a gesture of worship or prayer. Learning when, where, and how to bow seems complicated at first, but new students will pick it up by copying the senior students.

A standing bow is made when entering the dojo as you come through the door. This shows respect for the dojo, and symbolizes leaving the cares of the outside world behind. The hands should be either at the sides, or palm to palm. After bowing greet everyone briefly in a firm voice. After that, try to be silent, or speak in quiet tones.

To cross the mat to get to the dressing rooms, make a standing bow at the edge of the mat by the wall, then walk across to the doorway to the back room. Bow again before stepping off the mat. After changing, step onto the mat and make a standing bow, or kneel and perform a sitting bow by placing the left hand down first, then the right. If you are late, wait in seiza (sitting on one’s knees) just off the mat until the instructor acknowledges you with a nod. Return the bow, then come onto the mat, perform a seated bow, and join the class.

After coming onto the mat before class you may stretch or move about. Keep conversation quiet. Just before class is due to start, line up in seiza. The instructor enters and all bow together to the kamiza (the altar at the front). The instructor then turns to the class and all bow, saying, “onegaishimasu” (let’s practice or let’s begin).

After the instructor presents a technique, bow. Then bow to a person nearby, again saying onegaishimasu. Juniors should move quickly to bow to the seniors. When the instructor claps to end a practice period, quickly perform a sitting bow to your partner, saying, “thank you”, and quickly return to the line. If the instructor interrupts you during training to give a correction, make a sitting bow afterward. (If the instructor merely calls out to you with an instruction, it is not necessary to bow.) If the instructor demonstrates informally during practice it is customary for the surrounding students to sit in seiza and watch. Then, of course, everyone watching bows when the demonstration is over.

At the end of class, face away from the kamiza and straighten your uniform. Then line up in seiza. The instructor and the class bow together to the kamiza, then the instructor turns and all bow, saying, “domo arigato gozaimashita” (thank you very much). After the instructor leaves the mat all the students bow together to the kamiza, then each student makes a separate seated bow to each partner with whom they have trained, thanking each by name. When leaving the mat, make a standing bow. When leaving the dojo make a standing bow at the door. When in doubt, bow.