

# Belfast Aikido, affiliated to the Irish Aikido Circle

## Aikido in our Dojo

We want to practice in a safe and clean environment. To this end, tidy up the *dojo* and help to clean the *tatami* on a regular basis. Look after your personal hygiene, mind that the nails of your hands and feet are short and clean, do not come to practice when you are ill or otherwise indisposed.

Following proper etiquette demonstrates an understanding of martial arts and your willingness to subjugate your own ego to “the way”. Bowing (*rei*) is a symbol of appreciation and respect, of O-Sensei, the dojo, the instructor and the other practitioners. Proper etiquette aids to drop all preoccupation brought into the dojo and to focus our concentration on learning effectively and to avoid injury to yourself and others.

Competition (in any form) is not part of Aikido; trying to win, bragging about one’s power or ability or looking down on other students is not Aikido. The aim of Aikido is to become a better person and to perfect the techniques you are being taught.

During class, when the instructor demonstrates a technique, sit quietly and attentively in *seiza*. After the demonstration bow to the instructor, then to a partner and immediately begin to practice.

You are welcome to bring guests to the dojo, please introduce them to the instructor before class. These should sit quietly in the reception area and not disturb the running of the class (e.g., by asking questions during lessons or talking to the practitioners on the mats).

## Visiting other Aikido Dojos

Other Aikido groups have different traditions and opinions; many can be more formal in running their classes. Whenever you want to visit another dojo, contact the head instructor well in advance (often possible by e-mail) and ask for permission to visit their dojo and practice with them. When you arrive at the dojo, introduce yourself and ask a more experienced student (better not the instructor) about the way the dojo and the classes are run. E.g., it is possible that

- The instructor needs to be addressed as *sensei*;
- The students need to sit in a row according to their rank (with the highest one to the right);
- The students need to be seated before *sensei* enters the *dojo* and stay seated at the end of class until *sensei* has left the *tatami*;
- *Hakama* should only be worn by *yudansha*;
- You should not call *sensei* over when you have a question but wait until they come or walk over to them if necessary.

Other rules may apply so behave politely especially as you are only a guest.

## Dojo Etiquette

### Before the Class

- When entering the *dojo*, bow to the training hall and remove your shoes. Leave anything unnecessary (like food and drink) in the reception area and go to the changing rooms.
- Before you step on the mats, check if you are wearing your *keigogi* and your *obi* in the correct way. If you don't know what the correct way is, ask someone who knows. Ensure you are not wearing any jewellery and if you have long hair, tie it up to the back of your head.
- If you wear *zori* off the mats, leave them at the edge of the mats; each time you step on the mats, bow towards the *shomen* where the portrait of O-Sensei is placed.
- Before the class starts, sit in *seiza* in a proper line next to the other students and wait for the instructor to begin the class.
- It is helpful to arrive in good time so that you can relax from the distractions of the world outside the *dojo*.

### On the Mats

- When the class starts, stay seated on your knees, butt on the heels (*seiza*). Then place, while bending over, first your left hand followed by your right hand in front of you on the *tatami*. Place your hands in a way so that a triangle is made between your thumbs and pointing fingers.
- First everyone greets the portrait of O-Sensei by bowing in *seiza*. Secondly, everyone greets the instructor by bowing in *seiza* and saying the words: "**Onegai shimasu**" (meaning: "Let us practise together"). Then the lesson proceeds with the warming up.
- Before your partner and you start an exercise, you greet each other by bowing. After changing partners, or when the instructor points certain things out or demonstrates something, greet by bowing a second time when he is done. Be careful that you wear your *keigogi* and your *obi* in a correct manor during the lesson. After an exercise is finished, bow again to your partner and return to the line to sit in *seiza*.
- The best way to learn in an Aikido class is to watch and to listen. Avoid unnecessary talking and do not correct others when practising. When some technique is unclear, ask the instructor to explain it to you again. The best way to help your partner is by practicing diligently and taking good *ukemi*.
- If you need to leave the mat for any reason before the end of the class, you must ask the instructor for permission and again when you return to the mat. Remember to bow when entering or leaving the *tatami*.
- Never eat or drink while on the mats!
- If you are late for class, get changed, step on the mats as usual and wait until the instructor invites you to join the class.

### At the End of Class

- When the instructor indicates the end of class, all students go sit in a row in *seiza*, as at the beginning of the lesson. Now first, following the instructor, greet the portrait of O-Sensei. Next bow to the instructor. When doing this, you say: "**Domo arigato gozaimashita**". This means that you thank him or her for the lesson (in a most polite form).
- Before you step off the *tatami*, you walk to the corner of the *tatami* and greet the portrait of O-Sensei another time. When leaving the dojo you bow to the portrait of O-Sensei one last time.