

# **Aikidojo Members Guide.**

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Welcome to the dojo! You have also inadvertently just joined a world -wide fellowship of aikidoka's practicing this art. One of the many gifts Aikido bestows is this wider network where you are welcome, both on and off the mat, in all parts of the world where Aikido is practiced.

At first this practice looks confusing. The Japanese terminology, the rolling, the techniques which all look similar but different at the same time, the unexpected problem of figuring out which side is right and left!

But Aikido is actually quite simple (that doesn't mean easy!) so this introductory guide is meant to give some orientation and hopefully help with the initially somewhat confusing period before one finds one's bearings and starts to see the simplicity embedded within all the apparent complexity of Aikido practice.

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The style or line of Aikido that is taught in this school is known as **Takemusu Aikido** and is a traditional form of Aikido that was passed on from **O Sensei** (Morihei Ueshiba, 1883 - 1969, the Founder of Aikido) to the late **Morihiro Saito Sensei** (1928 -2002). He was a personal disciple of **O Sensei**, the founder of Aikido, for over 23 years and took over his dojo in **Iwama Japan** after his death, considering it his duty to preserve and pass on the the Founders original source techniques in as pure a form as possible.

Takemusu Aikido can be characterized and differentiated from other schools and styles of Aikido by it's clear emphasis on the following three areas:

- Emphasis on basic training and a clear distinction between basic and more advanced levels of technique and practice
- The integration of empty handed practice and weapons training into a single system
- Aikido as a martial art (Budo)

**Takemusu Aikido.**

The Japanese word **ai-ki-do** can be translated roughly as 'harmonizing - energy - way', or 'way of harmonizing with the energy' of another or of the universe in general. Each of these terms emphasizes aspects of a certain fundamental perspective:

1. **Ai. Harmonizing**, understood as overcoming a situation of conflict. Aikido goes beyond winning or losing and seeks *resolution*.
2. **Ki. Energy**. That our real nature is fundamentally open, energetic and fluid and that whatever we do or say (form) is an outcome of this level (no-form).
3. **Do. Way**. That the practice is more than learning a new set of choreographed movements but involves a new understanding with regard to conflict and by extension, to life itself.

**Takemusu** was a term the founder of Aikido used often to characterize his Aikido and can approximately be translated as '*source of divine technique*'.

A key word here is '*source*'. In training we practice pre-arranged techniques (waza) but eventually the point is to have access to their source of inspiration and execute them spontaneously and creatively without thinking.

The 'way' (**do**) is to 'harmonize' with the formlessness of circumstances (energy) and allow our actions to be lovingly commensurate with that reality, and not separate from it. Our actions will then be spontaneous and appropriate. To attain this ability under all conditions and particularly under conditions of stress (combat) is the ideal and goal of Aikido. In regular practice we learn known technique but the mature application of technique will be unknown, unique and spontaneously appropriate. This is my understanding of the meaning of *Takemusu Aiki*.

What does the term '**Budo**' mean? Roughly it can be translated as '*martial way*' and is a term for the modern descendants of the traditional martial arts of Japan.

The first character '*Bu*' (martial) is composed in Japanese of two sub characters: '*to stop*' and '*halberd*' (or *spear*). Thus the ideal of a martial art or Budo, is that it *stops* fighting. This does not mean that we cannot fight, but that in practicing Aikido as a Budo, the ethical choice is to contain conflict and resolve it through reconciliation where at all possible. Physical confrontation where the techniques are actually used is always an absolute last resort.

Here is a traditional story from the Japanese martial traditions that illustrates this important point:

*Among Bokuden Tsukahara's students (a famous 16th century sword master) there was a man of extraordinary technical skill. While walking down the street, this disciple passed a skittish horse that suddenly kicked at him, but he deftly turned his body to avoid the kick and escaped injury. Bystanders who witnessed the event said, "He well deserves being called one of Bokuden's top disciples. Bokuden will surely pass his secrets on to him, if to no one else".*

*But when Bokuden heard of the incident he was disappointed and said, "I've misjudged him", then expelled the student from the school.*

*People could not understand Bokuden's reasoning and decided that nothing could be done but observe how Bokuden himself would behave in similar circumstances.*

*In order to do this, they hitched an exceedingly ill-tempered horse to a wagon on a road which they knew Bokuden would pass. Secretly watching him from a distance, they were surprised to see Bokuden give the horse a wide berth by crossing to the far side of the road.*

*They were caught off guard at this unexpected outcome, and later, confessing their ruse, they asked the reason for Bokuden's dismissal of the disciple.*

*Bokuden replied, "A person with a mental attitude that allows him to walk carelessly by a horse without considering that it may rear up is a lost cause no matter how much he may study technique. I thought he was a person of better judgement, but I was mistaken".*

*(Quoted from: The Twenty Guiding Principles of Karate. Gichin Funakoshi).*

While I was training in karate under the late Keinosuke Enoda Sensei (9th Dan Shotokan) he once remarked (fully in line with the above traditional story) that as far as self defence and Karate was concerned, 90% of self defence was *zanshin*.

**Zanshin** can be translated as '*remaining mind or awareness*' and is the open and ongoing awareness that we retain while going about our business in the world. It is the awareness that Bokuden demonstrated so beautifully as he walked down the street and avoided the horse.

In training while engaging our partner we should cultivate this broader awareness by remaining aware of the space around us. In training with our partners we train with everyone around us as well.

The paradox of training in a Budo such as Aikido, is that the deeper our understanding and skill in the techniques of the art, the less likely we will ever have to use them outside of the dojo.

## Etiquette.

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The etiquette in Aikido is at first quite alien for westerner's. Some of us feel awkward at first with all the bowing, but what is the meaning and intention behind the rituals of the Dojo?

On the mat we take turns attacking our partner allowing him to practice the techniques against us and in turn he attacks us and we practice the same techniques. In effect we practice taking turns putting each other under pressure so that we can practice non-resistance and harmonization. The techniques are martial techniques whose intent is to neutralize rather than damage an attacker. However these same techniques if done with aggressive intent or carelessly can cause much serious pain or injury. Therefore it is of primary importance that the training be carried out in an atmosphere of *attention, trust and respect* for each other.

There are three bows:

1. To the shomen (traditionally a photo of the founder at the head of the Dojo) at the beginning and end of the class where we acknowledge the tradition, lineage and teachers who have come before us. Teacher and students together bow to and acknowledge the lineage.
2. Teacher and students bow to each other.
3. Students bow to each other.

Two expressions (in Japanese) mark the bows:

- At the opening of practice: **ONEGAESHIMASU.** (*I ask a favour...*)
- At the close of practice: **DOMOARIGATOGOZAIMASHITA.** (*Thank you very much - for the practice*).

The essence of etiquette is about respectfully paying *attention* to what you are doing and this attitude both informs the training and supports it. A dojo without this element cannot be called a Dojo as such.

## The Dojo.

This translates as 'way - place' or 'place where the way is practiced'. The Japanese understanding is that a *dojo* is a sacred space, hence before and after class the space is swept and at all times is treated with attention and care. The etiquette and attention we extend to the training and our partners is further extended to the place we train in.

**- Falling practice (*ukemi*).**

Actually the art of receiving. When receiving an attack we receive it and redirect it's power into our technique and as attacker when receiving the technique we yield and follow responsively as we seek to maintain our balance and integrity. Ukemi is thus much more than just falling practice but forms the basis for being able to blend and harmonize beyond resistance with any destabilizing force.

In practice we begin developing this ability to receive with *falling and rolling* practice. Here we encounter resistance to gravity with our tendency to stiffen up as we lose our balance. This implies that as we lose our balance we also lose our ability to respond flexibly to a situation. In martial arts under stress or attack it is essentially our center and sense of balance that is assaulted but in order to be able to execute an aikido technique it is at this moment that responsiveness instead of reactivity is critical. The reaction of holding on and trying to stay where we are needs to become the response to flow and change our position without struggling. Confronting our reactivity through conscious practice is the only way to effect this change from *reactivity to responsiveness*. So there is much more to falling practice in Aikido than meets the eye!

**- Ritualized technical practice (*kata*) and free style practice (*jiyu waza*).**

We begin learning aikido through the ritualized agreement of set techniques (**kata**) where the roles of attacker and defender are decided beforehand. This is an agreement where the attacker (**uke**) provides pressure in a controlled way allowing for the defender (**nage**) to practice harmonization through the execution of technique.

We learn aikido through developing technical ability but aikido itself is not limited by these techniques (ie Takemusu Aikido). Aikido is bigger than it's techniques.

Another aspect of this way of training is that it is a collaborative effort between uke and nage to *help each other learn*. There is no competition in Aikido. It should not practiced in the spirit of defeating or being better than the other.

When I as uke, attack nage, the power and speed of my attack should be measured to nage's ability to receive and execute a technique. Too little and he is not challenged to stretch himself or his ability, too much and he is overwhelmed. Hence it is understood in Aikido that the role of uke is actually the more difficult one and traditionally the senior takes that role in leading the tempo and level of the practice.

Free style practice is where both the attack and the technical response are free and undecided beforehand. This is advanced practice.

Between these two levels: fixed decided practice and free undecided practice there exist various gradations of accessibility. The issues here are of progressively 'letting go' of what we know so as to be free and uncontrolled by it. We learn skill and then in order to be able to use it freely we must 'forget' it.

**- Weapon training (*bukiwaza*).**

In this style of Aikido weapon training is essential. The basic footwork, hipwork and handwork of empty handed techniques are rooted in sword work. The underlying principles

underlying both training with weapons and without are the same and mutually reinforce each other. Weapons and empty handed technique are one system, not two.

Weapon training offers the following primary benefits:

- solo training without a partner where we can focus on all the **basic body-use principles** separate from the *principles of relating* with a partner.
- expanded sense of **extension** from joining with and amplifying one's sense of reach through the weapon.
- a strong focus on **self control and precision** (armour is not used in weapon partner practice).
- clearer and more acute sensitivity to issues around **timing and distance** (*ma-ai*).

Weapon training in general gives a greater understanding of the dynamics of empty handed techniques that they are the root of while at the same time allowing for a 'sharpening' in terms of precision and intent of those same techniques.

### **The technical structure of Aikido.**

The techniques of Aikido (waza) are divided into three main branches:

- **bukiwaza** (*weapon techniques*)
- **bukidori** (*weapon-taking techniques*)
- **taijutsu** (*empty handed techniques*)

There are hundreds of techniques and variations in Aikido but within that variety there is a **core of techniques** which before black belt should constitute 90% of the focus. **Skill in this core area of technique is the essential foundation for all other areas of practice** and it is this core of techniques that I will be covering below. *Weapon taking* I will be leaving out for the moment.

In essence at the **core level**:

- The **weapons** focus on the basic ways of handling the weapons with additional simple partner blending exercises.
- The **attacks** in empty handed training are 6 grabs and 3 strikes.
- The **empty handed** core waza are three very important exercises plus three immobilizations and three projections.
- The **directions** are 2: front and back (where applicable)
- The **levels** are two: static (kihon) and flowing (nagare).

Combinations of the above (**attack - technique - direction - level**) constitute the techniques practiced in class.

**taijutsu**

**3 basic exercises:**

tai no henko (emphasis on blending)  
morote dori kokyu ho (emphasis on blending + kokyu)  
suwari waza kokyu ho (emphasis on blending + kokyu + center)

**attacks:** *(6 ways of being held):*  
katate dori / ryote dori / morote dori / mune dori / kata dori / ryokata dori

*(3 ways of being struck):*  
tsuki / yokomen uchi / shomen uchi

**techniques osae waza** (immobilization techniques):

1. ikkyo (1st pinning technique)
2. nikkyo (2nd pinning technique)
3. sankyo (3rd pinning technique)

**techniques nage waza** (projection techniques):

4. kote gaeshi (wrist turn throw)
5. shiho nage (4 direction throw)
6. irimi nage (entering throw)

**directions:** omote (across the front)  
ura (around the back)

**levels:** *solid* (kihon) / *flowing* (nagare)

**bukiwaza.**

**ken** 7 ken suburi  
happo giri

migi/ hidari awase + variations  
go / shichi awase + variations

**jo** 20 jo suburi:

5 tsuki suburi  
5 shomen suburi  
3 katate suburi  
5 hasso suburi  
2 flowing suburi

6 count kata + awase

31 Jo kata

basic blending exercises from tsuki

**Terminology for naming techniques in Japanese** (see appendix 1)

In Japanese, the full term for a technique is descriptive as follows:

***attack - technique - direction - level***

as an example: *katate dori - ikkyo -omote waza -kihon*

*katate dori* is the attack: one handed grab to the wrist  
*ikkyo* is the technique (1st pinning technique)  
*omote* is the direction, in this case to the front  
*waza* means technique  
*kihon* is the level (basic)

another example: *ryote dori - shiho nage- ura waza -ki no nagare*

*ryote dori* is the attack: two handed grip to both wrists  
*shiho nage* is the technique (4 directions throw)  
*ura waza* is the variation (back)  
*ki no nagare* is the level (flowing)

***Don't worry too much about this!*** In class the instructor should repeat the names of the techniques every time he performs them at first and as they are repeated often, eventually they are learned naturally without having to study them separately.

**The ranks and the grading syllabus.**

Please go to the website ([traditionalaikido.eu](http://traditionalaikido.eu)) under **articles** for the **grading syllabus and ranks in Aikido** for the syllabus and explanation as to their purpose and rationale.

**Guidelines for training in the Dojo.**

***The absolute basics.***

1. remove all articles of jewelry  
keep your gi (training suit) clean  
keep hand and toe nails short
2. be in time and help with the cleaning of the dojo both before and after training
3. pay membership dues on time and notify the instructor if planning to be absent from training for any extended period of time
4. follow the teachers instructions carefully and keep talking to a minimum at all times

***Some directions on 'learning'.***

1. Cultivate 'beginners mind' (shoshin).

*In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few.  
(Shunryu Suzuki)*

2. Practice regularly.

*Learning through practice is like pushing a cart up a hill:  
if you slack off, it will slip backwards.  
(Japanese Proverb)*

3. Take responsibility for your own training and learning and never accept or believe anything without critically examining it against your own common sense and experience (and don't forget to ruthlessly question these as well!).

*Instructors can impart only a fraction of the teaching. It is through your own devoted practice that the mysteries of Aikido are brought to life.  
(Morihei Ueshiba)*

4. See the principles and essence of Aikido as universal and in the world around you and this will gradually close the gap between practice in the Dojo and it's application in the greater Dojo of everyday life.

*Study the teachings of the pine tree, the bamboo, and the plum blossom.  
The pine is evergreen, firmly rooted, and venerable.  
The bamboo is strong, resilient, unbreakable.  
The plum blossom is hardy, fragrant, and elegant.  
(Morihei Ueshiba)*

*Appendix 1 Glossary of Japanese terms used commonly in Aikido.*

AIKIDO	The Way of harmony
- AI	Harmony, to join with
- KI	Life force of energy
- DO	The Way
AWASE	The blend with, join with
ATEMI	Strikes to vital points
BUKI WAZA	Weapon techniques
- BOKKEN	Wooden sword
- JO	Wooden staff
- TANTO	Wooden knife
DOJO	Place of the way. Training hall
HANMI	triangular foot position which exposes half the body to an while minimizing one's vulnerable points
IRIMI / TENKAN	Irimi: entering, to take the initiative (yang) Tenkan: to turn leading the initiative of the other (yin)
KATA	Set technical form
KEIKO	Training, physical, mental and emotional
KIHON WAZA	Basic techniques
KI NO NAGARE	Flowing of energy techniques
KI MUSUBI	'energetic' binding with one's partner
KOKYU	breath power
MA-AI	distance-timing
NAGE	The executor of the techniques
OMOTE	Front
REIGI	Dojo etiquette.
SEIZA	formal sitting posture
SHOMEN	The head of the dojo where the photo of Osensei is situated
SHOSHIN	'beginner mind'
SUBURI	individual movement solo exercises with weapons

TAI SABAKI	body movement
UKE	the attacker
UKEMI	receiving (falling, rolling)
URA	back, to the rear
WAZA	Technique
ZANSHIN	'remaining / residual / peripheral awareness'
ZAZEN	sitting meditation : centering in Being through complete and unconditional non resistance to the contents of one's immediate and ongoing experience

### Numbers in Japanese

1 ichi	11 ju-ichi	20 ni-ju	31 san-ju-ichi
2 ni	12 ju-ni	30 san-ju	
3 san			
4 shi, yon			
5 go			
6 roku			
7 shichi			
8 hachi			
9 ku			
10 ju			

### Different levels of practice

KIHON WAZA	basic techniques
YAWARAKAI WAZA	soft/smooth technique
NAGARE WAZA	flowing technique
KI NO NAGARE	'flow of energy' techniques

### Different types of practice

SUWARI WAZA	techniques performed from seiza
HANMI HANDACHI WAZA	techniques performed from seiza where uke is standing
TACHIWAZA	techniques performed from standing
USHIRO WAZA	techniques performed against attacks to the rear
OYO WAZA	applied techniques (techniques against specific attacks)
JYU WAZA	freely executed techniques without agreement
NIDAN WAZA	second applied technique when the first fails or is blocked
NININ DORI	techniques applied against two attackers
KAESHI WAZA	counter techniques against Aikido techniques
TACHIDORI	techniques for disarming an attacker of a wooden sword
JODORI	techniques for disarming an attacker of a Jo
TANTODORI	techniques for disarming an attacker of a knife
JO MOCHI NAGE	techniques where uke is thrown with the Jo that he attempts to take from nage
KUMITACHI	advanced wooden sword partner kata
KUMIJO	advanced staff partner kata
KENTAIJO	advanced partner practice of ken against Jo

**20 Jo suburi.**

**5 thrusts (*basic; included in 31 kata kumijo*)**

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. choku tsuki             | direct thrust                           |
| 2. kaeshi tsuki            | reverse thrust                          |
| 3. ushiro tsuki            | rear thrust                             |
| 4. tsuki gedan gaeshi      | thrust, pull back low and sweep to knee |
| 5. tsuki jodan gaeshi uchi | thrust withdraw above head and strike   |

**5 strikes (*basic; included in 31 kata kumijo*)**

- |                                |                                     |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 6. shomen uchi komi            | strike                              |
| 7. renzoku uchi komi           | consecutive right and left striking |
| 8. men uchi gedan gaeshi       | strike pull back sweep knee         |
| 9. men uchi ushiro tsuki       | strike rear thrust                  |
| 10. gyaku yokomen ushiro tsuki | reverse strike rear thrust          |

**3 one-handed (*advanced; included in 10 kumijo*)**

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 11. katate toma uchi               | one handed long high to low sweep strike    |
| 12. katate gedan gaeshi            | one handed low to high sweep strike         |
| 13. katate hachi no ji gaeshi uchi | one handed figure eight double sweep strike |

**5 figure eights (*advanced; included in 13 kata awase and 7 kentaijo*)**

- |                               |                       |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 14. hasso gaeshi uchi         | figure-eight sweep    |
| 15. hasso gaesi tsuki         | + strike              |
| 16. hasso gaeshi ushiro tsuki | +thrust               |
| 17. hasso gaeshi ushiro uchi  | + rear strike low     |
| 18. hasso gaeshi ushiro barai | + rear clearing sweep |

**2 flowing movements with 180 direction change (*advanced; 13 kata awase*)**

- |                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 19. hidari nagare gaeshi uchi | left flowing strike with 180 change of direction  |
| 20. migi nagare gaeshi tsuki  | right flowing thrust with 180 change of direction |

**7 Ken suburi.**

First suburi. One move.

Second suburi. Two moves.

Third suburi. Three moves.

Fourth suburi. Consecutive straight shomen cuts. Stepping practice.

Fifth suburi. Consecutive circular yokomen cuts. Stepping practice.

Sixth suburi. Consecutive cutting and thrusting on same side.

Seventh suburi. Consecutive cutting on right thrusting on left side.

**Appendix 3: recommended resources.**

***Aikido:***

**Saito Morihiro. Traditional Aikido. vols 1-5.** *The essential texts for this style of Aikido.*

**Saito Morihiro. DVD. The lost seminars, part 2.** Aikijournal.

**WWW: youtube.** *The internet is overflowing with material but there is a good selection of clips of Saito Sensei's Aikido old and new if you do a search under his name.*

**Ethan Weisgard. Aikiken and Aikijo,** two volumes. *The most complete modern exposition of the weapon curriculum.*

**Hoa Newens. Aikido Curriculum. DVD set vols 1-4.** *Volumes 1-2 on the weapons are a bit weak but vols 3-4 are outstanding.*

***Aikido related:***

**Peter Ralston.**

**Zen body being.** *(Read this first, it is an introductory text to the below ).*

**The Principles of effortless power.** *The best book on Internal martial arts I have ever read.*

**Cheng Hsin t'ui shou: The art of effortless power.** *The techniques.*

**Herman Kauz.** *Books on Martial arts in a larger context. Very accessible.*

**The Martial Spirit.**

**A Path to Liberation.**

**Tim Cartmell. Effortless combat throws.** *Excellent and straightforward exposition of the Principles of Martial arts plus techniques.*

***Meditation:***

*I could recommend many books and authors here, but I will just stay with my top 3:*

**Nisargadatta Maharaj. I Am That.**

**Eckhart Tolle. The Power of Now.**

**Adyashanti. True Meditation.**

