

# Dojo Etiquette

Proper dojo etiquette is one of the essential aspects of martial arts training, not just in our style but in every other kind of Asian martial arts as well. Etiquette is the way of showing respect to fellow students, to the dojo, to the sensei, and to all the other senseis throughout history whose dedication and skills have been passed down to us as the art we now study.

More importantly, demonstrating proper etiquette is really for ourselves, a small symbol of our efforts at self-mastery and our pride in being an active participant in something so fascinating and enjoyable as martial arts.

In any dojo, one of the most important rules of etiquette is behavior.

Since by nature we all learn by trial and error, many things will be forgiven in a dojo, but bad behavior is not one of them. This rule applies to every student regardless of their rank, in fact the higher the rank, the less tolerance there is for any breach of etiquette. Starting with the "sensei" or "teacher" down through the "sempai's" or "assistants" in the black belt ranks, and then finally through the "kyu" or colored belt ranks. It is the responsibility of each student to make sure that those who follow in their foot steps do so with the highest possible level of personal behavior.

## **Personal Appearance:**

Wear a clean (gi) uniform (allowing the belt to remain increasingly soiled and worn is an option sometimes chosen to show one's long, hard work).

Keep fingernails and toenails trimmed short (for safety reasons).

Take off all jewelry, watches, rings, necklaces, earrings, etc., before class begins. Glasses may be worn during standards classes but not during fight classes unless a protective cover is employed. Glasses are generally forbidden in formal competition. (medical bands are an exception)

Long hair may be tied back with a rubber band or other inconspicuous tie.

## **Prohibitions:**

No eating in the dojo (except during approved social events).

No drinking on the deck.

No profanity in the dojo.

No horseplay in the dojo.

No loud talking, laughing or screaming in the dojo.

No shoes may be worn on the deck.

No playing or socializing on the deck.

Never argue with a referee.

Never speak angrily or tauntingly to an opponent

## **Forms of Address:**

Address your dojo's instructors as Sensei

Address assistant instructors as Sempai (Any senior instructor who is not a full black belt) or Mr./Miss/Mrs. (name).

## **Kneeling and Rising:**

Seiza

The "seiza" or "kneeling position" is used most often at the beginning and the end of each class, or when you are instructed to sit and watch a demonstration of some kind.

To get into the seiza position from a ready stance, bend down on the balls of both feet then first place your left knee on the ground, then your right knee, then sit down and tuck your feet underneath you. Be sure and always keep your back straight and your shoulders relaxed when sitting in seiza and your knees should be aligned with, but not touching, the knees of the person on your right or your left. Rest your open hands comfortably on the upper portion of your thighs with your fingers and thumb together and pointed slightly inward. At no time should the hands touch the floor.

When rising from "seiza" perform the above steps in reverse order with your hands raised in front of you with tight fists. Then stand in a ready position ("heiko dachi").

## **Bowing:**

Standing Bow (Ritsurei)

The standing bow is used to bow into and out of the dojo at the beginning and end of each class, when bowing to another student and to the instructor before performing any form of partner training and before and after a sparring match. Starting from a "heiko dachi" or "ready stance" bring your feet together while at the same time bringing your hands to your sides so you are now in "heisoku dachi" or "informal attention stance". Bend forward at the waist to about 45 degrees without letting your arms move or leave your side, pause for a second, then unbend. The entire bow should take only a few seconds, but it should always be performed with the utmost courtesy and respect.

Bowing in Seiza (Zarei)

To perform a bow from the seiza position first move your left hand from your left thigh and on to the floor about two hand lengths out in front of your left knee with your finger tips pointed inward. Then move your right hand from your right thigh and on to the floor about two hand lengths out in front of your right knee with your finger tips pointed inward so that your right hand is facing your left hand so that your and your index fingers are slightly touching. Now without letting your elbows touch the floor lean forward and bow your head stopping this motion just short of touching the back of both your hands. The bow is done entirely from the waist and since it is a more formal way of bowing you should pause for slightly longer than you do when performing a standing bow. When coming up from the bow

slide your hands back to their starting position in reverse order, that is your right hand first followed by your left hand and then sit up straight in a relaxed posture.

Upon the call of “tashi,” rise according to the above steps in reverse order. Hands should not touch the floor. Movement should be smooth, precise and graceful.

When bowing to a partner always keep your eyes focused on theirs, however, when bowing to your sensei always be sure that your eyes are looking downward.

When told to do so by the sensei/instructor perform a standing bow to an opponent at the beginning and end of a kumite (sparring) match or practice engagement, A handshake following the bow is often beneficial when the match or practice engagement has been a rough or difficult one.

An optional bow may be given to the referee during a match when he awards you a point or when he gives you a warning or penalty.

In kata competition, bow to the judges when stepping up to the edge of the competition area on the deck, then walk to your starting position and bow again.

### **Entering the Dojo or Training Hall**

Upon entering and leaving the dojo/training hall you must always bow in respect to training area. Regardless of how many times you enter or leave the dojo/training hall during the course of your training, you must always bow in respect.

### **Arriving Late**

In a dojo, as is it is in life, it is considered bad manners to be late.

Sometimes, however, this may be unavoidable, in which case you will be required to bow in quietly and then kneel in seiza just to one side of the dojo entrance. If you arrive while everyone else is also kneeling in seiza, do not make any noise what so ever, just wait quietly until the sensei or senior instructor acknowledges you and invites you to join the class. This may not happen right away, and it is important to remember that you must remain kneeling where you are until your are invited in.

Once you are invited to join the class, you must first bow while still kneeling, then get up quickly and join the class by finding a place in the last row unless some other space is indicated to you. This may or may not be your normal place of rank within that particular class.

### **Lining Up**

At the beginning of each class you will hear the most senior student or sensei call, “line up”. Upon hearing this command you must move quickly and quietly to stand in "heisoku dachi" or "informal stance" at your appropriate place of rank within that particular class. Depending on the size of the class you will often find that your place within the rank of students will vary from class to class. This is to be expected since the more senior students there are in a class, the further down the line you will be.

The line up is done in rank order from right to left facing the “front” of the dojo. As a result, you will always have a more senior student to your immediate right. To your immediate left you will then find a student of similar or lesser rank and so on down the line until finally at the end of the line you will find the newest or most junior student in the class. If you are ever required to start a new row due to the number of students ahead of you, be sure to start the row by standing behind the student on the extreme right end of the line in front of you, be sure that the line you start is of the same width as those in front of you, and that you are lined up directly behind the student in front of you.

At the beginning of each class all students will be told to kneel in seiza. The senior student will call a bow “Sensei ni rei”. This done as a sign of deep respect to your sensei without whom there would be no dojo for you to train in and therefore no one who could pass the art on to you. In return the sensei bows to the entire class as a sign of deep respect to the students who come to train, because without students to teach there would be no one for the sensei to pass his or her knowledge on to.

When you are bowing to the sensei you will say “onegaishimas” which roughly translated means “please teach me”.

**Kokyu** – this is the command to take long slow breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. It is important to learn to breath not just with the upper portion of your lungs but also from your lower abdomen or “hara” .Your "hara" is the lowest part of you abdomen and is located approximately three fingers widths below your navel. By learning to breath from here you will develop greater power and speed as your training progresses.

**Mokuso** -This is the command to meditate.

When ”mokuso” is called, close your eyes, lower your gaze, tuck your chin in towards your chest, relax and quietly begin taking long slow breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. It is during this meditative process that you want to “quiet your mind” and to try and rid yourself of all thoughts unrelated to your karate training, you must seek to find an inner sense of peace, or a relaxed state of being, this will help you to stay focused through out the training that is about to begin.

If ”mokuso” is properly used you will over time notice a definite increase in the quality of your techniques.

**Mokuso Yame** -This is the command to stop meditating.

When “mokuso yame” is called open your eyes immediately and sit up straight. When instructed to do so by the sensei quickly rise up by starting with your right foot, then your left foot and stand in "heiko dachi" or "ready stance" with your arms raised in front of you with tight fists and await further instructions.

It is usually at this time that the sensei or a sempai will lead the class in the "dojo kun" or student creed.

The "dojo kun" can best be described as “a verbal affirmation” of certain principles or truths. You must make a point to learn your dojo's creed as soon as possible and when reciting it always try and speak it in unison with the other students, but never so loudly that your own voice stands out from all the rest.

It is important that you believe in what you say, and you must then use this belief to help you do your very best, not only in the training that lies ahead but also in your daily life outside of the dojo.

**The following is our Student Creed:**

*Develop **Confidence** through the appreciation of my own abilities and qualities*  
*Have **Order** in my life so everything is arranged logically and to the highest ethical standards*  
***Respect** others and to believe I am also worthy of being treated well*  
*Have the physical and moral **Endurance** to continue on despite circumstances*

**During Class**

When moving from one area of the dojo to another always do it quickly and quietly. When changing positions in line be sure not to cut through the lines or to pass in front of anyone else, instead go behind and around them.

If the sensei indicates that some or all students should move to the side of the dojo, they should do so and remain standing unless told to sit. If allowed to sit, use only the kneeling or cross-legged positions.

Whenever you watch a demonstration, do so respectfully and silently, without leaning on the walls or doing anything that would distract others. If you have a questions about any of the techniques that are being taught during class never call out, instead always raise you hand and wait to be acknowledged, then ask your question in the politest possible terms.

When training with a partner always be sure and bow properly before you begin and after you finish your training together. This applies every time you change partners regardless of their rank.

Entering or leaving the training area during a class session is permissible only with Sensei's specific permission. Permission should be acknowledged with a bow.

**End of Class**

When your class is at an end and "line up" is called once again, be sure and quickly line up in in the same manner and rank order as you were at the start of your class. Finish as you started, with a positive attitude and a willing desire to always do your best no matter what lies ahead.

When bowing out at the end of class, students will say in unison: "Arigato gozaimashita," ("Thank you for teaching me").

It is very important that the lessons you learn at each class leave the dojo with you. How you use and apply these lessons in your everyday life is up to you, but your progress depends on you remembering them and building upon them.

## **Exiting the Dojo**

When your class is finished be sure that you exit the dojo in the same manner as you entered it by bowing with courtesy and respect.

Once again this is done by standing so you are facing the front wall, be sure that your feet are together, keep your legs straight, keep your arms at your sides with your hands open and facing downward along the seam of your gi and with your fingers and thumb together. Bend forward at the waist to about 45 degrees, with your eyes looking downward and without letting your arms leave your side, pause for a second then unbend. The entire bow should take only a few seconds but it should be performed with the utmost courtesy and respect.

## **Kiai (spirit yell)**

A kiai is not unique to karate, but it is a sound that will be unique to each individual student. This sound does not come from the throat, but instead it originates deep in your abdomen or "tanden" and is usually expressed during the maximum point of attack or defense.

A kiai is a unique, personal vocalization, brought about by a strong emotional feeling.

In martial arts a kiai is most often used at the moment when the students maximum physical and mental powers are required in combination with a specific movement or technique. What is learned over time over the course of one's training is to draw on all of mental and physical energy and focus and release this energy for maximum power and effect at the appropriate moment in performing katas and throughout class. A student should not be afraid to kiai loudly.

The overall tone of a class is often set by the level of spirit in the class, which can often be raised with a strong kiai on a student's part. A student with a strong kiai will often spur others to work harder as well. On the other hand, if the student's spirit is poor, or the kiai is weak, that student may actually bring down the class spirit.

In the end a student's kiai is as unique as the student is. The student should never be embarrassed by what it sounds like. If there is spirit and conviction in the student's actions then the kiai will always be strong.

## **Kata**

A kata is a series of pre-determined defensive and offensive movements and techniques that have been handed down from past masters as a means of helping a student to understand and overcome their personal physical limitations and at the same time helping the student to develop a strong spirit and a peaceful mind.

In the end kata is all about physical and mental control. If students perform katas often enough they will eventually come to understand what this means.

## **READ THIS BEFORE YOU CONSIDER QUITTING...**

The first strategy of many who are faced with a problem is to quit. But a man who suffered such severe burns on his legs that he faced amputation didn't quit. Glenn Cunningham became the most successful distance runner of his time.

And a man with less than one year of formal education didn't quit. Abraham Lincoln became the most revered president in history.

A fragile boy in Scotland, bedridden most of his childhood didn't quit. Robert Louis Stevenson became such a masterful story-teller; your great-grandchildren will cherish his books just as you did.

Now, if you had all three of those strikes against you, nobody would blame you for quitting. But, unless your legs are severely burned and you're so fragile you have to stay in bed and you never graduated from second grade, why don't you turn around and get back to work.

The story of successful people, wherever they may be found is the story of people who don't quit.

It makes you wonder how many people have stopped just short of winning everything they could possibly want – maybe just inches, just one day short of victory.

### **Note to Parents:**

Parents, we need to ask for your help in ensuring your child receives the best martial arts training. To that end, there are a few rules which need to be observed in the dojo. We realize you want your child to perform at his/her best. So do we. You may at times become excited or anxious during certain class events such as sparring drills. These feelings may cause you to want to reach out to your child to help them improve. Although your intentions are good they may actually cause just the opposite.

Therefore, we ask you to please do not call to or talk with your child while class is in session. Should you have an emergency that cannot wait until after class, motion to one of the black belt instructors and speak with them. It is very important for the instructor to have your child's full attention during class.

If you have a problem with the instruction or something that has happened in class please speak with the Sensie directly. We are glad to meet with you and discuss any situation.

Please observe quiet when class is in session. Should you receive a call during class please end the call or take it outside of the dojo

If you drop off your child for class you should pick-up him/her inside the dojo. We will instruct the child not to leave until you arrive. If you are having someone pick-up your child we will need to know this in advance.