

# Aikidosphere

**Nobuyoshi Tamura**

**8th Dan, Shihan**

**Head of Federation Francais d'Aikido et de Budo**

**Aikido - Etiquette and Transmission**

**by Nobuyoshi Tamura, 8th Dan**

**Translation by J.R. David, Aikido de la Montagne and Fiona Blyth, New England Aikikai**

[Editor's Note: We are extremely happy to present the next installment of Tamura Sensei's book Aikido - Etiquette and Transmission. This work, which has been available only in French is here presented first time in English. We are grateful to Tamura Sensei for his permission to produce this version.

Many thanks also go to Stephane Benedetti, 5th Dan, Chief Instructor of Mutokukai Europe Dojo Mirabeau, and student of Tamura Sensei, who translated (from Japanese), edited and published the original version, which was published by Les Editions du Soleil Levant in 1991. Photos courtesy of Aikido - Etiquette and Transmission.]

## **Chapter 9 - Ranks**

History

The judo and Aikido rank called "dan" is written with the Japanese character which signifies "degree" or "step."

One climbs a stairwell step by step. It cannot be ascended or descended in one big step as with an escalator or an elevator.

This single word contains the idea of separation, and it illustrates the method required to achieve a goal. In my opinion, this is why it was chosen to symbolize rank. This grading system is relatively new in the budo world.

Kano Jigoro, the founder of judo, is said to have instituted this system during the Meiji era (1868-1912.) In the older bujutsus, the ranking titles were inka, menkyo, etc. These systems still survive in the bujutsus and classic budo (budoka), still practiced today.

This older system was composed of the following classification:

- shoden
- chuden
- okuden
- menkyo kaiden
- mokuroku, inka (certificates or titles awarded by the traditional schools, which are equivalents of menkyo kaiden)

This system ensured the transmission of the art's secrets to the disciples. The meaning of each classification is as follows:

Shoden: initial transmission, that which is transmitted first.

Chuden: median transmission that ensures one has traveled over half the path.

Okuden: deep transmission of the essential teachings and those with hidden meaning (okugi, higi.)

Menkyo kaiden: certificate or title of one to whom all secrets have been taught without reservation.

The student who had been awarded the rank of menkyo kaiden could be called on to succeed to his master or to found a branch of his master's school.

The two systems of inka or menkyo kaiden (transmission certificates) or dan are each intricately tied to the method of teaching.

The progressive certificate system, which leads from simple to complex techniques, may appear logical. However, from the perspective of bujutsu, which has the power to decide between life and death, the master, who therefore exercises some caution, will not have taught every technique or all of each technique's content at once. This is true even though we are speaking of disciples, since in this system the personality of the student is directly involved in the teaching process.

Over years of teaching, the master can observe his student's technique, attitudes and actions. He then possesses full knowledge to award a degree to the deserving student and to him only (okugi, inka, menkyo kaiden.)

It is worth pondering the fact that kuden (oral transmission), i'shisoden (transmission to one son only) as well as the prohibition on accepting or provoking inter-school challenges all seem to indicate the teachings were not entirely transmitted.

Modern budo is the fruit of a period of peace. This makes it tend towards spiritual and physical evolution as opposed to perfection of technique. Today, every technique is taught from the outset. Nothing actually changes in the techniques aside from an evolution in execution as the trainee refines and transforms himself. The progression is structured so that the mind and the body evolve together. Dan ranks are the milestones of this evolution.

Up until the end of World War II, the Butokukai - the Japanese budo university - awarded teaching ranks and titles. These titles are renshi, kyoshi, hanshi. Dan grades go from first to tenth.

It is worthwhile to dwell a little on what hanshi represents:

1. A minimum rank of fifth dan, a correct social life and a great knowledge of budo are the necessary conditions to obtain the title of kyoshi.
2. After seven years and past the age of sixty, the subsequent rank of hanshi becomes possible. Technical knowledge has then reached perfection. Also, the practitioner is a model to others through an irreproachable social life.
3. The result of actions undertaken to foster budo manifest themselves at all levels.

The title of hanshi is thus the combination of the following elements: technique, spirit, contribution to the discipline.

The justification of the kyu-dan ranking system is to help evaluate the level of one's work as well as its final goal, and each person must find his own place within this system.

Like the steps of a stairwell, dan ranks must be earned one by one with an unending desire for progress. In Japan today these ranks are awarded according to the following three criteria:

1. technique;
2. personality and accomplishments;
3. how much the practitioner devotes back to his art.

Even with perfect technique, a practitioner with an unsettled lifestyle or a troubled nature will not have access to the higher ranks.

On the other hand, a practitioner with less than perfect technique but who demonstrates other great qualities, and who may have rendered great service to his discipline may be awarded a high rank, whether as an honorary rank or a standard one.

Even though honorary ranks may be awarded without any specific mention of its specific character, it is important to keep it in mind. The recipient of such a rank should not make the mistake of considering such an award as something it isn't.

Nowadays some countries, such as France, award ranks at the national level. However, usually each school, federation or chief instructor awards his own ranks.

Today the Aikikai is returning to the ancient tradition of not awarding ranks over 8th dan to living practitioners. It is important to keep in mind that the indicated levels of competence are minimal criteria one must meet. An approximate knowledge of those minima is not sufficient to claim any kind of right to a rank. Chapter 9 – Ranks (continued)

We shall explain the Aikikai rank system below.

Zaidan Hojin Aikikai

## Official instructions regarding ranks

### Article I - General remarks

Ranks range from 1st to 8th dan. They take into account technical ability, experience and services rendered to the discipline.

Ranks are awarded by the Aikido Doshu. Ranks can be awarded by one of two modes: examination or recommendation.

### Article II - Required qualifications

All candidates postulating for a dan rank must comply with the two following requirements:

- be a member of the Aikikai;
- meet the following conditions:
- to apply for a 1st to 4th dan exam, the applicant must meet the conditions expounded in the table (see below)

Dan	Minimum Years of Practice	Minimum Age	Date of Award
1	2 years after beginning	20	
2	2 years after 1st dan		
3	3 years after 2nd dan		in principle, one
4	4 years after 3rd dan		time per year
5	5 years after 4th dan		at Kagamibiraki
6	6 years after 5th dan	33	(New Year's)
7	12 years after 6th dan	45	
8	15 years after 7th dan	60	

- rank recommendation from 1st to 8th: minimum qualification conditions.

### Special cases

The Aikikai can modify the application conditions of Article II after deliberations or by proposal of the ranking committee (cf. Article III), in the following cases:

- to award a rank to a confirmed teacher based on a recognized need
- to a diligent student with an exceptional knowledge of Aikido.

### Article III - Ranking committee

Persons with the right to put forward candidates (by examination or recommendation).

The juries are nominated for five years or multiple mandates. The committee is composed of high-ranking members (at least seventh dan) who are members of the Aikikai or of organizations tied to the Aikikai and designated by it.

### Article IV

From 1 st to 4 th Dan – These grades can be awarded by the higher ranking committee or by an examination jury.

5 th to 6 th Dan – These grades can be awarded by the higher ranking committee. All of these grades must be submitted to the approval of the Aikikai.

7 th Dan and 8 th Dan – These grades are decided by the Aikikai, under the direction and authorization of Doshu.

Special Cases – In the case of exceptional merit, Doshu may, notwithstanding Article 1, award 9 th or 10 th Dan.

#### Article V

If a dispute arises, the candidate may be brought forward to represent a grade.

#### Article VI - Honorary Grades

These grades are awarded according to the specific criteria below, without taking into account Article II. They are awarded by Doshu. Posthumous grades may be awarded by exceptional cases by suggestion of the Aikikai and with the final decision made by Doshu.

Dan	Years
3	---
4	More than five years
5	More than five years
6	More than ten years
7	On the nomination of the Aikikai and
8	with final approval of Doshu

#### Article VII Kokusai Yudan-sha; International Yudansha card

Anyone possessing 1st Dan and above must possess an International Yudansha card

#### Article VIII Registration and rules for Examinations:

The examination rules, and registration regulations and other details are summarized in the table.

#### Zaidan Hojin Aikikai

#### Schedule of requirements for Kyu and Dan Examinations

Rank	Minimum duration of practice	Techniques
5th kyu	More than 30 days	Shomenuchi Ikkyo Katate tori Shihonage Shomenuchi Iriminage Suwari waza Kokyu Ho
4th kyu	More than 40 days	Shomen uchi Kiiyo Kata dori Nikyo Yokomen uchi Shihonage Shomen uchi Iriminage Suwari waza Kokyu Ho
3rd kyu	More than 50 days	Shomenuchi Ikkyo, Nikyo, Sankyo, Yonkyo (Swari waza and Tachi waza)

		Ryote dori Shihonage Shomen uchi and Tsuki Iriminage & Kaitenage Ryote dori Techninage Suwari waza Kokyu Ho
2nd kyu	More than 50 days	Shomen uchi and Kata dori Ikkyo, Nikyo, Sankyo, Yonkyo (Swari waza and Tachi waza) Hanmi Handachi Katate tori Shihonage Shomen uchi, Tsuki & Katatedori Iriminage, Kotegaeshi & Kaitennage Ryote dori Techninage Katate dori Jiyu Waza Suwari waza Kokyu Ho
1st kyu	More than 60 days	Shomen uchi, Yokomen uchi, Kata dori Ikkyo, Nikyo, Sankyo, Yonkyo, Suwari waza and Tachi waza Ushiro Ryote Dori Ikkyo, Nikyo, Sankyo, Yonkyo Yokomenuchi Gokyo, Tachi WazaKatatedori, Ryote dori Shihonage (Hanmi handachi and Tachi waza) Shomenuchi Tuski & Katate dori Iriminage, Kotegaeshi, Kaitenage Ryote dori Techninage Katate dori, Ryote dori & Morote dori Jiyu Waza Suwari Waza & Tachi waza Kokyu Ho
1st Dan	More than 70 hours	All above techniques without weapons, suwari waza and Hanmi Handachi Tachiwaza: Shomenuchi, Yokomenuchi, Kta dori, Mune dori, Jiji dori, Te ushiro dori
2nd Dan	More than one year	All of the above plus Tanto dori, Futari Gake, and Oral examination on the subject "Impressions of Aikido"
3rd Dan	More than two years	All of the above plus Tachi dori Jo dori, Taninzu gake Oral examination on a subject to be determined.
4th Dan	More than two years and morer than 22 years of practice.	All of the above plus Jiyu waza, and an Essay.

## Notes

One day = one day of effective practice.

One year = at least 200 days of effective practice.

Two Years = at least 300 days of effective practice.

At the time of the examination, the partner must be, ideally, of a grade identical to the candidate.

The candidates should complete the same technique on both right and left sides, and both omote and ura, until told to stop.