

Aikidosphere

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Preserving Authenticity in Aikido Training

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Photo Credit: Peter Plewes. Mr. Plewes has many good photos of Kawahara Sensei and other Shihan and can be contacted directly at pplewes@uvic.ca.

The martial art is a way of facilitating spiritual growth through training in martial techniques. Bujutsu or martial discipline is a physical education as a guide to the Way of Being.

However, the traditional Japanese martial training developed out of the need for self-protection and overcoming the opponent. In this respect, I have a concern about Aikido students' attitudes toward martial training. I get the impression that some people neglect the martial aspect of the art and get carried away with the philosophical aspect. Without understanding the martial spirit inherent in martial training, some create a pseudo-martial art by simply seeking a feeling of harmony.

However, you cannot dilute or disregard the strictly martial side of Aikido, including the manners by which you relate to your instructor and fellow practitioners. Therefore, I wish to remind students of some basic manners on and off the mats, such as the following:

1. Show respect to the instructor and senior practitioners. Some people seem to believe that they are entitled to practice in their own way as long as they pay their fees. They forget that they are at the dojo in order to be trained.
2. When visiting another dojo, introduce yourself and obtain permission from the instructor. Do not assume that this permission will be granted automatically. The manner of presenting yourself to another martial artist must embody your utmost sensitivity to a potential life-or-death confrontation.
3. Respect those with higher ranks even off the mat. Honor their expertise and accomplishments with respect, and try to learn from them as much as you can whenever you are with them. Similarly, do not treat teachers like buddies or peers and lose manners.
4. Follow the instructor's direction during training. Do not engage yourself in unassigned instructions, personally modified (wrong) techniques, and verbal or physical conflicts with other practitioners. Do not step on or leave the mat without the instructor's permission during class.



I want to ask local instructors to train their students carefully in these manners and to strive to maintain the order and unity of the dojo.

There are places where people unquestioningly practice pseudo-Aikido which is useless as a martial art. I think there are problems with the way Aikido is interpreted and practiced. If local instructors were conscientious and respectful enough toward Aikido as a strict martial art, they would be more careful about when and whether to start their own clubs by judging their level of expertise and readiness as a martial arts teacher.

By strict martial arts training, I do not mean rough practice. What is most important is your attitude toward training. You need to constantly ask yourself: What is "budo"? Budo training is a serious business.

Learning a Japanese martial art is, in way, learning the Japanese culture. So people disregard or distort this cultural background of Aikido by claiming that this is Canada and they should practice the way they feel like. I wish to suggest that strive to preserve the appropriate manner and seek authentic Aikido as a strong martial art in North America.

