



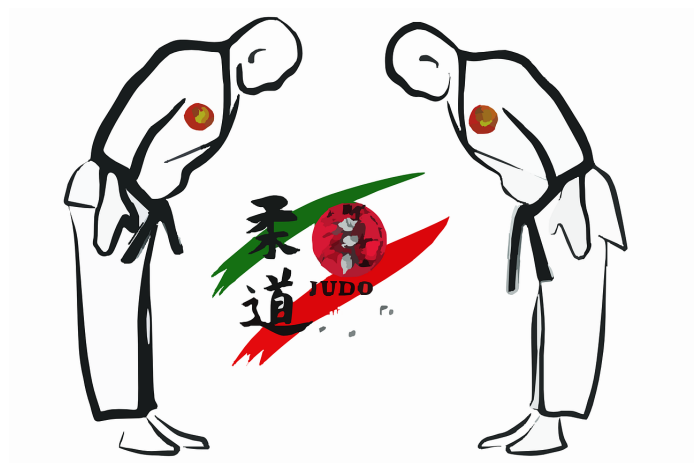
# Etiquette in Martial Arts

By

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An old saying in Martial Arts  
- 'Class begins and ends with  
Respect.'



'Respect' (*Rei*) in Martial Arts also includes what we call 'etiquette.' The Western idea of etiquette is 'the conduct or procedure required by good breeding or prescribed by authority to be observed in social or official life.' (Merriam-Webster)

The Oriental idea of etiquette is called '*Reiho*' in Japanese. It is far more than the formal bowing at the beginning and ending of a class, or during partner demonstrations, or at the beginning and ending of a competitive 'match.' *Reiho* is an attitude that martial artists should have at all times toward all members of their class – including instructors, students of higher rank, same rank, and lower rank. *Reiho* is often spoken of as the 'physical manifestation' of the spirit of *Rei* (respect).

A student who was new to Martial Arts once asked me why people bowed slightly or nodded toward each other as they approached before and after class. He didn't see any reason to bow when class was not in session. I told him it was a courteous demonstration of mutual respect toward a fellow student or to an instructor. It is the idea of '*Reiho*.' Some people shake hands or hug each other as a demonstration of '*Rei*' or '*Reiho*.' You'll often see that in a Christian martial arts program.

I began studying Judo in 1961 and was introduced to correct '*Reiho*' in the Dojo. We had three types of physical demonstrations of '*Reiho*' that included '*Ritsu-rei*' (Standing bow), '*Zarei*' (Seated bow), and '*Randori*' (Free sparring). I quickly learned that my instructor and higher ranking students expected me to demonstrate '*Reiho*' (etiquette) at all times. Though we do not use *Zarei* in our classes, we do expect students to sit cross-legged on the mats with hands on their laps while listening to an instructor teach.

Some people wonder why they see people bowing to each other and following somewhat strict rules within a martial arts class. The reason is for both development of self and others (*Jita-Kyoei* - mutual benefit).

I'd like to share some Martial Arts '*Reiho*' from two primary sources. Let's begin with Grace Martial Arts. You'll find this printed in the first part of the *Yon Ch'uan Black Belt Study Guide*.

## Grace Martial Arts Basic Training Rules

- Grace Martial Arts teaches Christian family values, directly related to Biblical principles
- Christian Bible lessons will be taught throughout a student's training
- Students are expected to memorize Bible verses and study their various assignments
- Please address your instructors as Sensei or Mr. and/or Miss
- No shoes are allowed in the training area unless they are mat shoes
- Please do not enter or leave training class floor without permission from an instructor
- If a student arrives late for class, wait for the instructor to recognize you before entering class
- There will be no chewing of gum or eating on the training floor
- When sitting on the training mats floor always sit cross-legged

- No loud talking or horseplay is allowed. Respect and self-control are always observed
- Students are requested to wear clean uniform (gi) and wear them for every class session
- No watches, earrings, rings, jewelry, etc, will be worn during practice
- Trim fingernails, toenails short in order to avoid injury to yourself or other students
- Bring any problems that could interfere with your learning to the attention of your instructor
- If you are injured in any way during class, notify the instructor immediately
- When the instructor is teaching show the utmost respect by not talking
- Do all exercises to the best of your ability. Students are expected to train hard, be disciplined and develop a strong moral character
- If you will not be attending a class, please, notify the instructor prior to the class
- Parents are most welcome to observe students, but only from the designated seating area

- Please, try to remember to sign in and sign out before and after each class session

This is an excellent list of *Reiho* and should be followed in all Grace Martial Arts classes.



## Other Martial Arts Etiquette

I began studying martial arts in 1961. Many instructors at that time had studied martial arts during their time in the military. Many had the opportunity of studying with instructors in Japan, Okinawa, and South Korea. The American instructors often taught martial arts similarly to how they had been taught.

One of my earliest lessons was about *Reiho* – proper etiquette for learning martial arts. The following are some of the lessons I remember as an adolescent and young teen. I hope some of these memories of *Reiho* in the Dojo will be of interest to you.

- Shoes were not allowed on the mat or near the mat. Students took their shoes and socks off after entering the Dojo and placed them neatly near the door to be put back on before leaving the building.
- We responded to instructors with the term *Osu* (pronounced 'Ooss') as they taught a technique or when they asked if we understood a teaching or command. Students were expected to say '*Osu*' loudly and in unison. We also stopped and bowed upon entering the dojo. We bowed when stepping 'on' and 'off' the mat. Our bows were to be at about a 20 degree angle bend at the waist with palms facing the front of each leg (some styles have palms at side of legs for bows). We were expected to bow first toward the lead instructor and not look them in the eyes. Our eyes were to look down at the floor. Instructors usually returned the bow, but we were expected to hold our bow until the instructor had completed his or her bow. Some of the better instructors I've known often bow first as a way of thanking the student for attending and demonstrating the 'brotherhood of respect.'

[You will find that ‘bowing’ in some Chinese martial arts are done in a different manner. One hand may be placed over another hand and ‘pushed’ forward as the student bows. If you participate in a different style of Kung Fu some day, watch how the other students bow and you’ll understand the proper way of demonstrating respect in that particular class.]

- We did not walk ‘in front’ of an instructor or higher-ranking student. We walked behind them as a demonstration of respect. We never ‘interrupted’ an instructor or higher-ranking student when they were talking to someone else. If the conversation was obviously of a private nature, we would walk away and talk with the instructor later. If the conversation was not of an obvious private nature, we were to stand about three feet away from the instructor with our hands folded over the knot on our belt. When the instructor turned to acknowledge us, we bowed to the instructor and stated our business. When we were finished speaking with the instructor, we bowed again politely and returned to our position in the class.

- If we were late for class, we were expected to wait near the entrance door. An assistant instructor would often direct us to a place where we could take a kneeling position until the instructor 'waived' at us or in some other way invited us to join the class. Some instructors expected a public apology for being late; others didn't. If you had to leave the class early and knew beforehand, we were to communicate that to Sensei before the beginning of class. We also communicated that with assistant instructors so they would know that we had Sensei's permission to leave early. Upon leaving the dojo early, we stood and bowed, then left as quietly as possible so that the class was not disrupted.
- If our belt came loose or untied because of exercise or sparring, we were expected to turn our back to the instructor to readjust or retie our belt. Then, we turned around to face the instructor. The same was true when practicing with other students. To tie or adjust our belt while facing an instructor or fellow student was viewed as 'disrespectful.'

- We moved quickly when the instructor called out, 'line up!' Each of us moved to our designated position on the floor or mat (based on rank) and followed the instructor's instructions from there. Assistant instructors (usually Black Belts) would often move everyone in position so that the process was done quickly and quietly. The same thing occurred at the end of class. It was important to move quickly, find our designated place, and follow instructions. We usually recited the Dojo Kun, but Christian programs usually begin and end with prayer. Dojo Kun are the rules of the Dojo. The rules of Christianity are found in hearing God's Word, praising God, and demonstrating obedience and dependence to God through prayer.
- Once class was dismissed, lower ranks were expected to take the lead in cleaning up the Dojo or Dojang. I remember grabbing a towel and pushing it across the wooden floor with other lower ranking students when I was a young Judoka and Karateka. We did not use mats in my early years in Martial Arts. We learned how to fall on wooden floors. Because of all of the sweat that would

come from practice and sparring, the floors needed to be cleaned of sweat, dirt, and debris. Assistant instructors usually took charge of making sure that lower-ranking students did the cleaning. It was never to be a concern of the Sensei.

- *Kime* – focus – was paramount throughout class. We were never to talk with a fellow student during class unless the discussion was part of the training. We didn't 'daydream.' We never leaned against a wall or sat in chair. We stood and paid attention.
- We always bowed to our partner before and after working with them. If our partner was of a higher rank, or the same rank but older in age, we were to bow first. We were never to 'wander around' or do anything that was not part of participating in the class. We were also never to put our hands on our hips or fold our arms. That was a sign of disrespect.
- Instructors are often sensitive to the needs of their students and will afford them the opportunity for a break to go to the bathroom or get a drink of water. If we needed to do either before an official break time, we

were expected to ask an assistant instructor who was 'not teaching' at the moment for that permission. We were never to interrupt Sensei for something as trivial as asking for a bathroom break.

- If we came to class with an injury, we were expected to let Sensei know. He would decide if and how we would participate in class. That would be shared with assistant instructors who would then ensure that Sensei's decisions were carried out.
- If a student was injured during class, we were expected to move several feet away and sit quietly on the floor. The reason was to make space for Sensei and assistant instructors to attend to the injured student. We were not to talk to other students because that was viewed as being disrespectful to Sensei and the injured student. Most injuries in the Dojo were minor, so Sensei would call us back into position. We were expected to shout 'Yes, Sir' or 'Yes, Sensei,' jump up and quickly return to our beginning position. Sensei would then direct us about what to do next.

- We were expected to address assistant instructors with a Dan ranking (Black Belt) in class as 'Sir' or 'Ma'am.' We were never to question their authority or disobey their instructions in class. If we had any problem with an assistant instructor, we were to talk with them respectfully in private. Those discussions usually led to a better understanding and improved relationship. If talking with an assistant instructor did not lead to a suitable conclusion, the request for a formal meeting with Sensei was allowed. Sensei's decisions were always final.
- We were always expected to 'do our best.' We were to train hard and not complain about the training. The exception to that rule of etiquette was if we suffered an injury during training. Sensei was to be notified of the injury immediately so he or she could determine the best way to handle the situation.
- We were expected to train on non-class days so that Sensei did not have to spend precious class time going over the same lesson he or she had taught in the last class. If we had questions about how to perform a technique correctly, asking one of the assistant



instructors was preferred. However, Sensei sometimes stepped in to make corrections. Teachers like to teach!

- When Sensei or an assistant instructor took time during class to personally show us how to improve a technique, we were expected to demonstrate proper *Reiho* by standing at attention, bowing, learning proper technique, then responding with – ‘Thank you, Sensei,’ or ‘Thank you, Sir’ with another bow.
- Bows during class training were usually quick. That allowed to keep the class moving at a good pace while still demonstrating *Reiho*.
- Students were never to disrespect another martial style, especially if Sensei invited someone to demonstrate. We were to give the ‘guest’ our full attention and demonstrate appreciation for their efforts. To do anything less would have been disrespectful to Sensei.
- Students were not allowed to use their martial skills outside of the Dojo unless it was in self defense. Bullying or picking fights could lead to suspension or even expulsion from the school. Sensei made that decision after talking with all parties involved.

The most important source for a student of Grace Martial Arts is the [Yon Ch'uan Black Belt Study Guide with Scriptures](#). I recommend you use that as your personal Etiquette guide for classes.

**Taking God's Grace to the World!**

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