

## Etiquette Tips from Japan

By Shihan Ken Hoggart (15 Sept 01)

During a training session on August 9, 2001 in Akron, Ohio, Dai Shihan Yasuhiro Irie was kind enough to share some etiquette tips with a few of the North American instructors. This was a great honor to be shown the proper ways to conduct ourselves while in the Dojo. The clarification on these behaviors are small in detail however, very important. Here are a few items for you to practice.

### Bowing in Suwari (Zarei)

Bowing in suwari can be done in two ways. One is with your hands open and flat on the mat. The other is with your hands placed knuckles down and your thumbs forward (loose fist). The question was when to use them. It was explained that if your sword was placed on your left side and you were bowing to a person close to you, the open hand would allow you to draw your sword. Therefore, when bowing to a person while in suwari, use the loose fist with your thumbs forward method, showing no threat.

When bowing at the Shinzen (in front of the Shinden), it is proper to show respect with the open hand method. When bowing to the instructor (and students) at the beginning and the end of class as a whole group, bow with loose fist.

### Bowing in Tachi (Ritsurei)

A similar theory applies while standing. Your open hands maybe placed in front of you on your thighs at the Shinzen and also in formal way. The loose fist method with the thumbs forward is performed with your hands to the front at the dojo. Either way, you should bow keeping your eyes on the person you are bowing to.

### Tachi from Suwari

It was clarified for us that you should always go to Han Tachi (half standing) from the suwari position. From there, it is proper form to step up with your right leg first (if you were to step with your left leg, it would be in danger as you were drawing your sword). From this position it is acceptable, once standing, to step back to your original foot position. To go from Tachi to suwari, step back with your left leg into Han Tachi and then your right leg.

### Saying "Thank you"

ARIGATOU GOZAIMASU (present tense) is proper when thanking someone on the mat for his or her assistance. ARIGATO GOZAIMASHITA (past tense) is a formal way to thank someone such as when bowing at the end of class. Domo Arigato is not polite / unfavorable and should not be used in the Dojo.

Starting and Finishing (for both instructors and students)

When starting; HAJIME (pronounced ha-ji-meeee)

When finishing; YAME (pronounced ya-meeee)

The above items assisted greatly in our understanding of the Japanese ways and culture. The clarification on these fine points helps us all to show respect to our instructors, students, and those who trained before us. Thank you Irie Sensei for your guidance and instruction.