



Scottish Budokan Association



Etiquette in Shotokan Karate

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Discipline in the *dojo* is of paramount importance, *dojo* etiquette is a code of conduct essential to the proper practice of the Japanese martial arts, and without it their practice becomes meaningless.

Self-discipline, mutual trust and respect for one's opponents are essential to safe practice. Please carefully observe the following procedure in any *dojo*.

Why do we have etiquette

Good etiquette should make for good karate. It should play an important part in karate training. It is pure common courtesy (something which, unfortunately, is missing from certain areas of life today), and should not be interpreted or considered as an act of subservience. Mutual respect is also important in karate, and applying the principles of etiquette inside and outside the *dojo* is certainly recommended. Having said this, those who have no problem with practising etiquette inside and outside the *dojo*, must have a certain amount of respect, for those who have difficulty or discomfort in practising some of the etiquette required in the *dojo*, and outside the *dojo*.

Studying karate is much more than learning to perfect a variety of techniques, and really requires an understanding of the cultural and historical background, which has risen to the conventional code of conduct. The importance of culture, tradition and philosophy in karate, are readily expressed by the conventional code of conduct which comes from, amongst other things, the ancient traditions of Okinawa and Japan.

A *karateka* (student of karate) who understands the principles of etiquette and practices the same will be a credit not only to oneself but also to his/her instructor and indeed, fellow *karateka*.

There are numerous styles of karate and each probably has their own way in which they practice etiquette but the practice hereinafter mentioned basically relate to Shotokan Karate.

Dojo and other etiquette in Shotokan Karate

Entering the *dojo*

Before you enter the *dojo* (training hall) you should remove all outer clothing leaving on only your *gi* (training suit), belt and perhaps slippers. Any slippers should be removed once inside the *dojo*. If there are any senior grades entering the *dojo* with you, you should allow them to go in first as a sign of respect for their higher grade. This includes entering or leaving any changing rooms. It is customary on entering the *dojo* that you bow and say "oss" (this word is used in Shotokan Karate as a form of greeting or as a form of acknowledgement or to say "yes") to the front of the *dojo* and then to your seniors on first seeing them, whether they are in the *dojo* when you enter or they enter the *dojo* after you. In days gone by the front wall of the *dojo* or the wall opposite the door to the *dojo* would have had a picture of the founder of the school or perhaps style of the martial art concerned. For those who practised Shotokan Karate this picture would probably have been of Shihan Gichin Funakoshi - the father of modern day karate. You should always bow and "oss" when your *sensei* or any other black belt enters the *dojo* or walks past you as a sign of respect. This is an acknowledgement of their experience and dedication and for passing on their knowledge to you when they take a class. When not actually training or sparring always walk round the outside and back of the *dojo* floor or matted area. Before you enter the contest area for sparring or at a competition, always *rei* (Bow) at the perimeter before advancing onto the area, being careful to enter from the correct side. Never walk on the training or contest area whilst wearing shoes.

It is in fact good practice to bow and "oss" to your seniors should you come across them outside the *dojo*, perhaps say in the street.

All students should have been to the toilet before attending training as to avoid any disruption to the class. Any person, who has been drinking alcohol, shall not present themselves for training.

If you arrive late

You should always try to arrive at class in time. This is a mark of respect. Late arrival can disrupt the class. In parts of Japan, in days gone by (and probably to this day), it was not unusual for instructors to refuse to teach the class, if the class was not ready to train on time. Certain instructors would apparently signify their displeasure by simply walking out of the *dojo*. However, there are times when one cannot avoid being late (for genuine reasons), and if you are late, you should get changed quickly and warm up outside the *dojo* being as quiet as you can. Thereafter enter the *dojo* quietly, so as not to interrupt the class, bow and "oss" to the front of the *dojo*, and then in the direction of the instructor, and then kneel in *seiza* (meditation posture) just inside the doorway of the *dojo*, waiting for the instructor to signal to you to join in. Once the instructor has asked you to join in, answer by bowing and saying "oss sensei" and then stand up and run quickly and quietly to your place in the relevant line in the class, going round or behind the class and not cutting through the class. You may find that sometimes you are asked to do some press ups before you join the class and this can be seen as a way of saying to the class that you are sorry for being late.

Lining up

You should always line up in grade order as quickly and quietly as possible. If a fellow *karateka* is the same grade then (if at all possible) line up in the order of the date graded and age with the eldest first. Always make sure that you are not standing ahead of a senior grade and that your lines are straight (lower grades should look to their left to ensure that this is the case). You should (at this point) be standing with your heels and toes touching (*heisoku -dachi* - formal attention stance) and with your hands by your side. The instructor will then come to the front of the class and do the formal bow.

Formal Bow & Mokuso (meditation)

The instructor and students will (at this point) be standing with your heels touching and toes turned out at a 45 degree angle (*musubi-dachi* - informal attention stance) and with their hands by their side. The instructor will say "seiza" kneel for *mokuso* (left knee first then right) and putting both hands on their thighs with fingers pointing inwards, each movement must be followed by the class in the same sequence. The instructor will say "mokuso" and each student should close their eyes and begin the meditation (preparing the mind for training). After a few minutes the instructor will say "mokuso yame" (stop the meditation) and the most senior grade in the lines (who should be at the front of the first line to the far right of the instructor) says "sensei ni rei" (teacher we bow) and then the instructor bows by first putting his left hand to the floor and then his right hand to the floor (Making a triangle with the thumbs and forefingers). The class should again follow the same sequence after each movement by the instructor and everyone should say "oss" upon bowing. The instructor then rises by first putting his right hand on his right thigh and then his left hand on his left thigh. The class should follow again in the same sequence each *karateka* making sure that they do not finish before the instructor. Everyone then gets up (right leg first), and stands back into *heisoku -dachi* with lines straight. The instructor will then usually ask one of the senior grades in the line to take the warm up exercises. Thereafter, the instructor will take the lesson.

Leaving and re-joining the class whilst a lesson is in progress

In theory it is not permissible to leave the class whilst it is in progress without the instructor giving you permission to do so. However, in practice it may not always be possible to obtain the instructor's permission e.g. if you are injured and the instructor has not realised that this is the case. In such instances you should indicate your intention to leave the *dojo* to your fellow *karateka* and then raise your hand to try and attract the instructor's attention. If you can attract the instructor's attention, (or you are unable to do so) bow and "oss" (to the front of the *dojo*, and then in the direction of the instructor), before leaving the *dojo*. If you do return to the *dojo*, you should enter the *dojo* quietly, bow and "oss" again to the front of the *dojo* and then in the direction of the instructor, and then kneel in *seiza* just inside the doorway and wait for the instructor to signal to you to re-join the class. As soon as the instructor has signalled to you to re-join the class, bow and say "oss sensei" and then stand up and run quickly and quietly to your place in the class.

Etiquette in class

Several points should be noted:

- No talking is permitted unless asked. It is really a sign of respect that you listen to the instructor taking the class. All too often students start talking when they are not the focus of attention e.g. when the instructor might be watching a fellow *karateka* he/she has called out to the front of the class to do a *kata* (a prescribed form of movements where one pretends to be fighting an imaginary opponent or opponents) or if the instructor is showing a fellow *karateka* a technique.
- When told to line up you should do so as quickly and quietly as possible and in grade order ensuring that the lines are straight and that you are standing in *heisoku-dachi* or *masubi-dachi*.
- When you pair up with a fellow *karateka* greet them by bowing and saying "oss". When you leave, then again bow and say "oss". These are ways of thanking them for the opportunity they have given you to work and train with them.
- You should always pair up by making sure that your senior grade has a partner first. If they already have a partner (i.e. their senior grade) then you should pair up with someone who is your own grade and failing that with your nearest junior grade.
- Strictly speaking when in partners it is the junior grade that should collect and return any equipment used e.g. *bo* (a stick of approximately six feet long used as a weapon), knife, punch bags etc.
- If you cannot train for the entirety of the lesson, arrange with the instructor to be excused at a pre-arranged time. The instructor will then allow you to leave at that time and this should allow for the minimum of disruption to the class.
- When told to sit down during a lesson, always sit with your legs crossed or *seiza* (to sit on ones heels) and keep quiet. Never lean against the wall or sprawl about on the *dojo* floor.
- When the instructor addresses you in class always acknowledge that you have heard what he/she has said by saying "oss sensei". This is a way to show appreciation that your instructor has taken an interest in making sure that you are carrying out a technique correctly. Instructors should not be ignored in class.
- When waiting for the start of the class or on the instructor to come, you should stretch and exercise.
- You shall do your utmost to carry out the training as laid down by your *sensei*.

End of class and Mokuso (meditation by deep breathing and emptying the mind)

After the end of the lesson and after having performed the warming down exercises the class should come to attention making sure all lines are straight. The instructor will say "*seiza*" and kneel for *mokuso* (the formal bow as above). The instructor will say "*mokuso*" and each student should close their eyes and begin the meditation. This involves a series of deep breathing in through the nose and (after several seconds) out through the mouth. After a few minutes the instructor will say "*mokuso yame*" (stop the meditation) and the most senior grade in the lines (who should be at the front of the first line to the far right of the instructor) says "*domo arigato gozaimashita, sensei ni rei*" (thank you very much for teaching us, teacher we bow) and then the instructor bows (formal bow) followed by the class and everyone should say "oss" upon bowing. The instructor then raises first the class should follow again in the same sequence each *karateka* making sure that they do not finish before the instructor. Everyone then gets up (right leg first) and stands back into *heisoku -dachi* with lines straight. The instructor will then say that the lesson is finished and he/she will bow and "oss". The class should then bow and "oss" to the instructor before dispersing (walking not running). The instructor may ask the class to gather round if he/she or anyone else has any announcements to be made, or should the instructor wish to have a short discussion about the lesson. The instructor may even ask the class to practice any of the techniques learned during the lesson, at home. In any event each *karateka* should be standing in *musubi-dachi* with hands by their side whenever listening to the instructor unless the instructor has advised otherwise.

Leaving the dojo at the end of the lesson

You should bow and "oss" to the front wall of the *dojo* and senior grades, in particular, to your *sensei*/instructor (just before the door exit) before you leave the *dojo*.

Gi and belt

Your karate *gi* must be plain white with no piping or markings except for the manufacturer's logo and your badge (club, association or national). Jacket should be no more than three quarter thigh length and sleeves must cover half the forearm but not past the bend of the wrist. Trousers should be more than three quarter shin length, but not pass the ankle bone. During the lesson, before adjusting or tidying up your *gi* (or in fact doing up your belt that may have become loose) you must bow and "oss" and then turn away from the front of the class or go down on one knee. Once you have carried out these adjustments you should turn back or stand up to the front of the class and bow and "oss" again, but not too loud. Apart from this your belt should not be taken off in the *dojo*. If you need to wear your *gi* in the street either to or from the *dojo* (which you should avoid doing if at all possible) it should ways be covered by an over-*gi* or failing that a suitable tracksuit.

Etiquette in sparring

You should really have taken part in the lesson before being allowed to spar rather than just turning up expecting to spar. When putting on your sparring gear i.e. gloves, shin guard, groin guard etc. you should do so as quickly and quietly as possible and then return to the *dojo* floor lining up in the usual straight lines and in grade order. If you do not have any part of your sparring gear you should try to borrow some from another *karateka*. If this is not possible then you should advise the instructor who has discretion to excuse you from sparring, allow you to spar regardless or ask you to do some alternative training. When asked to pair up, always try to pair up with your senior first. Senior grades who pair with a lower grade should adjust their level of sparring to suit their partner since sparring in the *dojo* is not really about who is the best. Sparring is an opportunity to exchange techniques so that each *karateka* taking part can develop and learn something. If you are hit with a good technique it is courteous to say "oss" to your partner thereby acknowledging your partner's techniques and if you catch your partner with a good technique you must show courtesy by saying "oss" also. As soon as the instructor tells you to stop sparring by saying "yame" you should immediately stop and return to your position in the *dojo* before that element of sparring commenced. When you join or leave your partner you must first bow and say "oss" to thank them for their help during sparring.

Social etiquette

If you see your *sensei* outside the *dojo* you should address him/her by calling them "*sensei*" and not by calling them by their name (especially their Christian name), unless they have given you authority to do so. Under no circumstances should you call your *sensei* by his/her name (Christian or surname) inside the *dojo*. Traditionally, when *karateka* were out with their *sensei*, perhaps for a meal or to have a drink, it was common for them to wait until their *sensei* has started to eat or drink first before they started to do so. There appears to be no reason why this cannot be adopted nowadays, as a sign of respect.

Personal etiquette

Your *gi* should be clean, tidy, pressed and in good condition at all times prior to a lesson. Any tears or rips should be repaired. Those with long hair must ensure that the same is tied back so as not to obscure vision. Feet in particular must be clean and toenails and finger nails must be kept short so as to avoid injury. No makeup and no jewellery should be worn during a lesson since it can cause injury to either yourself or another *karateka*. If jewellery cannot be removed then it must be covered with a plaster or some other form of surgical tape. Neither food nor drink should, strictly speaking, be consumed in the *dojo*. However, drinking water may be allowed (subject to your instructor's prior approval) during a lesson. Finally, bad language is strictly prohibited in the *dojo*.

Absence from training

If you know that you will not be able to train for a lengthy period of time you must tell your instructor. If you have to stop training for more than say six months, you must then train for a minimum of six months after your return, before you are eligible to sit your next grading and your licence must be up to date.

Parents/Carers bringing and collecting their child

Could parents/carers try and bring their child to training ready to start on time. Have with them a bottle of water or a diluted drink, and correct training fees. When collecting your child please come no earlier than five minutes before their finishing time and wait in the designated area. If inside the *dojo*, please follow the above etiquette, and be as quiet as possible, and no talking until the class has finished.

Finally, remember the *dojo* etiquette and creed below

Humility, Sincerity, Respect, Purity, Endeavour and Honesty.