



Halifax Aikikai
Established 1976

Halifax Aikikai Beginner's Guide

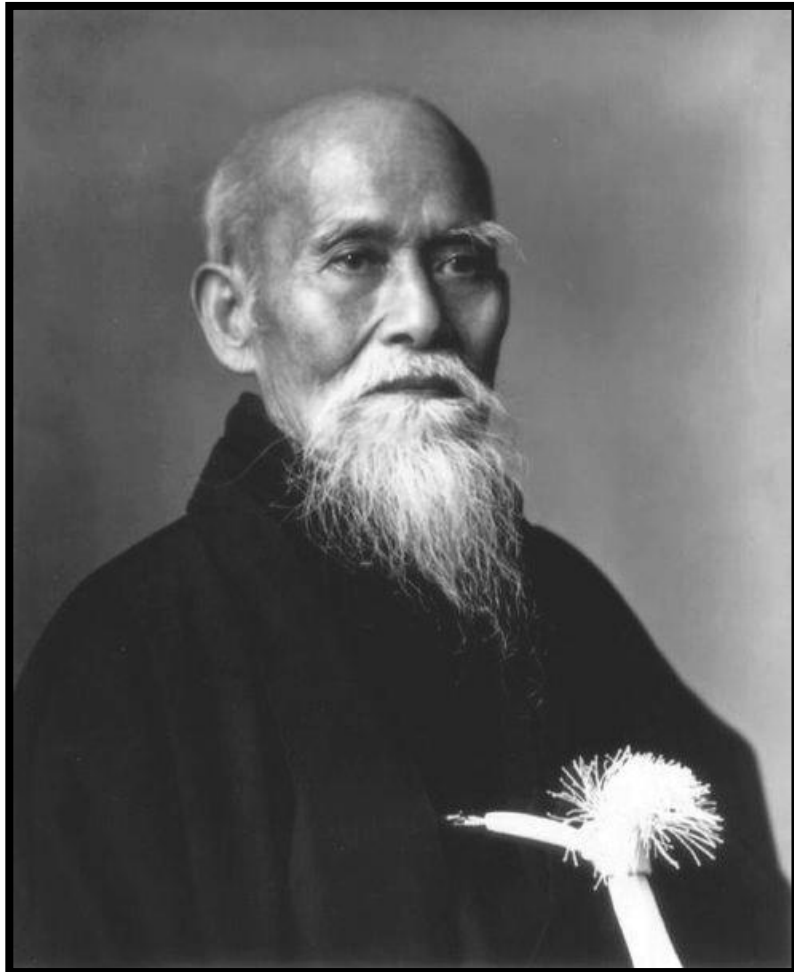
Camp Hill Medical Centre
Abbie J. Lane Memorial Building, 4th Floor
Gymnasium. *Corner of Veteran's Memorial
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<http://halifaxaikikai.ca>



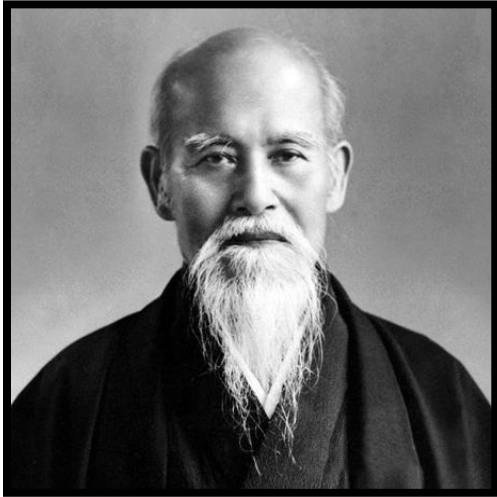
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Ō-SENSEI

Morihei Ueshiba, Founder of Aikido (1883 - 1969)



UESHIBA MORIHEI Ō-SENSEI

KAISO

Founder of Aikido, progenitor of Aikikai
Lineage.

(1883 - 1969)

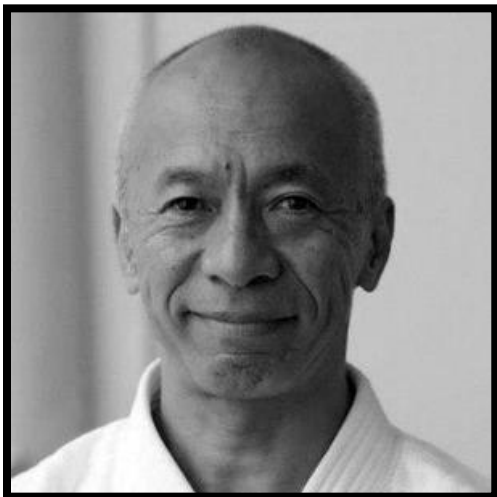


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Introduction to Aikido

Aikido is a traditional Japanese martial art. As such, when we practice Aikido we should take care to observe the traditional and cultural practices that take place before, during, and after the physical training takes place. This way, we can practice Aikido in a style, and a spirit, that is recognizable world-wide; across Canada and the United States, from the Western to the Eastern world, and across different teachers and lineages you can find Aikido being practiced in a way that is close to home.



Among the martial arts practiced in modern times, Aikido maintains a stronger-than-most adherence to tradition and philosophy. For example; although **rank**

*"Learning a Japanese martial art is, in way, learning the Japanese culture."
-Yukio Kawahara Shihan (1910-2011)*

exists in the same way it does in *Karate* or *Judo*, Aikido is non-competitive and is not meant to be seen as a simple race to the top. Techniques are practiced thoroughly and with intent, and ranks are obtained slowly and only as a demonstration of obtained skill and development, not by some mandate. This is not meant to be punitive; rather, it is an expression of the fact that Aikido is a life-long endeavor over which a practitioner develops martially and also personally, a practice that is becoming lost in today's busy world.

At Halifax Aikikai, we practice the **Aikikai style of Aikido**. Our Dojo operates as a part of the **Canadian Aikido Federation (or CAF)**.

Dojo Etiquette

Dojo, roughly translated, means Training Hall. More directly, it translates to *way place*; a spot where one goes to practice the *way* of a particular discipline. So, an *aikido dojo* is a place where one goes to practice and learn aikido. Simple enough, huh?

As a place where Japanese martial arts are practiced, the dojo, regardless of location or appearance, is a place where certain Japanese traditions and etiquette are observed to emphasize why Aikido is practiced the way that it is practiced. In some dojos, for example, footwear is removed and left at the entrance; a common practice in many Japanese establishments besides the home, even today.

This practice of etiquette also extends to the practice of Aikido itself. There are certain formalities that are followed that ensure a dojo practices an authentic form of the art. These formalities originate from elements in Japanese culture, from **budo**, the traditional warrior code of Japan, and even from *shinto*, the traditional religion of Japan. Here, many of these formalities are identified to help explain how a typical aikido class unfolds.

Before Class

Always be **punctual**. For permanent **dojo** (place of practice), you should arrive well enough in advance to enter, change, and step onto the **tatami** (practice mats) before the listed class time arrives. If you are visiting a dojo, use this time to ask about practice fees or other administrative issues. Be proactive; do not assume that the class is free, or wait for an instructor to ask you to pay.

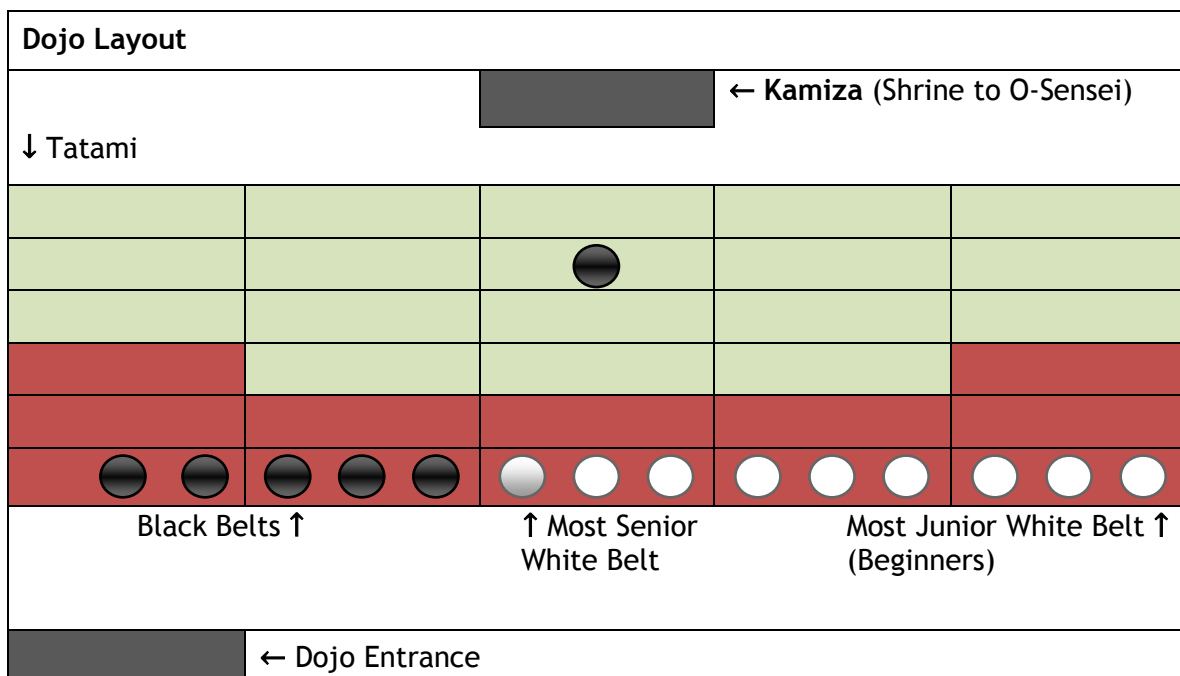
At **Halifax Aikikai** and other semi-permanent dojo, the time before class is used to assemble the tatami, to pay dues, and to check in at the **attendance log** (recorded attendance is used for promotions). Do your best to assist with the mats so the process moves as quickly as possible; the mats used by many dojo

are heavy and cumbersome so offer to help another person if you lack the height or strength to move them on your own. You should only forego this process if you have an upper-body injury, if you have been excused, or if more volunteers would simply slow it down (this is possible, but rare!).

Inside the dojo, outdoor footwear is removed and replaced with **zori** (sandals, flip-flops, etc.) to keep street debris from being tracked onto the mats.

During Class

The first and most common ritual during Aikido training to bow, or **Rei**. Rei is practiced to show appreciation and respect for the person, place, or object being bowed to.



Dojo layout at Halifax Aikikai

When you enter or exit the dojo, it is proper to do a **standing bow** towards the **Kamiza** ('high seat', a shrine dedicated to O-Sensei and occasionally other honored persons). This is a showing of respect to the dojo and can be a good

punctuation to the rest of the day prior to arriving at the doorstep; a place to leave all of the day's stresses behind while you practice.

When stepping onto the tatami, remove your sandals arrange them in a tidy line with the others, toes pointing *away* from the kamiza. From here, face the kamiza and perform a **seated bow** to **O-Sensei**; this is a showing of thanks to O-Sensei, without whom there would be no Aikido.

If there is still time before class begins, light stretching or warm up activities by yourself or with others is encouraged. The beginning of class is signaled when **Sensei** ('teacher') claps his or her hands. When class begins, all students line up in order of rank and seniority; black belts to the left, beginners to the right.

While in line-up, all students sit in **Seiza** (seated kneeling position) and await Sensei's direction. Typically, Sensei opens the class by directing a bow towards O-Sensei. Sensei will then face the line-up and all participants will bow again. During this bow, all participants emphatically say **Onegai shimasu!** (roughly translated, 'please show me') as a sign of gratitude for the class that has just begun.

Following the opening of class is a warm-up; Sensei will demonstrate an action and the class follows. From this point on the class proceeds as directed by Sensei. Once a technique has been demonstrated, participants pair off and practice the technique as shown.

Chosen partners will bow to each other (saying *onegai shimasu* as a sign of good spirits), then find practice space on the tatami. Typically, one partner takes the role of **Nage** ('thrower', performer of technique) while the other takes the role of **Uke** ('receiver') for four executions of the technique, and then trade roles. Partners should keep conversation to a minimum to get the most out of their time together. Practice of a particular technique continues until directed by Sensei to stop.

When directed to stop, partners will bow to each other once again, then return to the line-up. While in line-up, it is only necessary to sit in order of rank at the beginning and the ending of class.

After Class

As class is ending, participants will return to the line-up and arrange themselves in order of rank once again, sitting in seiza. Sensei will conduct the class in a seated bow towards O-Sensei, just as when class began. Sensei will then face the class and all will bow as before. This time, all participants will say **Domo arigato gozaimashita!** (translated, a very polite and sincere form of 'thank you') to express their thanks to Sensei for his or her teaching. Sensei will return to the line-up and bow off the tatami. The class will bow once more to O-Sensei, and then bow to the partners that they practiced with during the class. Finally, you bow again to O-Sensei as you leave the tatami.

At Halifax Aikikai, the tatami is disassembled and the mats are stacked at the end of class on Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday. Just as assembly is the responsibility of everyone participating that day, all participants should help stack the mats so the process takes as little time as possible.

When to Rei in Aikido:	
Situation	Action
<i>Entering Dojo</i>	<i>Bow</i>
<i>Entering Tatami</i>	<i>Bow</i>
<i>Starting class</i>	<i>Bow</i>
<i>Finding a partner</i>	<i>Bow</i>
<i>Thanking partner</i>	<i>Bow</i>
<i>Ending class</i>	<i>Bow</i>
<i>Exiting Tatami</i>	<i>Bow</i>
<i>Exiting Dojo</i>	<i>Bow</i>
<i>Can't remember if you're supposed to bow?</i>	<i>Bow</i>
<i>Can't remember if you've already bowed?</i>	<i>Bow</i>

General Tips

Before class starts, make sure to **remove any jewelry**. Rings can be damaged or leave cuts and bruises, piercings can get caught on clothing. Leaving jewelry off the mats and keeping finger and toe nails trimmed reduces the risk of accident for yourself and for your partner.

If you are arriving late to a class, **wait** at the edge of the tatami until invited to enter by Sensei. Don't allow lateness to become routine. If another commitment forces you to be **late on regular basis**, this is acceptable; just make sure to inform someone about the situation.

At **Halifax Aikikai**, Mats and equipment may be cleaned after a **Friday** evening class. When cleaning is being done at any dojo, you should offer to help to make sure the process is finished as quickly as possible.

If you become injured, feel sick, feel dehydrated, or feel genuine exhaustion while on the mats, don't hesitate to tell your partner and Sensei so that you can either leave the mats or sit in the corner to recuperate.

Always be aware of yourself, your partner, and those practicing around you so that no accidents or collisions occur. Spatial awareness and awareness of those around you is an important part of Aikido training, and good Aikido practice is one where no one is injured.

When beginning practice with a weapon, hold the weapon at eye-level and bow towards the kamiza. This is to show respect for the weapon; while our weapons are made of wood, the bow is to remind you that a live blade is a danger to yourself and others if wielded carelessly. When sitting in seiza with a weapon, place the weapon on your **right side**, with the **blade facing your person** (other dojos and instructors may place their weapons differently, so try to follow their custom when visiting).

Aikido can be vigorous exercise at times. Make sure you wash your **do-gi** (uniform) often enough to prevent odor, but not too frequently or with too many additives; strong bleaches will cause a **gi** to wear out faster.

Ranks and Promotion

Similar to other Japanese martial arts like *Karate* and *Judo*, Aikido uses a modern system of ranks that students inherit as they practice and refine their technique over time. In this system, the **obi** ('belt') is used to denote rank. Unlike Karate or Judo, our style of Aikido does not use colored belts or stripes to denote rank; all *kyu* ranks wear a white belt, and all *dan* ranks wear a black belt.

Ranks

The basic unit of rank is called a **kyu** (roughly, beginner rank). In our style of Aikido the starting kyu rank that a student obtains upon passing their first test is **5th Kyu** or **Gokyu**. Upon further testing, students obtain **4th**, **3rd**, **2nd**, and **1st Kyu** ranks, respectively.

Once a student has reached **1st Kyu** or **Ikkyu**, their next promotion will be to that of **1st Dan** or **Shodan**. Dan (roughly, student rank) is the rank of the black belts. As a black belt receives more promotions, their numbered rank increases; to **2nd Dan**, then to **3rd Dan**, and so on.

	<i>6th Kyu</i>	<i>5th Kyu</i>	<i>4th Kyu</i>	<i>3rd Kyu</i>	<i>2nd Kyu</i>	<i>1st Kyu</i>	<i>1st Dan</i>
<i>Karate</i>							
<i>Aikido</i>	<i>n/a</i>						

...

Also uncommon to other modern Japanese martial arts is Aikido's use of the **Hakama** (divided skirt), the traditional black or dark-blue divided skirt that students wear from Shodan onwards.

Promotions and Testing

For white belts, promotions occur as the result of a successful test or grading. At **Halifax Aikikai**, testing routinely takes place twice a year; once in early March, and once in September.

Candidates for promotion must meet a number of criteria before they are asked to perform a test. Aikido tests should not be considered an exam where you *try your luck* and see how well you do; tests are more accurately described as a demonstration of the competence level that you have already achieved. The criteria for promotion includes (but is not limited to): class and seminar attendance, technical ability, and meeting the minimum practice time requirements as set by the Canadian Aikido Federation.

The test material for each Kyu rank is set by the Canadian Aikido Federation. The example below shows the time and technique requirements for the 5th Kyu test.

GOKYU (5th Kyu)			
To Know the Basic Forms with Accuracy			
Minimum 60 Days Training Required Since Previous Rank Test	Hanmi/Waza	Attack	Techniques
	Tachi-Waza	Shomen-uchi	Ikkyo
		Katate-dori	Shiho-nage
		Shomen-uchi	Irimi-nage
	Suwari-waza	Ryote-dori	Kokyu-ho

When testing begins, the head examiner calls the name of the person or persons being tested, as well as the names of the people acting as uke for the candidates. All of the named persons approach the center of the tatami in **shiko** (knee walking) and face the kamiza. In unison, all participants bow to O-Sensei, then rearrange themselves and bow to the examiners, then rearrange once more and bow to their partners. With this, the testing has begun, and the examiners lead thereafter.

Basic Terminology

This section contains an incomplete list of basic Japanese terminology and its English meaning in the context of Aikido.

Pronunciation Tips

In general, Japanese words are written and pronounced syllable-by-syllable. *Aikido*, for example, is written with the characters 合気道 and is pronounced "Ai-Ki-Do". Even long terms like *Onegai Shimasu* should be broken down and pronounced as independent syllables, i.e.: "Ō-Ne-Gai-Shi-Ma-Su".

The vowel sounds of Japanese words transliterated into our alphabet rarely (if ever) change compared to the same letters in English. In English, Polish describes something from Poland, while polish means to make something shiny. With Japanese, the vowels in a syllable are (almost) always pronounced the same way: *to*, *do*, and *mo* are pronounced with a hard-o sound (thus, *do* sounds like dough, *mo* sounds like mobile).

Vowel	Example use	Sounds like...
-a	waza	Car, star
-e (also -ei)	katate, rei	Stay, day
-i (also -y-)	Budo-gi, Ryote, Gyaku	Key
-o	Aikido	Boat, toe
-u	...shimasu	Flute, root
-ai (also -ae)	Aikido, Onegai, kamae	Guy, buy, fly, eye
-yu	Kyu	you

The *-u* sound in many Japanese terms is usually contracted except during polite speech (just as the *i* sound in *it is* is contracted to *it's*). For example, the word **tsuki** often sounds like ts'ki (or simply ski, like *skiing*), and the trailing *-u* in *Onegai shimasu* is dropped, leaving an *-s* sound as in *mass* or *moss*.

List of Terms

Counting		
Numeral	Japanese	Alternate*
1	ichi	
2	ni	
3	san	
4	shi	Yon
5	go	
6	rokku	
7	shichi	Nana
8	hachi	
9	ku	
10	jyu	
11	jyu-ichi	
20	ni-ju	
21	ni-ju-ichi	

**Alternate forms of 4 and 7 exist because the syllable shi is related to death and misfortune and is avoided in sensitive or polite speech.*

Dojo Etiquette	
Phrase	Translation or Meaning
Aikidoka	Practitioner of Aikido.
Kamiza	'High seat', front of class space and shrine to O-Sensei.
Shimoza	'Lower Seat', back of class space at the entrance/rear wall.
Rei	Formal Bow
Seiza	'Proper Sitting', A formal seated-kneeling position.
Onegai shimasu	'Please show me' or 'I ask for your training'.
Domo arigato gozaimashita (gozaimasu)	Very formal form of 'thank you'.
Sensei	Teacher.
Senpai	Senior student, used to refer to a student of higher rank/seniority than self.
Kohai	Junior student, used to refer to a student of lower rank/seniority than self.
Tatami	Practice mats, individual or combined.

Basic Terminology

Basic Concepts	
Phrase	Translation or Meaning
Uke	'Receiver'; Attacking partner, recipient of Aikido technique.
Nage (also traditionally <i>shite</i>)	'Thrower' (<i>Do-er</i>); Defending partner, performer of an Aikido technique.
-nage (used as a suffix)	Throw; a throwing technique, i.e.: Koshinage ('hip throw').
Omote	'To the front of...'; description or variation of a technique.
Ura	"To the rear of...", description or variation of a technique.
Hanmi (also <i>kamae</i> , rarely <i>dachi</i>)	Stance.
Ai-hanmi	'Harmonized' or 'Same' stance, relative to partner, i.e.: both have left foot forward.
Gyaku-hanmi	'Reverse' or 'Mirrored' stance, relative to partner.
Migi	Right, i.e.: Migihanmi ('right sided stance').
Hidari	Left, i.e.: Hidarihanmi ('left sided stance').
Soto- (used as a prefix)	'To the outside of', description or variation of a technique.
Uchi- (used as a prefix)	'To the inside of', description or variation of a technique.
-uchi (used as a suffix)	A hitting or striking technique, i.e.: Shomenuchi ('vertical head-strike').
Tsuki	'Thrust', describes punching, stabbing, and poking movements.
Jodan-	'High area', usually describes a strike, i.e.: Jodan-tsuki ('high punch' or 'punch to face').
Chudan-	'Mid area', usually describes a strike, i.e.: Chudan-tsuki ('mid punch' or 'punch to chest').
Gedan-	'Low area', usually describes a strike, i.e.: Gedan-tsuki ('low punch' or 'punch to kidney').
Kokyu	Breath, breathing, controlled breathing.
-waza	Techniques, as in a category; Ura- waza equivalent to 'techniques to the rear'.

Basic Movements	
Phrase	Translation or Meaning
Tai-sabaki	Literally "Body" (<i>tai</i>) "Movement" (<i>sabaki</i>), a category of technique.
Ukemi	Breakfall, also a category of technique.
Shiko	Knee-walking.
Tenkan	Sliding pivot, to face opposite direction.
Irimi-	Describes an "entering" movement or motion.
Tenkai	To face opposite direction, turning feet but not pivoting as in <i>tenkan</i> .

Clothing and Weapons	
Phrase	Translation or Meaning
Gi (may be <i>do-gi</i> , <i>budo-gi</i> , <i>aikido-gi</i> , etc.)	White martial arts uniform.
Obi	Belt.
Hakama	Pleated, divided skirt worn by black belts.
Zori	Sandals, flip-flops, or other indoor footwear.
Katana	Traditional Japanese sword.
Bokken	Wooden sword, used to simulate or replace a live bladed sword.
Jo	Wooden staff, usually 3-4 feet long.
Tanto	Knife, wooden variety used during practice.
Tegatana	Literally "hand blade", refers to the side of the hand including the small finger.

Basic Terminology

Ranks	
Phrase	Translation or Meaning
Mukyusha	Beginner (lacking a <i>kyu</i> rank)
Yukyusha (also Mudansha)	Ranked White Belt (lacking a <i>dan</i> rank)
Yudansha	Ranked Black Belt
Kyu	Basic, beginner rank.
Dan	Advanced, student rank.
Gokyu, Yonkyu, Sankyu, Nikyu, Ikkyu	5th, 4th, 3rd, 2nd, 1st Kyu
Godan, Yondan, Sandan, Nidan, Shodan	5th, 4th, 3rd, 2nd, 1st Dan
Shihan	Master teacher

Biography: Morihei Ueshiba

Morihei Ueshiba was born in the Japanese village of Tanabe, Kii Province, now known as Wakayama Prefecture, on December 15, 1883. His father was a retainer of the Kii family, lords of the province. He taught a secret method of combat called Aioi-Ryu with a mixture of Tai-jutsu and Kendo. The fighting style Morihei learned from his father as a boy lies at the root of present-day Aikido.

When Morihei was twelve years old, his father served as chief of the village and member of the village council. Thugs hired by political opponents sometimes came to the house and assaulted Morihei's father. These incidents of violence made a permanent impression on the boy and he resolved to become strong through the martial arts.

At age eighteen, Morihei worked on a street of wholesalers in Tokyo by day and studied jujutsu at the Kito School under Tokusaburo Tosawa. This style was influenced by the Chinese Kempo techniques which strike the vulnerable parts of the body, yet gives prominence to the art of throwing an opponent.

After a few months in Tokyo, Morihei developed heart beriberi and had to return home. When he recovered, he was determined to strengthen his body. As a youth his short five foot two body was slight, but as he studied the martial arts, he became solid and muscular. He went to Sakai to study the fencing under Masakatsu Nakai at the Yagu School of fencing. To release some of his youthful energy during this period he would engage in rice-making contests in his village. In these contests, a large scoop of rice is placed in a stone mortar and pounded with a heavy mallet until it becomes a rubbery paste that is laid out in flat cakes to cool before eating. Completing the process first required great strength and team work with a partner. Morihei beat all comers and would often break the mallet. This story suggests he had a strong youthful competitive spirit.

While his fencing training was interrupted by a period of military service in Manchuria (Russo-Japanese War 1904-5), he received a certificate from the Yagu School sect in 1908.

In the spring of 1910, Morihei went as a settler to the northern island of Hokkaido. At that time it was still considered to be a frontier region. Here he continued to study the martial arts on the pay per technique system under Sokaku Takeda, a master of the Daito Jujutsu sect. Morihei practiced on his own most of the time and paid the master between three and five hundred yen for each technique (one yen was worth about half a dollar). In addition Morihei would cut the master's wood and carry his water before receiving a lesson.

His father's death, in the spring of 1918, had a profound effect on Morihei's spirit as reflected in his own thoughtful questions below:

"Of what use is it to perfect one's self in the arts of self-defense if one must inevitably be defeated by death? After all what does fighting mean? If I win today, the time will inevitably come when I must lose. What will I have accomplished if I waste my entire life and all my spiritual power on such things as these? What will I have gained? The universe is absolute: is there no absolute victory?"

Morihei Ueshiba began to see an answer through meditation and prayer. He moved to Ayabe where he lived and studied until 1926. During this period his son Kisshomaru was born. The master also occupied himself with the study of Shinkage jujutsu, with the arts of the spear, and with simple farm work.

An important experience occurred to Morihei in Ayabe in the spring of 1925. A naval officer, who was a professor of fencing, came to visit. During their conversation, they argued and agreed to have a contest with wooden swords. The officer attacked, but the master dodged each blow and his opponent, unable to touch him, finally gave up. Wanting to rest after this encounter, the master went out into the garden alone. He experienced satori, the Zen equivalent of a revelation or enlightenment. Here is his own description:

"I felt that the universe suddenly quaked and that the golden spirit sprang up from the ground, veiled my body and changed my body into a golden one. At the same time, my mind and body became light. I was able to understand God, the Creator of this universe."

"At that moment I was enlightened. The source of Budo (martial arts) is God's love, the spirit of loving protection for all beings. Endless tears of joy streamed down my cheeks. Since that time I have grown to feel that the whole earth is my house and the sun, the moon, and the stars are all my own things. I had become free from all desire, not only for position, fame, and property, but also to be strong. I understood. Budo is not felling an opponent by force; nor is it a tool to lead the world into destruction with arms. True Budo is to accept the spirit of the universe, keep the peace of the world, correctly produce, protect, and cultivate all things in nature. I understood. The training of Budo is to take God's love, which correctly produces, protects, and cultivates all things in nature, and assimilate and utilize it in our own mind and body."

This remarkable insight was the beginning of Aikido.

The ethic of Ueshiba's enlightenment is reflected in the technique which the master taught. Therefore instead of trying to block an attack and reply to it, or avoid an attack then counter-attack, the technical aim is to harmonize one's will with the will of the opponent. One should conduct and lead the energy (ki) in the opponent's movement, until it is dissipated, without causing harm.

In 1927 the master moved to Tokyo and began to teach. A large house on a hill was rented to serve as temporary headquarters. The training was rugged, and the pupils became skilled and strong. He kept strict control over the admission of new students, requiring from each the recommendation of two persons of high standing. The result was that a majority of the pupils were budo experts: nobles, military, and business leaders, or children of such families. The master was concerned with preserving the good reputation of his new budo by ensuring that his pupils were of a certain position, or of a certain personal level. Professor Jigoro Kano, the founder of Judo, came to visit along with several of his pupils. Kano is said to have remarked on seeing the master's Aikido, *"this is my ideal budo"*. He sent several high-ranking men from the Kodokan to study with Ueshiba.

The outbreak of World War Two dispersed O-Sensei's pupils, many were called into military service. The master left Tokyo and retired to the site of the Aiki shrine at Iwama to engage in farming, private practice and teaching. The master's son, Kisshomaru, took charge of the Tokyo dojo at this time. Since that time, Aikido has spread outside of Japan, and the special restrictions controlling the acceptance of pupils for the new partial art have been removed. Following the war, the master had come to feel that the principles of Aikido were essentially international and should be offered freely to all as a way of filling the spiritual vacuum of the modern world. Accordingly, instructors were sent out to all parts of the globe.

On April 26, 1969, at 86 years of age, the master died in his sleep.