

Isoyama Sensei introduction to Hakama Pleat Explanation Text

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Translated by Ethan Weisgard, 2006

Aikido as a martial art

It is said that Budo went from, in olden times, being a means to fell your enemies, to developing into a way or path of life. In the beginning it was based on the idea of felling your enemy through skills and effort, but by merely focusing on this one could not win. One had to include the study of the spiritual side of things. It is believed that the final ideal is “winning without fighting,” this being the circumstances, the ultimate purpose that we wish to achieve.

Therefore the words of the masters of budo, the expressions of their mentality and eminent philosophy that demonstrates the strong way of living, have been achieved through their life of severe training.

People who intend to practice Aikido must understand the spirit of Aikido as explained by the founder Ueshiba Morihei O-Sensei.

O-Sensei said the following:

Aikido is love. You make this great great love of the universe your heart and then you must make your own mission the protection and love of all things. To accomplish this mission must be the true budo. True budo means to win over yourself and eliminate the fighting spirit of the enemy...No, it is a way to absolute self/perfection, in which the very enemy is eliminated. The technique of Aiki is ascetic training and a way through which you reach a state of unification of body and spirit by the principle of heaven.

Morihei Ueshiba

In Budo there are many different schools or styles to be found. Because of differences in the reiho (etiquette) in the different styles, this leads to confusion.

Even though there is a school - Ogasawara Ryu - that teaches only reiho, I believe that it should be enough for those of us who intend to train Aikido to learn the reiho as taught by O-Sensei.

Even now what is embedded in my memory is an example from when I started my training under O-Sensei. I was 12 years old and O-Sensei was already 64.

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When Saito Morihiro Sempai was Sandan, I was introduced to O-Sensei by him. When I made my greeting to O-Sensei, he greeted me not at all as a child, but as if we both were adults. I felt that this was truly wonderful, and the form that O-Sensei showed me in his *rei* at this encounter created the foundation for my *rei*.

(Translator's note: When using the word "rei" in Japanese, this refers to both the physical form of the bow, as well as to all the aspects of etiquette behind the form.)

I will explain the *Reiho* (manners) for inside the dojo at a later time, this time I think it would be good to give the information regarding the hakama. I will be most pleased if you find my explanation useful.

First I will try to explain the meaning of wearing the hakama.

People who intend to train Aikido wish to quickly be allowed to wear hakama, this goes for people anywhere in the world, I believe.

In response to this wish, there are places in which beginners are allowed to wear hakama, but I am extremely doubtful about this practice.

It should not be forgotten that an important meaning of wearing the hakama is to not allow your opponent the opportunity of seeing and detecting the movement of your feet.

When there are few practitioners training it is not so difficult to see the foot movements if people are wearing hakama, but in cases where there are many people training it is often easy to miss the foot movements (translator's note: thereby not being able to correct them, as a teacher). This is one main reason for not letting beginners wear hakama.

There are many people shamelessly wearing hakama who do not even know how many pleats the hakama has. A requirement for wearing the hakama is to understand the significance of the pleats. This is something I strongly wish for people to learn about.

Written by Hiroshi Isoyama
8th Dan Shihan
Ibaraki Shibu Dojo

