

Reihō – Bowing Methods (礼法)

The meaning of *reihō* can be sometimes translated as "etiquette," "respect" or "courtesy." It is a very important concept in Japanese culture, including traditional Japanese martial arts. It is not a "ceremony" or a "ritual" per se; as this may construe that it is performing an exotic spiritual or religious act without meaning, which is not the case. In Japan this act is considered ancestral reverence. While *reihō* may have the meaning of "etiquette," this does not adequately describe its many connotations. *Reihō* is in many ways a code of conduct, which in Japan is applied to one's everyday life. For example; at school, at work, at home, when they visit their doctor, ect. In Japan "*rei*" is not taught to the Japanese – usually only to foreigners – because it is generally known due to its culture. In our western culture (specifically American) we tend not to "show respect." And when we do give respect we often express it by saying it. And when we do say that we respect someone as in "I respect you" it is seldom given out. So, *reihō* is a foreign concept to westerners.

Since we are dealing with a Japanese martial art, *reihō* is included in the *Genbukan*. It is the basis of all traditional Japanese martial arts, no matter what their roots are. Without *reihō* in martial arts it would be nothing more, nor better, than hoodlums fighting in the streets. In the *Genbukan* the purpose of *reihō* has two purposes. First, it is a way of paying respect to the tradition, the teacher, and the students. Secondly, it provides a degree of safety, especially during the use of weapons. In the *Genbukan*, as well as most Japanese martial arts, everything begins and ends with *reihō*.

Entering the *Dōjō*

When entering the *dōjō*, stand in a natural posture and perform *shizen rei* (standing bow) to anyone present, and say one of the following: *ohayō gozaimasu* (good morning), *konnichiwa* (good afternoon), or *konbanwa* (good evening). If you are already at the *dōjō* it is customary to stand up and greet the teacher when he arrives.

Entering and Exiting the Training Floor

Before entering on the training floor, face towards the *kamidana* (*dōjō* shrine) and perform *shizen rei*. If you are training outside you will face to the north and perform *shizen rei*.

Note: If you are late to class, quickly prepare yourself for training. Upon entering the *dōjō*, immediately step off to the side and perform the *shizen rei*.

Beginning and Ending of Class

The beginning and ending of class is signified by a formal bowing consisting of two parts: *shizen rei* (bow in acknowledgment of the tradition) and *shi rei* (bow to the teacher).

1. Beginning: *Seiretsu* – Form a line (整列)

At the beginning of class the instructor will say, "*Dewa keiko wo hajimeru*" (begin training). The *senpei* (the senior) will command everyone to line up in a row by saying, "*Seiretsu!*" All the students will line up by rank and kneel into *seiza* (a seated posture) with the *senpei* at the lead, facing the *kamidana* (*dōjō* shrine). The instructor will move to the front of the class and kneel into *seiza* facing the class.

2. *Mokusō* – Meditation (黙想)

The *senpei* will then instruct everyone to perform *mokusō* (Japanese term for meditation to "clear one's mind"). Everyone will then place their hands in their laps, right hand over left, thumbs touching, and then lightly closing eyes to clear their minds. After a few minutes, the instructor will then recite the "*Ninniku Seishin*" poem with everyone following his lead. The instructor will then stop the meditation by saying "*Mokusō yame.*" Everyone will then open their eyes and places their hands on the thighs.

3. *Shinzen Rei* – Bow before the shrine (神前礼)

The instructor turns around and faces the *kamidana* (*dōjō* shrine). He then places his hands in *gasshō* (hands together in front of his chest). The students with then follow his lead by doing the same *gasshō*. The instructor then recites the following phrase, "*Chihayafuru kami no oseiwa tokoshieni tadashiki kokoro mi wo mamoruran.*" (The teachings of God never changes throughout eternity and will protect you if you have a correct mind/heart/spirit). And then he says, "*Shikin haramitsu daikōmyō!*" (The sounds of words in our reach for perfection will lead us to the powerful light). The students then repeats, "*Shikin haramitsu daikōmyō!*" Everyone then claps twice, performs a bow, and claps one more time followed by one more bow.

Note: If the Teacher is not in class then the *senpei* does **NOT** go to the front of class where the teacher sits. He stays in the usual place at the far right.

4. *Shi Rei* – Bow to the teacher (師礼)

The instructor then turns around and faces the class. The *senpei* will command everyone to correct their posture and bow to the teacher by saying "*Shisei wo tadashite, Sensei ni rei!*" The students then bows to the instructor, while the instructor does the same to the students, with everyone saying, "*Onegai shimasu.*" (Please assist me).

Note: if the teacher is not in class, the the *senpei* says "*Shisei wo tadashite, shinzen ni rei!*"

5. Ending: *Seiretsu* – Form a line (整列)

At the end of class the instructor will say, "*Keiko owari*" (Training has ended). The *senpei* (the senior) will command everyone to line up in a row by saying, "*Seiretsu!*" All the students will line up by rank and kneel into *seiza* (a seated posture) with the *senpei* at the lead, facing the *kamidana* (*dōjō* shrine). The instructor will move to the front of the class and kneel into *seiza* facing the class.

6. *Mokusō* – Meditation (黙想)

The *senpei* will then instruct everyone to perform *mokusō* (Japanese term for meditation to "clear one's mind"). Everyone will then place their hands in their laps, right hand over left, thumbs touching, and then lightly closing eyes to clear their minds. After a few minutes, the instructor will then stop the meditation by saying "*Mokusō yame.*" Everyone will then open their eyes and places their hands on the thighs.

7. *Shinzen Rei* – Bow before the shrine (神前礼)

The instructor turns around and faces the *kamidana* (*dōjō* shrine). He then places his hands in *gasshō* (hands together in front of his chest). The students with then follow his lead by doing the same *gasshō*. The instructor then recites the following phrase, "*Chihayafuru kami no oseiwa tokoshieni tadashiki kokoro mi wo mamoruran.*" (The teachings of God never changes throughout eternity and will protect you if you have a correct mind/heart/spirit). And then he says, "*Shikin haramitsu daikōmyō!*" (The sounds of words in our reach for perfection will lead us to the powerful light). The students then repeats, "*Shikin haramitsu daikōmyō!*" Everyone then claps twice, performs a bow, and claps one more time followed by one more bow.

Note: If the Teacher is not in class then the *senpei* does **NOT** go to the front of class where the teacher sits. He stays in the usual place at the far right.

8. *Shi Rei* – Bow to the teacher (師礼)

The instructor then turns around and faces the class. The *senpei* will command everyone to correct their posture and bow to the teacher by saying "*Shisei wo tadashite, Sensei ni rei!*" The students then bows to the instructor saying, "*Arigatō gozaimashita.*" (Thank you). The instructor bows to the class while saying, "*Gokurō samadeshita*" (thank you very much for your efforts). The *senpai* will then give a command to the students to bow to each other by saying, "*Sōgo ni rei.*" Everyone will then bow to each other and says "*Arigatō gozaimashita.*"

Note: if the teacher is not in class, the *senpei* says "*Shisei wo tadashite, shinzen ni rei!*"

Exiting the *Dōjō*

Upon leaving the *dōjō*, stand in a natural posture and perform *shizen rei* (standing bow) and say one of the following: *oyasumi nasai* (good night), or *shitsurei shimasu* (pardon me leaving).