

## **Wearing the Black Belt & Hakama:**

When someone asks, "Why do you practice Aikido?" We all understand that the correct way to answer this question is to say that we do not concern ourselves with the black belt or hakama and then begin to expound on the benefits of the physical and mental aspects of Aikido training. This is very correct and wonderful. Yet, despite what we say and do, we are all concerned about getting the black belt. How we get it and when we get it is foremost in our minds. It is okay to admit it; we are all human beings so it is only natural. However, please remember that it is not that part of ourselves as human beings we can be the most proud of.

The most commonly asked question when someone calls about joining the dojo is, "how long does it take to get a black belt?" My answer ranges from "an average of three years" to "when I'm sucking on popsicles in H\_\_\_." (Just kidding!)

One day quite sometime ago, I had a very sincere but difficult caller and you must understand that I receive many, many (too many) inquiries everyday and sometimes around the tenth call I am no longer at my very best, you could say.

After the normal initial chit-chat, he finally asked me the deadly question and I replied: "About three years." (I thought I would be generous and kind with this caller.) About two minutes later into the conversation, he asked the same question again. I replied: "Five years." He asked me again and I replied, "Ten years." Obviously, this caller was not catching on to the pattern here and I began to doubt his ability as a good learner and student. Finally about thirty seconds later, he dared to ask me one more time and I replied on que, "Twenty years!"

This conversation is more or less very much like a conversation held several hundred years ago and is a very famous and well known among martial artists and Zen experts. In the original version, the questioner, an aspiring but inexperienced young swordsman, achieved immediate enlightenment and went on to become a first class martial artist.

Although I followed the traditional formula quite faithfully and to the letter in my own mind, but I am afraid the resulting effect was quite a bit to the contrary. The caller, instead of achieving a profound enlightenment and prostrating himself before me in gratitude (which is very hard to do on the telephone), he simply called

me, "an ass" and hung up. As many instructors well know through experience, the great and profound wisdom of the martial arts does not always work as we wish, especially not as in the past.

Sometimes, we want to take this superior wisdom, wrap it around something like a sturdy bamboo stick of a goodly thickness or paste it on to the back of your hand, and you will find that the effectiveness of this wisdom has been immediately and greatly enhanced. No, this is not the proper way to handle students. The proper way is to read your Yudansha Kai bulletin.

---

## **REMINDERS**

When leaving the dojo be sure to turn off both lights on the first floor, the fan in the men's dressing room and third floor (if it is being used) and check the stove on the second floor making sure that it is turned off.

Before and after class, make sure that everyone has paid their monthly dues. This is where Black Belts fail the most. It is very, very important to collect the dues because it is our only source of income and we are not a rich dojo. I hope I have everyone's cooperation in this.

Everyday, after practice as usual, the practice area should be vacuum-cleaned and the floors wiped clean. Also, especially in the summer months, we need to keep the water cooler filled as well as the humidifiers. The humidifiers are necessary to keep the air clean. There is one of the first and third floors (Sensei's room needs prior permission).

Always check with Sensei first to see who is going to teach class if he is not. Please observe this rule carefully.

Please, please try to attend our Black Belt Meetings. Thank you.