

The Origin and Meaning of Bowing



It is commonly believed that the act of bowing in Judo has a religious significance. This is not true.

Bowing originates from the days of the Samurai. When two Samurai warriors met they would bow their heads to show the back of their neck, this demonstrated that they trust the other not to cut their head off.

Nowadays bowing has become a form of demonstrating respect and a willingness to be friendly.

In terms of judo culture, bowing has several meanings and is a display of good judo etiquette. At the beginning of practice the bow is a symbol of readiness. At the end of practice bowing is recognition of appreciation (saying thank you).

The western hand shake has a similar meaning. The hand shake originates from the days of the Knights. Should two sword wearing soldiers or knights meet they would hold right hands during conversation to signify that their sword hand was empty and ensure that it would stay empty.

Like bowing the hand shake has now come to signify a greeting. Therefore bowing is understood and performed correctly, rather than merely nodding the head, the Japanese equivalent of the handshake has been executed.

When to bow:

- Upon entering and leaving the dojo (practice hall)
- When stepping onto and off the tatame (mat)
- Before and after practice with another judoka
- When requesting permission from the sensei to leave or come onto the tatame during a session

Points to remember when bowing

- Feet must be together
- For boys the hands should be extended with the fingers together at your sides
- For girls the hands should be extended with the fingers together on the front of your thighs.
- When bowing the whole upper body should move forward and over, not just the head.

Before and after practicing Judo or engaging in a match, opponents bow to each other. Bowing is an expression of gratitude and respect. In effect, you are thanking your opponent for giving you the opportunity to improve your technique.

.....Dr. Jigoro Kano

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