



108 Aikido Meditation Practice

Everyone chooses a technique that they will do for the entire training. Any technique may be selected. However, if this is your first time experiencing the format, I suggest choosing a simple technique that does not require an elaborate pin. (Or leave the pin off.) Also, I suggest that if your technique has an omote and ura version, that you choose either the omote or ura version and stick with that for the whole time. Simplifying the movement part of the practice allows one to focus more deeply on the inner aspects of the practice. Also, choose a technique that you are at least moderately familiar with. This is not the time to "learn" a new technique. This is a time to "deepen."

After a short warm-up, everyone sits down in seiza. When the bell rings, everyone finds a partner a sit across from each other.

When the bell rings again (ONCE), everyone bows to their partner, gets up and does their first set of techniques together. A silent gesture at the beginning of the set indicates which grab or strike is desired (e.g., a fist toward ones stomach indicates "mune tsuki," pointing to one's shoulder indicates "kata dori," etc.)

A "set" of techniques is when each person has done 4 techniques. However, instead of the usual "4-4" pattern where you do 4, then your partner does their 4, the 108 format is 1-1, 2-2, 3-3, 4-4. You do your first one, then your partner does their first one; you do your second one, then your partner does their second one; you do your third one, then your partner does their third one; you do your fourth one, then your partner does their fourth one.

When both people have completed this alternating set of 4, they sit down where they are, face each other, bow, and wait in silence until everyone in the room has finished their set and is also sitting. After a short pause the bell rings (ONCE). Everyone bows to their partner, gets up and does a second set with the same partner. At the end of the second set, you sit, bow, and wait for everyone to finish their second set. After a pause, the bell rings again and everyone gets up to do a third set with the same partner.

At the end of the third set, after everyone is sitting, there is a pause and then the bell rings TWICE. The two rings let everyone know that it is time to bow to their current partner, then rise and change partners. Once a new partner is found, everyone sits in seiza spaced evenly on the mat and waits for the bell to signal the start of the first of the next three sets with this new partner.

This pattern continues until a total of 108 techniques have been completed. (Everyone will have a total of nine different partners.) At the end of the 108, the bell is rung THREE times and everyone does kokyu dosa with their last partner. After each pair completes one set of kokyu dosa (we only do one set here), they wait in silence until the final bell rings ONCE. Everyone then returns to the line and we bow out.

During the seated meditation parts, drop deeply inside yourself just noticing, not judging, your experience. Pay attention to your breath and notice any feelings you might have in your body. If a thought appears, let it go and come back to your breath. Some people like to close their eyes during this time and some people prefer to keep their eyes slightly open and cast downward in the space between them and their partner. Either way is OK.

During the training some students may need to sit out for a while or get off the mat for some reason. That's OK. It is not uncommon for someone to feel dizzy, lightheaded or overheated. That's OK. The 108 tends to bring things up - especially energetic things. Remember, the 108 is meant to be an edifying ritual, not an agonizing ordeal. (Although, it can be intense.) If you need to sit out for a while or get off the mat, take care of yourself. You might not complete all 108 techniques, but you did enter into the spirit of the ritual. And after all, this willingness to "enter in" (irimi) and open to new experiences may be the most enlivening aspect of our practice together.

Extracted from an Article by Tom Gambell