

Sword and Spirit

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— Why Budo? —

Regardless of the times in which you live, or the circumstances of your life, success largely depends on things you can control:

- **Building a foundation of strong relationships in a community of mutual support and achievement.**
- **Forging a disciplined and positive mindset.**
- **Enhancing your physical health and capabilities.**

These are exactly the benefits membership in an authentic dojo provides.

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When an Exclamation Replaces Thought: Why Class, Culture, and Precision Matter in the Dojo

There is a particular sound that echoes through many Western dojo, sharp, clipped, and proudly delivered as if volume alone were a virtue. It is often defended as tradition, as toughness, as respect. Yet in truth it is none of these. When language is reduced to a bark, it ceases to carry meaning and becomes theater. My sensei, a Japanese man shaped by classical sensibilities rather than modern bravado, regarded that exclamation not as spirit but as a collapse of it. He did not merely dislike it. He rejected what it represented—a preference for compression over comprehension, imitation over understanding, noise over presence.

The issue was never about being strict or precise. It was about class. Japanese language is built on relational awareness. Words do not merely transmit information; they establish posture between people. Strip them of context and you strip them of dignity. The term so casually shouted in many karate circles arose from narrow, abrasive environments, places where endurance was emphasized through verbal bluntness and hierarchy was enforced through verbal reduction. Even in Japan, its use is situational and limited. To export it wholesale and deploy it as a universal expression of encouragement is not cultural respect. It is cultural flattening.

Encouragement, when done properly, does not need to be loud, aggressive, or theatrical. A calm “*ganbatte kudasai*” carries real weight because it recognizes effort without demanding submission. It says, in effect, do your best, and it trusts the listener to know what that means.

A softly spoken “*yukūjuri*” reminds a student that control matters more than speed, that refinement outlasts force.

“*Daijoubu desu*” reassures without infantilizing, restoring confidence rather than manufacturing it.



When a technique lands correctly, “*ii desu ne*” acknowledges quality without inflating ego, a small phrase that keeps pride aligned with precision.

Even the most modest words can carry depth when they are intact. A clear “*hai*,” spoken with attention, affirms understanding without turning affirmation into performance.

“*Mou ikkai*,” delivered evenly, invites repetition without pressure or humiliation.

“*Sore de ii*” grants approval while preserving humility. Before training begins, “*onegai shimasu*” frames the exchange as mutual responsibility rather than dominance. When practice concludes, “*arigatou gozaimashita*” seals the space with gratitude, reminding everyone present that effort was shared, not extracted.

What my sensei was defending was not etiquette for its own sake but the psychology that underlies real

discipline. When students are taught to shout instead of to listen, to portray toughness instead of to embody it, the art begins to erode from the inside. Language shapes attention. Attention shapes movement. Movement, over time, becomes character.

A dojo that tolerates sloppy language will eventually tolerate sloppy thinking, and sloppy thinking always shows up in the body.

Removing that one crude expression is an act of conservation. It preserves the dojo as a place of refinement rather than affectation, of seriousness rather than cosplay. Encouragement does not require aggression. Respect does not require volume or gruffness. Strength does not require theatrics. The martial path has always been about learning how to stand properly in the world.

Sometimes that lesson begins by choosing better words and, just as importantly, by knowing when silence carries more power than any shout ever could. 🌐

A Request from Castillo Sensei

My name is Edward Castillo. On October 20th, 2024, **I had a series of cardiac traumas, resulting in a hospitalization.** I am in need of assistance as I can't work at this time and things have taken a downturn financially. **I am seeking assistance while recovering from this life-changing situation.** I am a martial arts instructor and have a limited capacity for any physical activities. As you know, the monthly bills mount and it becomes difficult to focus on recovery, with the other worries involved. I am working on making a full recovery and my particular health insurance does not cover my cardiac therapy. Thank you and any assistance is appreciated. All the best to you and yours.



**Donate via
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Edward Castillo (Salahuddin Muhammad) is docho of the Takeshin Dojo and director of the Nihonden Aikibujutsu Senyokai. An overseas director (Nihon jujutsu division) for the Japanese Budo Association under his teacher, Asano Yasuhito Sensei, Castillo Sensei is the current head of Hontai Hakkei-ryu, and a student of Shinkage-ryu Hyoho (Asano-ha). He is retired from the fields of private client and executive protection, and has also worked in fugitive recovery.

