

In the martial arts there is a term called Okuden. Okuden refers to the inner circle of teachings within a Ryu (system) of martial arts where only the deserving will be given these teachings. The teacher/Sensei holds back the core strategies, techniques and principles that define their Ryu for the ones who have deemed themselves worthy to attain and learn them. This principle is very much alive today despite the hype of the media claiming there are no secret teachings to martial arts anymore.

When Takanami Sensei began teaching me the Okuden of his family's Ryu he explained to me that I must always continue to earn this right. Sensei also said that once I was no longer a part of this inner circle I would never be welcomed back into the family since this is the core of the Ryu that has been taught from generation to generation. This was a privilege that I continue to earn each day by living the principles that define his Ryu.

The Okuden is revolved around mystery when you are a student. You quite often see black belts performing certain techniques, Kata or items that intrigue you and you want to learn more about it just to find out that you are not allowed to. There are many reasons for this and we will explain why many of you are told "When it is your time" and not taught these techniques.

- Sincerity. To be included as a member of the Aiki Te Ryu Okuden Council you must have demonstrated great sincerity in your training and for your senior students as well as your master instructor. Measuring your sincerity is easy for a Sensei to do since they watch each of you very closely at all times. If you believe you are sincere in your training you must step back, look at your methods of training, sacrifices made to get where you were and if you are a perfect example of what your Sensei and Ryu's etiquette demand from their black belts. Sincerity is judge by the Master of the Ryu, no one else and only they will allow you into the Okuden.
- Loyalty. The Okuden are loyal to their school and are always trying to help it grow and achieve great things, many times when it is not convenient for them (sacrifice) and are the most respectful of their Sensei. It is very easy to claim loyalty in today's age but you will be tested and if you fail you will never achieve this wonderful part of your training.
- Sacrifice. This seems to be the hardest part of the training for people today since we live in a selfish world. We are not talking about killing a goat and offering it here but rather three types of sacrifice that are essential to attaining mastery in the martial arts. First there is the emotional sacrifice. Understanding that you will get upset, mad or frustrated and you keep training trusting your Sensei will one day help you to understand this sacrifice is the correct way...quitting, well you know where that leads. Second is the physical sacrifice. You must push yourself beyond the mere physical limitations of your body to truly develop your skills. When it hurts you push harder, when you bleed you get up and keep on going and when you get knocked down, no matter how much it hurts you get up and go back to the lesson. This is the ultimate test of your body. Last is the mind. You must learn to let go of your personal thoughts and opinions. You have to trust your Ryu and Sensei 100% with no evocation in order to truly learn. The more you question the training the less likely you will ever attain the Okuden privileged. There are reason why we teach you to put your foot at a certain angle, stand a certain way and why Sensei can take up an entire class on talking. Perhaps he is testing your patience or to see who really listens...or maybe he is just examining if you are sincere and loyal.

Whatever the reason your Sensei does what he does to you, keep in mind you are being tested each day, each class and inside as well as outside the Dojo. We screen our applicants for this special privilege extensively and never accept them outside of the Ryu because we must trust you as much as you trust us.

The Aiki Te Ryu system has only had two people accepted into the Okuden. They have learned many things that other black belts could only dream of and have the deepest understanding of the martial arts. Will you be the next one?