



# Lakewood Budo Kai

*Fujitsu, Karate, and Women's Self Defense*

## Hidden Meanings of the Martial Arts Bow

Martial arts are military arts, techniques used by ancient warriors to protect themselves and their leaders. Some of the hidden meanings of the bow can be understood in military terms.

In military terms, you can think of the bow as a salute, performed by both higher and lower ranks. In this sense, it demonstrates that you are respectful and understand basic martial arts etiquette. Our students learn how to bow from both a more formal kneeling position as well as a less formal standing position. The more formal kneeling bow is the least threatening because it is hard to attack from a kneeling position. In our Dojo, the bow is performed with our hands held open, not in fists. Our hands are open to show that we are unarmed and don't have a weapon. Bowing with your hands held open shows that you can be trusted and you aren't a threat. When bowing to your partner, you lower your head and eyes, communicating to your partner that you trust they will not attack you. Your partner follows the same honor code.

However, the bow also has other, non-military, meanings, including hidden meanings that make this simple gesture, much more meaningful and important.

When you bow as you enter the Dojo, you are showing respect to the training hall and glad that you don't have to workout outside in the cold or heat. The bow at the entrance allows you to prepare your mind and ready yourself for the training that will occur as you formally leave one world and enter another. When bowing at the entrance, you are also paying respect to all of the instructors and past students before you – from our school's three decades of teaching to those instructors and students that were performing and perfecting the techniques thousands of years before us. Your bow pays homage and respect to this lineage – since without their dedication, training, and willingness to teach, none of us would be here today.

When you bow to your instructor, you do so to recognize all of the years of effort, dedication, and hardship spent by your instructor to learn the techniques so that they can now be passed on to you.

We always say that you don't have to learn the martial arts just to hurt someone. You can grab a stick, sneak up behind someone, and hit them over the head. Knowing how to hurt someone doesn't make you a martial artist. Martial artists are judged by their technique and by how they uphold and follow the traditions and protocol that were laid out centuries before them. How you bow, among other protocols, demonstrates your knowledge and respect for those who came before you. Your bow is your mark, your imprint, and let's others know how much respect you have for yourself and for our lineage.



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The next time you bow, think of it not only as a physical technique, or dojo "rule", but as a martial arts tradition, something to be performed with appreciation, humility and wisdom.