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## **Foreword**

### **New Year's Message for 2026**

At the beginning of Reiwa 8 (2026), I would like to respectfully extend my New Year's greetings.

*Judo is the way of using one's mental and physical strength in the most efficient manner.*

*Through training and practicing techniques for offense and defense, judo disciplines and cultivates body and spirit, and thereby masters the essence of this way*

*Thus, the ultimate goal of judo is to strive for personal perfection by means of this and to benefit the world.*

In January 1915, the monthly magazine "*Judo*" was launched. From its inaugural issue, a series of commentaries entitled *Judo hongji* (The Fundamental Principles of Judo) was appeared. In its second installment, Kano Jigoro Shihan articulated the essence of judo and the purpose of its practice in the words cited above to explain what judo is. These teachings later came to be known as the "*Kano Jigoro Shihan Ikun*" (*Teachings left behind by Kano Jigoro Shihan*).

Today, most people who engage in judo training have entered the discipline through judo as a competitive sport. I myself too encountered judo at a young age and devoted many years primarily to competition. Striving to become better than I was yesterday, and better tomorrow

than I am today, I trained relentlessly with the goal of outright victory at competitions such as the All Japan Judo Championships, the Olympic Games, and the World Judo Championships. Even after retiring from competition and becoming a coach, I continued to focus on technical mastery and on how to win. However, after assuming the position of President of the Kodokan at the age of 58, I began to reflect more deeply on the question: What is judo?

I would first like to consider the meaning of “*ju*”. In the book to annotate the secrets of *Kito-ryu Jujutsu*, it is written: “*Wa* (harmony) is softness that is sought, while *ju* (gentleness) is softness that arises naturally.” *Wa* refers to softness achieved consciously through effort, whereas *ju* signifies a natural softness—one that emerges without deliberate intent. Kano Shihan explained the principle of *ju* as follows: when an opponent attacks using force, one does not resist it, but instead adapts gently to that force, utilizes it, and thereby secures victory.

I understand *ju* to mean flexibility, and furthermore, adaptability. The prerequisite for this is not reacting with resistance, but first accepting everything as it is. Such acceptance cultivates the ability to respond to a wide range of situations. Rejection limits experience, while acceptance leads to a rich diversity of experiences. By remaining flexible, one becomes capable of responding appropriately and effectively.

Through randori training, I have gained several important insights. There were moments when, despite complete exhaustion and an apparent lack of strength, I was able to enter decisively into a technique. With only the faintest sensation of contact, I would suddenly find myself executing a throw, accompanied by the precise “sound” I had been seeking. At such moments, I realized that in order to apply force effectively, one must first release tension, restore posture, and prepare for the next movement. A fundamental principle common to all judo techniques is that true effectiveness lies in how force is released.

The same principle applies to footwork. Take *O-soto-gari* as an example. As a left-sided judoka, in order to move my right leg freely as the supporting leg, I first establish a firm grip and shift my center of gravity onto my left leg. At that moment, by pushing the body forward from the left leg, the right leg naturally steps forward, and by receiving that force, the body can be supported in balance on the right leg. To transmit power effectively, it is essential to relax and to execute weight transfer accurately and in proper sequence. This is a natural movement, no different from walking, and there is no need to overcomplicate it simply because it is judo.

One’s own center of gravity can also be aware with the position of the head. In other words, if you can control the opponent’s head, you can break his balance. Based on this, forward and backward movement, lateral movement, and body positioning should be considered. Every action must be taken with the next action in mind. The very first step must be taken while anticipating the step that follows.

None of these can be achieved through rigid posture or inflexible movement. Everything must be governed by *ju*.

Next, I would like to reflect on the meaning of *do*, the way. A way is a path that leads toward a destination. By extension, it signifies reason, principle, and ultimately a guiding philosophy. Judo, therefore, may be understood as a philosophy grounded in flexible adaptability.

A way exists in order to move forward. To walk the way of *ju*, one must abandon fixed preconceptions, continually ask “Why?” and “How?”, and create with flexibility within an unlimited field of possibilities.

At the same time, there are elements that must never be changed. Among Olympic sports, judo is unique in that its origins and philosophical foundation are clearly defined.

Kano Shihan established four methods of training in Kodokan Judo: *kata*, *randori*, *kogi* (lectures), and *mondo* (discussions). Through *kata* and *kogi*, one learns principles—the unchanging truths that must never waver. Through *randori* and *mondo*, one cultivates flexible thinking and adaptive response. Here we can see the concept of *fueki ryūkō* (tradition and innovation), articulated by the *haiku* master *Matsuo Basho* : the coexistence of the unchanging fundamental and change prompted by circumstances, both rooted in a single essence.

Judo is the path I have walked, the path you all have walked, and the path we will continue to walk. I invite you now to reflect on how this path should be shaped. And if I may say so plainly, first and foremost, please live earnestly in the present moment. *Ju* is the means of skills by which we live steadily in the present, and the series of such skills becomes the way.

It is our responsibility, as judoka, to pass on accurately to future generations the judo that our predecessors built and preserved, with pride and dignity. This year as well, we will continue to walk the way of *ju*, building new history while sharing the spirit and true essence of Kodokan Judo both in Japan and throughout the world.

I respectfully ask for your continued guidance, support, and cooperation in the year ahead, and I sincerely wish that this year will be a good one for each and every one of you.