

New Year's Message—2005
Feb 20, 2005.

Dear Takemusu Aikido Association Members:

I would like to belatedly wish everyone a Happy New Year and hope that your aikido endeavors will prosper. Our association is growing! We now have 39 member dojos throughout the United States and in six other countries. Thanks to everyone for your support. As an international association we need to maintain good communication to ensure that our basic duties (to Hombu Dojo, Saito Sensei's memory, and each other) are fulfilled.

One of our founding principles, was that our association would be collegial. This organization is based on voluntary participation but with the understanding that there is a definite hierarchy, which we commonly refer to as rank or the sempai/kohai system. It is another principle that the senior members be available to all members. This is a heavy responsibility. When called to witness examinations, for instance, we will be there. When asked to help, we will respond. Saito Sensei always felt it was important for the senior students to take care of others.

When a dojo joins the TAA, the dojo-cho is asked to select a senior instructor with whom he/she feels comfortable. The purpose of this arrangement is not to force a new style or personality upon a new member (as in a traditional teacher/student relationship) but to create a point of contact with a senior instructor so the dojo-cho can get help should concerns arise, tests be witnessed, or advanced training be desired. If the new dojo is developed out of an existing member dojo, the senior instructor selection is usually the sensei of the existing dojo. With new members joining from outside the TAA, this prior relationship may not exist and must be developed. This, by the way, is a requirement in the TAA bylaws.

While this may look like a traditional teacher/student relationship, and indeed we refer to it that way, in fact the relationship because of distance and culture is usually looser. Communication by email is a great way to keep in touch about what is going on at the individual dojo level. That is only part of the story, however. It is still necessary to attend events or invite a senior instructor occasionally. The reason for this is with members spread over the United States and six different countries it is too easy to become isolated. It is very difficult to maintain a steady direction in training without help from colleagues. I write this from personal experience.

The TAA Board of Directors has discussed and endorsed the concept that a member dojo should participate once a year in a TAA event like the Memorial Day Gasshuku or Fall Trainings. This requirement would be fulfilled by either traveling to a TAA event or by inviting a TAA senior instructor to the local dojo. Local dojos can cooperate in organizing regional seminars to increase attendance and save on costs. The thought behind this proposal is to insure that dojos maintain contact with senior instructors on a regular basis.

There are benefits to developing these interactions. It is always good for students to see what other TAA instructors are doing. More importantly, it gives the students a chance to see instructors interact with each other and giving support positively to each other. Constructive feedback and validation of one's own training and teaching direction is obtained. Attendance at TAA seminars inspires students to work on new things, and gives them opportunity to make new friends. It is possible that the only way a student in a local dojo can advance to dan level is through a senior TAA instructor witnessing an examination.

Finally, the way that a dojo-cho advances in rank in the TAA is by personally being seen occasionally and evaluated by a TAA instructor. This requires attendance at seminars or the invitation of a senior instructor to visit for a local seminar or dojo training. Rank is not automatically given, because time has elapsed.

It is not our intention to create a labyrinth of member requirements. I am hopeful that you will

agree that a participatory approach like that outlined above will contribute to all. Please let me know, if you feel otherwise. I look forward to training with you soon.

Sincerely yours,

Bill Witt, Shihan
President, Takemusu Aikido Association