

New Year Message—2007

1-05-07

Dear Takemusu Aikido Association Member:

Another year has come and gone, and it is time to reflect on the past year's events. Our association is now five years old and has grown about threefold from our beginning membership.

Although in total our membership has grown substantially again this year, three members have submitted their resignations in order to develop a relationship with Hitohiro Saito Sensei.

This has not been unexpected. There is always a certain amount of uncertainty, when a leader passes on. The decision to follow one path or another in aikido is a very personal and sometimes difficult choice. It may mean developing the courage to step out on one's own, or to develop a personal connection with someone. In any case, such a change also brings feelings about the possible loss of one's friends. Therefore whatever the reason, a personal decision to follow a particular direction in aikido is usually not made quickly but with considerable forethought.

Saito Shihan said that whatever the reason, people change aikido directions all the time. It should not be surprising to anyone, if a promising student decides to leave. There are two things, however, that must be observed by the parties involved: First, the departure must be civil. Second, both sensei and student must continue to respect one another. The sensei must recognize the student's quest for improvement, and the student must acknowledge the sensei's help in his personal development.

Aikido is spreading rapidly throughout the world. Now, I believe, there are more people training in aikido outside of Japan than in it. This can create situations where misunderstandings may arise, due to cultural differences and perceptions. Visiting a dojo in Japan, for instance, can be a real shock for someone who is used to an informal dojo atmosphere. Respect for the Sensei, the traditional techniques and teaching methods, the sempai/kohai relationships, personal commitment to training and loyalty to the dojo are all qualities I found particularly appealing, while training in Japan. These are all qualities which we should take pains to adopt and pass on, regardless of our aikido style or affiliation, because these are important facets of our developing aikido character.

Our association varies a bit from the traditional dojo organization. I always thought from the first that we are an organization of peers who are supportive of one another and not a top-down organization dictating how others should conduct themselves. This, I feel, allows us to pursue our own directions in aikido to the fullest, with support from other association members, if required. Our association respects the principles and culture of the Japanese dojo, and we seek to incorporate these qualities into our lives. In this manner, I believe, we are most free to develop the aikido that truly resonates within us.

By affiliating with the Aikikai, we establish a direct link to the Founder and are able to award our students ranks which are widely respected and recognized throughout the world. This arrangement also affords us considerable latitude in the conduct of our affairs and gives our students access to affiliated dojos worldwide. Considerable confidence has been shown to us by the current Doshu, and I feel our continuing association with the Aikikai is the best way to express our commitment to the Founder, Saito Morihiro Shihan, and the current Doshu.

I would like to wish all of you a very Happy New Year. I hope you all have a prosperous year for your dojos.

Best regards,

Bill Witt, Shihan
President
Takemusu Aikido Association