

New Year's Greetings for 2008

January 7, 2008

Palo Alto, CA

Dear Takemusu Aikido Association Member:

Every December I spend some time reflecting on our association and what has been accomplished during the year. I like to think of our positive directions and also of ways we can improve. It was in December six years ago, since your board members gathered in a room and telephoned Saito Shihan to tell him we were planning a new association and asked him for his support. His answer, true to his character, was almost explosive. It was a resounding, "Yes, of course." His enthusiasm energized us and gave us encouragement to come together and proceed in a new direction.

Our original membership began with 18 dojos and has now grown to 53. During this time, we have had an influx of members who have trained personally with Saito Shihan, and who wish to keep this unique experience alive by associating with friends made while training with Saito Shihan. I have noticed a new trend, however, with new members coming out of existing dojos to start new clubs and dojos of their own. This indicates to me that our instructors are doing a great job of developing committed aikido enthusiasts who wish to develop new centers for training.

Most dojos in our association are relatively small. I suppose it is just a fact of life that not many people, as a percentage of the total population, are attracted to martial arts. However, this smallness also creates an atmosphere of intimacy. In a small dojo, one has contact with a sensei on a personal level. It is this personal contact that helps build one's enthusiasm and commitment to aikido. In short, the personality of the instructor has probably as much to do with one's training as the skill of the instructor. A bond, therefore, develops between sensei and the student which can be very strong. This is the basis of the requirement in our association for each dojo-cho to have a senior mentor/instructor.

While it is important to have a single mentor/instructor for day to day development, sometimes the student has an opportunity to train with others by either visiting a dojo for a short time or, more often, through a seminar. In our association, with so many senior instructors who trained under Saito Shihan, there is a wealth of experience to be used as a training resource. If a student from our dojo wishes to go and train at another dojo for a short period of time, I am more than happy to help with the arrangements. It broadens the student's outlook and new friends are made. There is never a question of whether I will lose a student or not. It is a question of what is the best for the student. This helps our association in the future. A willingness to share students occasionally is, I think, unique in our association. We are all learning from the same source and everyone will benefit from "cross-pollination." This willingness to share students occasionally can only strengthen the bond between student and sensei.

As we begin the New Year, I would like to extend my best wishes to everyone and to wish you all a prosperous and happy 2008. I am looking forward to seeing you all in May at Lake Tahoe.