

## New Year's Message

At the beginning of the year, what do you do? Do you look back, or do you look forward? Do you dwell on your past accomplishments and setbacks, or do you plan new ventures?

Up until now, I have dwelt on the past sharing with you accomplishments, such as the percentage growth of new members, or the number of people promoted. Such statistics are good business-like indicators of success for a business plan. But the Takemusu Aikido Association is not a business, although it is managed according to good business principles. It is really an association of like-minded persons who share a particular philosophy of training in aikido.

We have enjoyed a period of rapid growth and are now accepted as a serious aikido association. That is the past. What will we do in the New Year to improve our association mission and our personal aikido as well? That is the question we must all ask of ourselves.

Reviewing past year efforts and developing plans for the future is a lot like practicing jyu waza. If a technique is tried and does not succeed well, we might dwell on the mistake we made. However, holding on to our past mistake may cause us to lose the concentration we require for success in performing the next technique, and it is probable that the next technique will not be performed well. Over the years I have watched many examination candidates fall into this very trap. The multiple attack portion of the examination begins well and then falters as techniques become less and less successful. Dwelling on mistakes—or the past—can have lasting effects. Too many past setbacks can create a negative future. Too many past successes can create a sense of lassitude or invulnerability. Either condition may be harmful to one's training or to an organization's health. In either case we cannot change the past and must meet the future with a positive attitude and a can-do resolve.

The pace of life is usually a lot slower than jyu waza, but the pattern is the same. There  
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is time to analyze and correct our setbacks and successes. That period of time should be relatively short however, and our decision to move on should be decisive and sure. I have noticed that aikido people tend to make decisions in a fairly rapid manner. After all, in randori, for instance, we must make a decision on which way to move in a split second. We learn through our training that which way we move doesn't really matter, because we understand that we can perform a technique either way. We know that either result will be right for us. In our daily life, one outcome may be less desirable than the other, but it won't be disastrous, because we intuitively make our decision based on aikido principles and thus avoid total disaster.

For the New Year, I would like us to focus our association less on attracting new members and focus on inner growth to improve our aikido quality. A focus on quality

will more than likely result in more members as well. At an association level this will mean a review of testing procedures and the introduction of the instructor certification program.

On a personal level it is important that we review ourselves periodically to be sure that we are still adhering to ideals set down by Saito Shihan. It is possible to veer off the path of successful development especially if we are somewhat isolated from one another. A review of our personal keiko, for instance could be done by asking our senior instructor to observe our technique and to note strengths and weaknesses. Another way to accomplish this is to make a video and to objectively review our own performance. If this is done on an annual basis, then we can compare our technique against a prior year. This is similar to an annual job evaluation but done with our critical aikido eye.

I am confident that in the new year, a focus on quality for the association and personally will result in an improvement of our aikido-well being overall.

Happy New Year.

Bill Witt  
President  
Takemusu Aikido Association