

The Seidokan Communicator

Aikido for a Modern Way of Life

Respect: A Foundation of Aikido Training

By Doug Wedell

In a 1991 interview with Kobayashi Sensei I asked Sensei to relate what he emphasized most when teaching a group of beginners. His reply began as follows:

Well, actually it is to develop respect for each other. If you don't have respect for each other, if you don't have respect for everything around us, like the "Banyu Aigo" of O-Sensei, the spirit of loving protection for all things, then you are not going to have Aikido to begin with. That's the basic. That's why we face the Shomen and bow. We are not bowing to O-Sensei. It is more a feeling of thanks to the room we practice in, and thanks to the principle. Not really the person O-Sensei, like a god, like some instructors do. Then we turn around and face each other. It's not to make the students respect you and bow. No, it's a mutual thing. The instructor will bow, "Onegaeshimasu," please stay with me, listen to what I tell you. Please, come and share this. And the students bow and think, please share your knowledge with us. It is mutual. We have to develop mutual respect. Respect the mat, and even respect the wall. In our daily life, respect everything. Be one with nature! Unless we have that attitude, we will have difficulty learning Aikido.

In this article I delve further into the concept of respect and consider its many facets. To help in this endeavor, I will use the device of forming related components with the letters forming the word. For me, these are:

Realize
Everyone is
Special
Patience
Etiquette
Compassion
Transcendence

R *Respect* begins with *realization*. Indeed, the word realize is a very important one for us in Seidokan Aikido as the root of Sei or Makoto can be translated as "actions and words become one," or in other words, realizing the

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principles in one's daily life. Realize not only means to make real, but it means to understand the reality of what is happening. When I realize I am in trouble, I become aware of the true nature of my situation. Respect begins with awareness and with a focus on realizing the principles in one's interactions. Note that the awareness is both of the moment and of one's broader perspective and goals. Ask yourself first what really counts for you in the grand scheme of your training. Then blend your awareness of these overarching principles with your awareness of the here and now.

E *Everyone* and everything is deserving of our respect. If we feel that only some things and some individuals are worthy of respect, then we divide our thinking into "us" and "them." One problem with this dichotomous thinking is that we lose awareness and thus may lose our balance in the world. Kobayashi Sensei reminds us to respect even the wall! If we don't respect it, we may suffer the consequences. In a sense, everyone is a part of us when we become one with the universe. To disrespect others is then to disrespect ourselves. This does not mean one agrees with everything others do and say. We may abhor the terrorist, but we cannot afford to ignore him or treat him with the same disrespect he treats others. *Everyone is!*

S *Special* implies deserving unique attention and treatment. In some ways, this seems contrary to the "everyone is" part of respect I described above. After all, if everyone is special, then does "special" have any real meaning? I believe it does, because special means to recognize the uniqueness of everyone and everything, not just the commonality of everyone. Respect then means to act in accordance with who is here and what is happening and not simply follow a rule applied to everyone equally. In our training, it is helpful to begin your interaction with each person with the reminder that this interaction is unique and deserving of your special attention. *Everyone is special!*

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

(continued)

P *Patience* is a virtue, and it is a necessary component of respect. When we lose patience, we lose control and often act in a way that we might regret later. Patience means we keep our one point and our focus on the bigger picture. Recently we have started a kid's class at our dojo (ages 8-12). This is especially good training for keeping one's patience while maintaining order through proper discipline. One may raise one's voice to capture the attention of a wandering mind, but the voice should not be raised in anger because one has lost one's patience. Respect requires patience because through respecting others we realize we all proceed on our own path and at our own pace. Beginning students are often reminded of the need for patience when we tell them that this is a twenty-year technique -- meaning that one cannot hurry the insights and perspectives reached through training. Finally, we should remember to be patient with ourselves, as respecting others requires that we respect ourselves.

E *Etiquette* was developed to help us form habits that lead to respectful behavior and thought. One simple rule for proper etiquette is to always act in a way respectful of others. This requires our awareness of the customs of those with whom we are working and knowledge of the general customs of the culture. There are several points of etiquette that apply to the general practice of Aikido as an art of self defense originating from Japan. These, however, are modified by the culture and concerns of those practicing the art. For example, in some schools students line up according to rank and are lined up several minutes before class begins and the instructor walks onto the mat. This is not an etiquette ritual that is employed in Seidokan Aikido. The best guide for etiquette at Aikido functions is to consult one's seniors (sempai), who are also responsible for guiding their juniors (kohai).

I believe much of etiquette in Aikido can be summarized by rituals with which we *enter* and *exit* relationships. Note that we bow to the Shomen when we enter and exit the dojo, when we enter and exit the mat, when we enter and exit a training session. Students and instructors bow to each other when they enter and exit a training session and when they enter and exit an instructional segment within the class. Students bow to one another when they enter or exit an encounter. But merely bowing does not always mean one is exercising proper etiquette. Instead, there is much in the nature of the bow that connotes the respect being accorded. I often remind students who bow out of sync with one another (one after other) that the principles of Aikido imply they should coordinate the bow so they bow at the same time. To do so, one must look into the mind of the other, sending an acknowledgement that the two of you are here to learn together. It is the feeling of mutuality that leads to mutual respect.

Rules of etiquette may also cover many other behaviors, such as what we wear, when we talk, who we might use as an uke during an instructional session, and the like. Since these may differ across regions, it is best to consult one's

sempai when in doubt. Most likely, one will receive different answers from different sempai regarding these situations. Once again, when in doubt, act in the most respectful way one can think to act. It is better to err on the side of being too respectful. Finally, we should remember that etiquette serves to promote respect, rather than standing alone as a prescribed set of inviolable rules.

C Unlike the rules of etiquette describe above that have a distinctly abstract quality about them, *compassion* implies the need to feel a connection with others deeply within one's core being. Compassion then may be considered a source from which respect originates. Very simply, compassion is the ability to see oneself in others and to interact with them from a deep seated feeling of oneness. This does not mean to me that everyone has to hug everyone all the time. Indeed, expressions of compassion may be varied and nuanced. In seeking to delve ever further into our Aikido training, we should be guided by a basic compassion for our fellow human beings and for the other inhabitants of our world and our universe.

T Transcendence represents moving beyond ourselves, growing into something bigger and better. Ultimately, respect is a vehicle for transcendence. By respecting others, we can learn from them and grow into a better person. Respect is a way that we learn to transcend the barriers that divide us. Remember that O-Sensei dreamed that Aikido would ultimately lead to world peace, accomplished one individual at a time. As students of the art, we should strive toward this transcendental goal.

* * *

As Kobayashi Sensei pointed out long ago, respect is a foundational principle that we must continue to develop throughout our training. I have attempted here to point out some of the many facets of the concept of respect. It includes the **Realization that Everyone is Special**, along with training in **Patience, Etiquette, Compassion and Transcendence**. We owe a great debt of gratitude to O-Sensei, Kobayashi Sensei, the Kobayashi family, our teachers, our sempai and our kohai for making our Aikido training possible and realizing the principles in our daily life. Let us pay them all our deepest **R-E-S-P-E-C-T!**



**Seidokan Aikido Founder
Rod Kobayashi Sensei**

Kengi: A Story with Four Directions

By Chaim Noy

I was always fascinated with stories. Since I was a child I liked listening to stories: short and long stories, comic, dramatic and tragic stories, stories of extraordinary and of everyday occurrences, monologic and dialogic stories; in short: all stories. I was later fortunate to research stories in my academic work. I explored the language of narratives, the structure of their plots, the social context in which they are told, and the different meanings and powerful effects they have in and on people's lives. This is probably why I became aware of the role stories play in aikido, and realized aikido is rich with stories. For instance, every time we say "uke strikes with..."—we are beginning a story; and every time we say "nage steps off the line of attack and..."—we are developing a story and concluding it (hopefully...)

Three things can briefly be said about these stories, which we daily tell and embody in our practice. First, they are quite short and express a minimalist ideology (much like Japanese aesthetics in general, and prose and poetry in particular). These stories typically do not involve emotions, and rarely tell of feelings and of other details that are not essential for the eventual plot to develop in a select direction. Second, the stories are about relationships. They are relationship narratives. They usually describe a potential interaction between two protagonists, the "good" guy (nage) and the "bad" guy (uke). The distances between these two, the velocities they are moving in relation to each other, and the continually changing spaces and angles between their bodies are described. They add together to a complex, even if transient and fleeting, interpersonal relations, where every move is relational and assumes meaning in an interpersonal context. These stories are often narrative metaphors for larger interactions outside the dojo. Third, most importantly, these Aiki stories have a benevolent plotline. They have a happy end, but not in the Hollywood sense. That is, unlike the stories told in most martial arts and in the Western genre, the villain in aiki-stories is not killed or defeated, and the protagonist (the "good guy") does not "win". Instead, the conclusions of the stories *maintain the stories' relational nature*. No one is hurt. Although the drama is made of true risk and danger, these are overcome, and the stories conclude in a point that describes a *bettered state of affairs for all protagonists*.

In the rest of this essay I tell a short aiki-story, using the vocabulary and syntax offered by the bokken (the wooden sword). I call it "Kengi: A story with four directions." Generally, kata (gi) make for good stories, because they demonstrate and teach a sequence. Hence a companion—usually fictional and sometimes real—is always needed. For instance, "a new attacker is coming at you *hidari yokomenuchi* from the southwest. Pivot on your right foot as you turn to your left, drawing the left foot behind and pointing the *kisaki* at the throat to check the attack" (cited from Doug Wedell's Handout, *Daisen aiki-kengi*, movement #10). If one wishes to understand the movements of the *gi* and to execute them effectively, one must listen closely to

the story. The story supplies both the rationale for each overall sequence of movements and for its precise execution, as well as for the overall sequence.

The short story I am about to tell should be performed with a bokken. It is made of a sequence of only four moves, which is repeated four times, facing a different direction each time (turning clockwise: North-East-South-West). I present the story together with my interpretation of it. It commences as I stand in *Seigan-no-kamae* facing north:

1. Shomenuchi. Similar to all three *Aiki-Kengi*, I step forward with my right foot and strike *shomenuchi*.

I feel that I am dealing wholeheartedly, with all the *ki* and sense of centeredness I have, with something that requires my full attention and my involvement. It can be a family matter, bureaucratic matters, or my ego which I wish to cut. The point is that I am frontally attending to whatever currently requires my attention in my life.



Step 1: *Shomenuchi*.

2. Hidari zenpozuki. Similar to *Aiki-Kengi* #1 & #2, I switch feet and step slightly forward with the left foot. I then bring the right foot slightly forward, lower my center a little, and execute a *hidari zenpozuki*.

For me, this movement means I do not let go. I now have to follow through and complete what I began in the previous movement; I must attend to whatever needs my attention until matters are finally and completely settled. As I complete the *zenpozuki* I realize that I have achieved this state.



Step 2: *Hidari Zenpozuki*.

Kengi (continued)

3. Nukikaeshi (movement #18 in *Aiki-Kengi* #3. The movement feels a bit like the first half of the turn in movement #13 in *Aiki-Kengi* #2). The movement commences when I slightly slide back to withdraw the sword and then swing it swiftly 180 degrees to my right (pointing southwards).



Step 3: Nukikaeshi.

My understanding is this: After I finish dealing with whatever required my attention and action, I am wiping the sweat off my forehead in a round sweeping movement. I am doing this (metaphorically) as I brush the salty water all the way to my right (180 degrees). When the movement is performed with relaxed arms, it has the powerful effect of a whiplash. It concludes suddenly and precisely when the tip of the bokken (*kissaki*) faces South and my sweat—my *ki*—flies off of it. Yet my body is squarely facing East.

Or, I clear my (metaphorical) desk of any matters that are on it—students' seminar papers, reviews I need to submit, mortgage accounts I need to pay—with a long and sweeping motion of a 180 degrees. The table now is clear.

Or, I clean my mind's board, brush sideways all thoughts, leftovers and remains from previous encounters (movements #1 and #2). The table of my mind is clear and clean. I am free to reengage and ready to proceed.

Note that right before I begin the movement, when my body is still positioned in *zenpozuki* and facing North, I quickly turn my head southwards, checking if there is anyone there. Later my face and body are facing East.



Step 4. Hidari Shomengawashi.

4. Hidari shomengawashi (movement #1 in *Aiki-Kengi* #2, movements #7 and #19 in *Aiki-Kengi* #3). Left foot leads the movement leftward, and the right foot follows and is positioned at the front. The left hand at the bottom of the bokken (*tsuka*) leads, as the tip (*kissaki*) draws a U shape in the air. During the movement you should feel some coordination between the movements of the left foot/hand and the right foot/hand.

As my body is free and exposed a new issue arises from the East (assuming the form of a *shomenuchi* strike dashing at me from the front/East). I acknowledge and accept the new engagement, as I am blending with it by stepping off the line of attack and checking it with the tip of the bokken. This is the beginning of a new engagement and a new story.

Now I am ready to proceed to a new sequence of four movements. From the *hidari shomengawashi* I proceed with movements #1 (*shomenuchi*) and #2 (*zenpozuki*), and so on. Note that in the *shomenuchi* strike my left foot is in front, and hence from now on I do not have to change feet in the *zenpozuki* (similar to movements 5-6 in *aiki-kengi* #1).

Every mini-sequence includes four movements that attend to a new direction. When I conclude four mini-sequences, moving clockwise and covering all four directions, I feel that I dealt with everything around me and I can relax. I feel calm also because there's something meditative in the quadruple repetition. This is why I recommend practicing the entire sequence (4X4) four, eight or a dozen times, and thus be absorbed in the repetitive motion. Note that when performing the *hidari shomengawashi* I can turn counterclockwise only 45 degrees and not 90 degrees (facing Southeast and not East), and so eight sequences will be executed, covering eight directions (*happo undo*).

The flow of the entire kata is concluded after the *shomengawashi* position, whenever I choose to lower the bokken which is above and in front of my head (*shomengawashi*), to the *seigan-no-kamae* position. This is a nice centering movement that is performed smoothly and powerfully (with very little correction of the feet. The movement mirrors a part of movement #1 in *aiki-jogi* #1 where the *jo* is lowered and centered before the strike).

This is the basic sequence of movements (kata) and the corresponding basic storyline. It can be modified easily and played with in order to suit different needs and changes in the plot. For instance, it might be that I am viewing the matter I am facing more seriously and wish to give it more attention. In this case, *shomenuchi* and *zenpozuki* will not suffice. I then add whatever I think is needed. Say, two more *kasagiri* strikes (as is the case in movements 1-2-3-4 in *aiki-kengi* #2). Only then, after I executed *four* (and not two) strikes, I feel I can proceed to the next phase, metaphorically wiping the sweat off my forehead with a *nukikaeshi* movement. In this case the entire sequence will include six movements and not four. Alternatively, I can shorten the sequence: If I have no time left—an urgent new matter has appeared, I can skip the large opening-of-the-door movement (*hidari shomengawashi*), and proceed from the *nukikaeshi* directly to the *shomenuchi* (left hand leading the movement. See how this move works for you).

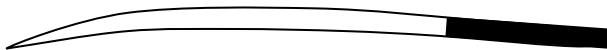
Kengi (concluded)

Note that according to this interpretation, this story has *only two strikes*: movements #1 and #2. Movement #3 is actually the conclusion of the sequence 1-2-3, and is not understood here as a strike in itself, but as a *shindo* (a shaking movement). It brings my body back into balance after striking, and after I attended whatever it was I needed to attend. Symbolically, it flattens and smoothes my line of thoughts, and sets my body and mind ready for a new encounter. A little like movement #13 in aiki-kengi #1 (*Osame*). Movement #4 (*shomengawashi*), too, is not an aggressive cut according to this interpretation, but a blending motion. It embodies my acknowledgment of a new impinging matter that requires my attention and action (stepping off the line).

The larger point is that different stories can inform our actions in *Aikido* in differently ways. Different stories set not only a different course of movement and action, but also different states of mind and attitude. We can now understand our actions and reactions in different ways than we understood them earlier, sometimes in new and illuminating ways. In short, the movements we perform are endowed with a wider spectrum of meanings and implications. For instance, *nukikaeshi* in this story is a meditative movement, one that brings *mushin* to the mind after action.

Yet the relationship between stories (representing meaning) and movements (representing action) is two-directional. Usually, a set of movements, in the form of technique or kata, is a given, and we have stories by which we can make sense of these movements and teach/learn them. We learn the stories and perhaps sometimes even change them a bit in order to better our understanding of the action. However, we can do something more radical, which demonstrates a reverse of direction of cause and effect. We can *begin* with a story, and proceed to develop a technique or a kata from it. That is, we can first have words and meanings and feelings, and then choreograph them into waza or kata. The movements would then be a concretization or an embodiment of more abstract ideas. This is a singular and rewarding process, which lies at the heart of any Art, not only Martial Arts.

In Japanese terms, this notion is captured in the term *bunbu-ichi*, freely translated, "pen and sword in accord" or "the oneness of pen and sword". More literally, *bun* designates culture, and specifically it indexes writing or inscription, while *bu* means martial. Together, *bunbu-ichi* refers to the close relationship between the written or the worded sphere, which includes stories, and the sphere of life that has no words, such as bodies, movements and action. These two spheres continually interact and inform each other until they are one, or *bunbu-ichi*, which we can sense when practicing meditatively.



Harmonizing with Nature

From August 5th – 7th this year, in Salt Lake City, Utah, situated at the foot of the mountain soaring high against the clear blue sky, a special workshop took place with Larry Wadahara Sensei in a beautiful park surrounded by trees. The ground covered in grass transformed into "mats" for practice. For me personally, this visit was also my way of expressing my gratitude to the dojo members for the many years of their support.

The mountains speaking to us of some message...

The trees and plants whispering to us vibrantly...

The sounds of the flowing river cleansing our body and mind...

The wind blowing softly against my skin,

"Sawa, sawa, sawa"... we hear the leaves whispering,

"San, san, tou kagayaku"... blazing sun slipping behind the clouds sporadically.

Within this grand natural world,

How I exist as one tiny "spec",

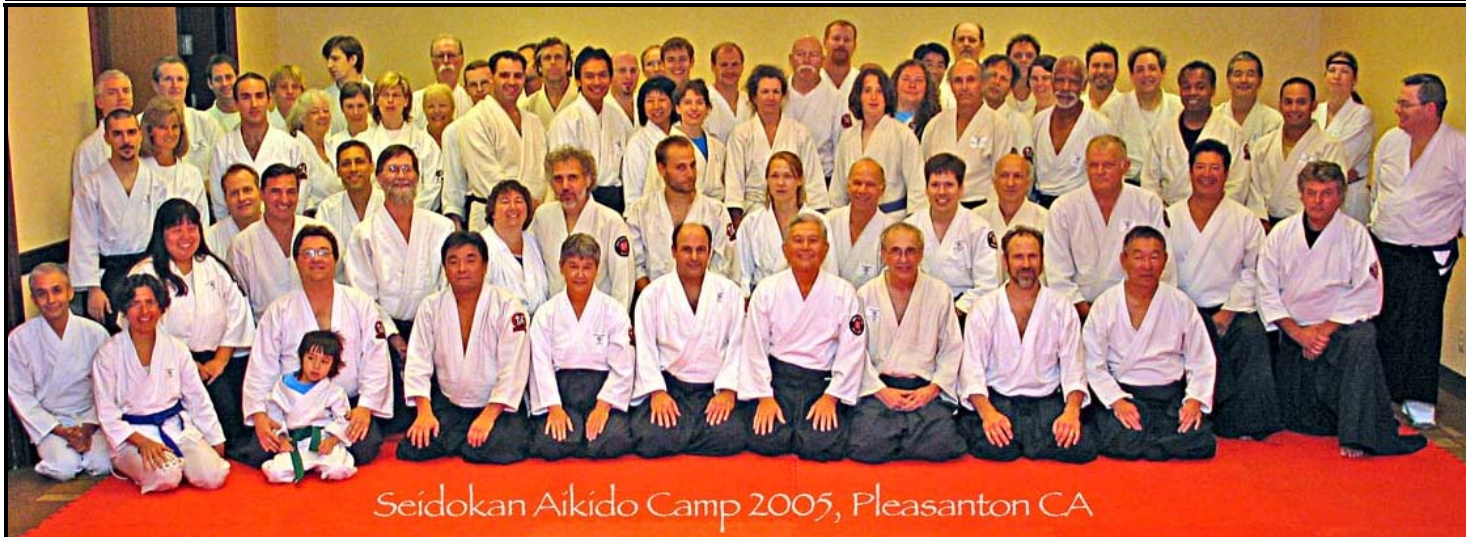
Yet at the very same time, is it perhaps possible,

To also exist as one large "point" in space...

The experience of training in the midst of nature was distinctly different from the usual training sessions that take place on the designated "mat" space in a dojo. It was as if everybody's 'gi' were painted by the hues of the greenery and of the earth. Particularly, I could imagine the jo-gi and ken-gi practice among the trees in the forest may have evoked a "ninja"- like experience for some. I have attempted to describe my personal impressions from the 3-day visit and would also like to once again send my deepest appreciation to all the members of both AHSA Dojo and the Petersen Family Dojo.

*Minoru Kobayashi
Seidokan Aikido Headquarters
September 11, 2005*





Seidokan Aikido Camp 2005, Pleasanton CA

An Honest Attack

Sue Deese, Seiwa Dojo

How many times have we heard this "...and give an honest attack."? I learned a valuable lesson in this at summer camp this year. We are always told to give an honest attack so that nage can to the technique properly. For me this has been something I have tried to work on as attacking someone, whether for real or just on the mat, is very difficult for me. But I got a great chance to see just how this should work.

At camp, there are a wonderful number of new people that we do not get a chance to work with on a daily basis. One of the classes the sensei said we should choose someone to work with that we normally would maybe choose not to work with, or may be hesitant to work with. In this class I got a chance to work with my sensei, Dr. Mark Crapo. Now, on a daily basis, working with your own sensei is not something we get to do. A rare chance. But, we were attacking with munetsuki. Me, strike sensei?

I did as I was suppose to, I did the punch. Of course, it fell short. He just stood there. So I tried again. And again, and again. Each time coming closer, contacting, but not a true effort. Finally he motioned to his back, meaning that I was to strike all the way through him (you wouldn't pull a punch on someone you attacked on the street would you)? Taking a deep breath, I finally gave the kind of punch that I should have the first time. When I did, he disappeared and completed the technique. We did this several times, each time I tried to give the best attack I could. I must have worked because he did not have to 'teach' me again.

Too often, when we attack we 'pull' our punches, only give a half-hearted grab to someone's wrist, or a weak bear hug. I believe that learning to attack like you really mean it is something that in not done as often as it should be. Of course, the attack you may give a white belt is not going to be exactly the same as what you would give a 6th degree black belt. While both attacks must be honest, you would want to work with the person at their level.

We think only of the job we have to do a nage to make the techniques work. We need to look at uke's role and practice that also. After all, if it weren't for uke, we would not need nage.

Seidokan Summer Camp 2005

Doug Wedell

I'm sure that all those who attended this summer's camp in Pleasanton California (just south of Oakland) would like to extend a big thank you to Steve and Ellen Tersigni who did a great job putting it together. Camp this year was held at the Hilton Hotel – a summer camp first. Needless to say, the accommodations were quite comfortable and the amenities rather plush. The outdoor swimming pool was placed in a tranquil setting and was quite refreshing to dive into after warming appropriately in the Jacuzzi. I'm not sure the weight room got much use, though. Another summer camp first was the availability of calligraphy classes, led by Seidokan Kanshu Minoru Kobayashi, replete with brushes, ink and lots of paper. Who would have thought stroking a line could be so difficult or so engaging? Mrs. K. held two classes, helping us brush the kanji and giving us a good feel for the flow of ki in this art.

Altogether, Camp was held over four days, Thursday thru Sunday, with more than 20 instructors leading classes and participants coming from as far away as Israel and Japan. The instructors provided many perspectives on basic and advanced arts, in slow and fast motion, with and without weapons, using single and multiple attackers, and always providing a smile and positive energy for all of us to enjoy. A theme of the camp was "Embrace Chaos." This theme encompassed the idea of being open to new experiences and learning to maintain calmness in the midst of difficulties. There were several classes that focused on ki development, including a rousing misogi session led by Joe Crotty Sensei in which we raised the roof of the Hilton with cries of "To-ho-Ka-Mi-E-Mi-Ta-Me!". Sunday's class included a focus on ki development through Aikiryoho, with many volunteers to be uke! Altogether, the training was excellent and we are all looking forward to getting together at camp next year in St. Louis!

Promotions

Sandan

John Robertson
Aikido Institute of America 05/08/05

Nidan

Jason Coskey
Ahsa Aikido 08/06/05

George Ishii
Aikido Institute of America 11/06/05

Shodan

Shalomi Sagiv
Aikido Institute of Jerusalem 02/04/05

Coleene Vickers
Seidokan Aikido of South Carolina 02/19/05

Christopher Vaden
Aikido Institute of Michigan, Seiwa Dojo 03/05/05

Darrell Ettleman
Aikido Institute of Michigan, Seiwa Dojo 03/12/05

Ron Asher
Cal State Long Beach Aikido Club 05/08/05

Stephen Spargur
Aikido Institute of America 05/08/05

Chris Berro
Orange County Buddhist Church Aikido 05/02/05

Gabriel Segura
Orange County Buddhist Church Aikido 05/02/05

Emmanuel Reymond
Seidokan Aikido of Tokyo 08/07/05

Mermel Blanco
Aikido Institute of Mid-America 10/29/05

Gregory Dunn
Aikido Institute of Mid-America 10/29/05

Jason Taff
Aikido Institute of Mid-America 10/29/05

Congratulations!

Calendar

1. **Annual Bokken Shugyo Training** held at Aikido Institute of America; Saturday, December 31st, 2005; For more information, please call (323) 254-3372 or email Aikitiger1@aol.com.
2. **Annual Misogi Barai/New Year's Training** held at Aikido Institute of America; Saturday, January 7, 2006 from 7:00-10:00 a.m. For more information, please call (323) 254-3372 or email Aikitiger1@aol.com.
3. **Annual New Year's Potluck Party** held at Aikido Institute of America; Saturday, January 14, 2006 from 5:30-9:00 p.m. For more information, please call (323) 254-3372 or email Aikitiger1@aol.com.
4. **Summer Camp 2006** for Seidokan Aikido will be July 6, 7, 8, & 9, 2006. We are planning on holding it at Washington University in St Louis, Missouri. At present the camp fees will run somewhere between \$225 - \$285. For more information contact Richard Harnack Sensei at 314-647-0903 or via email at aikima@primary.net.

Archival Photo Gallery Pictures of Seidokan Founder Roderick Kobayashi Sensei

