

## 2004 Aikido of Maine as a Dojo

I began my martial Arts training with a wonderful family. Our Dojo was small, simple and very active. There was a small desk, mat, kamiza and dressing rooms. This was a place that always felt special to me the more I was there the more special it became. I mentioned this to my sensei one day and he smiled paused and told me that is what a Dojo is, It's a special place where the spirit of self-development lives.

When I think back to these feelings it is still very hard to describe. The Dojo had a group of dedicated students and very competent teachers. There was a sense of unbounded potential a sense of magic, the promise existed that with effort and time there was the potential to embody this energy. This sense of all things unfolding in time with solid and constant training is still with me. The Dojo is at the core of martial arts training; in English it translates as a place to practice the way or path. The name itself speaks of this special nature; there are so few places in society with this as their purpose.

There are a wide variety of martial arts schools, some can seem very commercial with a gymnastic quality, others can offer an array of health club type activities these all serve a purpose and fill some needs. Apart from these there are those that focus on the traditional ways. That focus on the Dojo as a Place to study The Way, a place for training the mind body and spirit! Training halls have roofs, walls mats dressing rooms, most have shrines of one type or another so when we look at what it is that gives a training hall the quality and feel of a Dojo, we are left with the people and training that takes place there. These places only come to life with dedication of all those who come and train and begin the process and path of the martial arts.

When we moved to Maine to open Aikido of Maine We had some very strong images and models of what we wanted in a Dojo: we wanted a clean uncluttered space, a great training surface, ample ceiling height, strong and simple shomen, good dressing rooms, showers, a kids space etc. all physical things that we could control to some extent, but what we wanted most was an excellent training experience for ourselves and the students who would come. We wanted a good membership with serious Aikido students all working on themselves in various ways and all belonging to an extended community. We wanted to develop a solid training schedule mornings afternoons and evenings. We wanted to be accessible to beginners and experienced students. We wanted to develop a youth training program that

would thrive and add to the dojo's energy. We wanted to create an environment that would further our personal development.

With 2004 here we would like to take stock of where we are with our vision of Dojo. This year our adult program grew to twice the size as it was last year and the training level has improved greatly, creating a solid foundation for our future. Our youth program is going very well from a few kids our first year we now have a vital and energetic group! Our lounge area is full of parents and siblings during class and this brings a great energy to our expanding community. We have started an Aikido playgroup for 3 to 5 year olds and this has been a great experience. All of this is very positive and confirms we are moving in the right direction!

Our hope is to continue along this path and in concrete terms to undertake the following: We would like to expand our adult membership and to grow our average class size to increase the energy of group practice. We would like to rise up the level of training for our students and ourselves. We would also like to expand our youth program, by increasing our membership and class offerings. We would like to expand our Aikido playgroup 3 to 5 year olds. We will add a youth summer program to our schedule. We will also improve the physical nature of the dojo, build a front entrance, improve the shomen, repair windows etc. We very much want to communicate and foster the sense of ownership of the dojo among our members. So people are encouraged to help in any and all of what it takes to be a dojo. Your help and input is always appreciated.

We are very proud of where we are and we would like to express our sincere gratitude to all of those who are and have been part of our Dojos development this is clearly not something that we can do alone. Thank you for your practice and being part of this dojo. Let us all work together and develop this special place to study the path of Aikido.

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