

## Friendship Seminars

**friend · ship** (frënd'shĭp') n.

1. The quality or condition of being friends.
2. A friendly relationship: *formed many new friendships over the summer.*
3. Friendliness; good will: *a policy of friendship toward other nations.*

**sem · i · nar** (sĕm'ə-när') n.

1.
  - a. A small group of advanced students in engaged in original research or intensive study under the guidance of a teacher.
  - b. A course of study so pursued.
  - c. A scheduled meeting of such a group.
2. A meeting for an exchange of ideas; a conference.

In November 2003, our dojo organized the first All-Virginia Aikido Friendship Seminar, called “Common Ground”. We invited senior instructors from the major aikido organizations represented in Virginia to instruct at a neutral venue, a local Middle School Gym. My goal was to provide a forum to expand our understanding of Aikido by looking at it from a variety of knowledgeable viewpoints in one training session. Each class focused on the teachings of different Aikido lineages. It was a day for practitioners of Aikido to come together and experience the diversity of Virginia's Aikido Resources.

It was a great day! For many participants, it was the first time they had trained outside of their own dojo. Technically, many of us saw new insights into Aikido application. For many participants it was the first time they saw Iwama Aikido. Personally and professionally, new associations were made.

Training in Aikido can be fostered by maintaining "beginners mind"; to consistently look for newness and discovery, to be receptive to the instructor's guidance and your partners' gifts. We should strive to learn something new every time we get on the mat, whether teaching or training. O'Sensei would say “learn and forget”. Training with different teachers and in different styles of aikido fosters “beginners mind”.

This event was featured in Aikido Today magazine. But it was not the first Friendship Seminar ever and, thankfully, it will not be the last. Every time you train outside of your dojo, it can be a “Friendship Seminar”. We now hold Common Ground Virginia every other year and it is widely supported and appreciated.

Saito Shihan would often urge students to train with other Senseis. He would tell us to come back to own dojos and try to apply what they learned in other dojos to see if it strengthened our own practice.

The annual TAA Memorial Day Weekend [Gasshuku](#) (begun in 1988 by Wolfgang Baumgartner Sensei) features a group of Iwama-Style instructors. This event has been inspirational to many -- other Aikido organizations now have similar seminars. The annual “Aikido Summit” held in Colorado is one such seminar that transcends

organizational boundaries. In 2007, a group of dojos in the Mid-South USA are coming together for the “Delta Common Ground Aikido Training”.

If you haven’t trained outside your own dojo for awhile, you are encouraged to do so. If your dojo is isolated geographically, consider organizing a regional Friendship Seminar. Every time we gather together to share the Founder’s Aikido, good things can occur.

The Way of a Warrior is based on humanity, love, and sincerity; the heart of martial valor is true bravery, wisdom, love, and friendship. – O’Sensei

Aviv Goldsmith

[Aikido in Fredericksburg](#)