

Aisatsu a Technique at the Heart of Aikido  
By Erich R. C. Holcomb

"Don't sneak out like a thief! Say goodbye to the people at the door!"  
-Ueda Shihan Mieken Aikidokai during children's class

My teacher in Ise frequently instructed children in his classes on more than just Aikido. He let the kids know that they should greet people appropriately. At the dojo that meant "hello" and "goodbye" were as much a part of practice as ukemi. He insisted that the Aikidoka he trained should give up their seats on the bus to the elderly and infirm, to give way on the sidewalk for others and, in general, to be polite. Greetings, aisatsu in Japanese, are a part of daily training – so much so that it is clear that the aisatsu form an integral part of the Do of this art.

A shout of "Hey!" may bring a smile to the face of a friend or make an irritated co-worker scowl. The energy and appropriateness of a greeting is similar to energy and appropriateness in training. A hard, fast strike might be enjoyed by one partner while a similar strike might annoy another. Establishing the energy level from "onegaishimasu" makes for good training. A friendly greeting to one's partner is often enough to let both sides know how far practice can go.

That said, the importance of aisatsu in Aikido extends beyond the doors of the dojo. After our shoes are on and we walk our path out into the world, our greetings establish space. Maai, is set with friends and strangers alike by greetings. Whether ones culture encourages bows, handshakes or a kiss on the cheek, greetings bring people face to face. A simple "Good morning" is a powerful form of awase. Without proper awase there is little chance of establishing the musubi of conversation.

Maai, awase, musubi are all core elements of budo in general so one might say that aisatsu are integral to all martial arts. However, the intent of greeting is, if only for a moment, to bring two people together into harmony. As harmony between people is the goal of our art, it is clear that aisatsu can be considered a kihon waza of Aikido. So everyone who greets friends, family, neighbors and strangers with the positive intent of making a connection is, in a small way, spreading Aikido in the world.