

## Chin Kon Ki Shin Shinto Elements in Martial Arts Practice and Realization

### Chin Kon Ki Shin:

*"A practice intended to aid one in joining with the universal spirit and to help one understand the divine mission that is one's life goal to fulfill."*

- From the glossary of... *The Principles of Aikido* by Mitsugi Saotome

**Chinkon** is defined as... *to settle down and calm the spirit* and **Kishin** is defined as... *returning to the divine or kami*, which refers to achieving a profound contemplative state where one is grounded to the divine universe. Chinkon and kishin are generally practiced together where the first part, chinkon, involves revitalization of the senses and the gathering of spirit, while the second part, kishin, involves an alert meditative state. It's been said that chinkon and kishin together form a method of achieving unity with the divine, although each has its own function. Chinkon is said, by some, to gather the spirits or souls wandering the ether into ones *tanden* (abdominal center) while kishin activates those spirits.

Chinkon-kishin has ancient roots that are referenced in the old Shinto texts such as the *Kojiki*. The shamanistic practice of mystical breathing and meditation of uniting the divine and human spirits was often used in old times in the preparation of waterfall *misogi*, an ascetic practice of standing under a freezing waterfall for long periods of time, in meditation, with the objective of cleansing the mind, body, and spirit. O Sensei often practiced this kind of *misogi* (spiritual cleansing), but to O Sensei, aikido was his daily *misogi* practice. For this reason the founder would prepare for the *misogi* of his aikido training by performing chinkon-kishin techniques in his warm-ups..

Traditional chinkon-kishin had largely fallen out of practice in the Shinto tradition until Onisaburo Deguchi revived the practice within the Omoto Kyo Shinto religious sect, in the early 1900's. When O Sensei met Onisaburo and embraced the Omoto religion he also embraced the practice of chinkon-kishin as taught and practiced by Onisaburo. O Sensei had embraced the rich traditional Shinto culture and mythology since his childhood. Omoto Kyo, as a new form of an ancient religion and Onisaburo, the charismatic leader, had a profound effect on O Sensei's spiritual path. The founder and another Omoto follower are shown here practicing kishin meditation with their hands folded into esoteric *mudra* or meditative hand postures.



According to Yasuaki Deguchi, grandson of the Omoto leader Onisaburo Deguchi, Onisaburo received his knowledge of chinkon-kishin from a revelation he had while engaging in ascetic practices on Mt. Takakuma. He also referred to a method of kishin mentioned in the section regarding Emperor Chuai in the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters) and in the record of Empress Jinko in the *Ni-honshoki* (Chronicle of Japan). Chinkon-kishin was practiced for many years in Omoto Kyo and indeed attracted many new followers who had heard of the reported benefits of chinkon-kishin to cultivate and channel power. However, in later years the practice of chinkon-kishin was abandoned in Omoto Kyo because of the profound and often surprising effect it had on its practitioners. The practice was never abandoned by O Sensei and is found mixed into aikido warm-ups in dojo everywhere today.

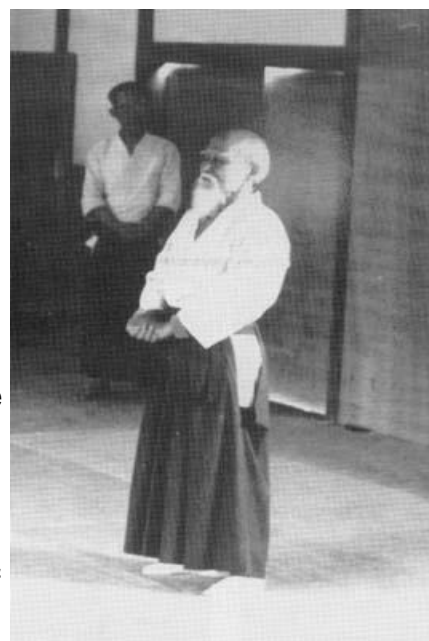
There are several forms of chinkon-kishin that O Sensei integrated into the warm-ups of aikido training. These exercises, although generally not clearly understood, even by uchideshi of O Sensei, are still practiced in many aikido dojo around the world. They are practiced for their obvious physical benefits and they are also practiced, in part, for their historical significance. By some it is practiced because it is considered integral and inseparable from aikido. The founder's students who retained the practice often differed significantly in the details as well as the level of importance they placed on this practice, and most of them professed not to understand it. One student of O Sensei said... "*We practice it because it is very important... Sensei said that we would discover the meaning of these techniques for ourselves.*"

**Furitama:** "soul shaking", "settling the ki", or "vibration of the spirit"

*Furitama* is practiced standing with the legs shoulder-width apart. The hands are placed together with the right hand over the left. A small space is left between the hands. The hands are placed in front of the abdomen and shaken vigorously up and down. Inhale to the top of the head rising up naturally. Then exhale to the bottom of your feet as you continue shaking your hands up and down. The exercise is finished in silent and still meditative kishin.

This chinkon exercise was intended to gather the spirits of the divine into ones center... calming the spirit... vibrating the soul. It's an effective way to gather your thoughts, center your mind and focus your intention.

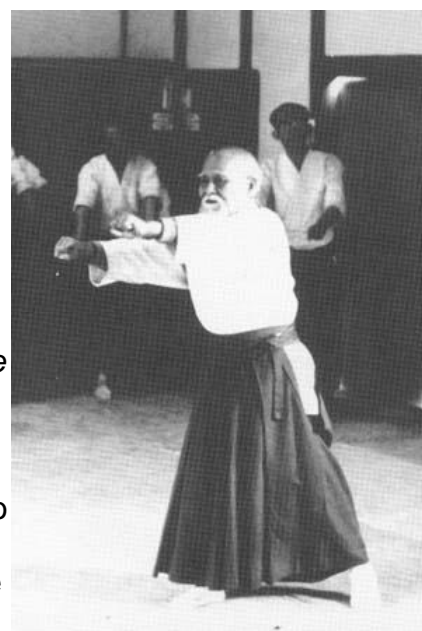
Another form of "vibration of the spirit" can be seen in the practice of raising the hands over your head, shaking them vigorously while fingers are extended. Then throwing the hands down toward the ground. The founder would speak of shaking the dust from the joints when referring to this wrist loosening exercise. For him it was a vitalizing movement to shake the impurities from the body... a form of misogi to prepare for aikido practice.



**Torifune:** "rowing the boat" or "bird rowing"

*Torifune*, also known as *kogi-fune* or *the rowing exercise*, involves the arms and body moving in a boat rowing motion. According to the *Kami no Michi*, an important text on Shintoism, the hands were clenched in fists, with the thumbs inside, and hand movement was very linear. Pictures of O Sensei show him with his hands in traditional punching fists, with the thumbs outside. In old video footage he can be seen practicing *torifune* with both linear punching movements as well as sweeping, rowing movements. Today *torifune* appears to be mostly practiced with open hands, fingers pointing down, wrists being thrust forward and drawn back to the hips.

One should be well grounded while practicing *torifune*. The goal is to move from the hips, shifting the weight of the body from the front foot, to the back foot, and back to the front again. The hands act like ropes or rods being lead by the movements of the hips.



It's practiced by first placing the left foot forward. While thrusting the hands or wrists forward you

vocalize the sound "eh". While drawing the hands back you vocalize "ho". This push / pull is performed rhythmically 20 times, then the right foot is put forward. Now as you thrust forward you vocalize "ee". While you draw back you vocalize "sa". In some schools they'll will do a 3rd set back on the left leg. "eh" is sounded on both the pushes and pulls.

**Ibuki Kokyu:** "deep breathing"

Ten-no-kokyu: Breath of heaven

The *breath of heaven* involves the deep inhalation, with the hands together in front of us, raising the hands in *ten-no-kokyu* (breath of heaven) posture, together and over the head. We then proceed to the *breath of earth*...

Chi-no-kokyu: Breath of earth

The breath of earth involves exhaling slowly and bring the hands down in *chi-no-kokyu* (breath of earth) posture. The hands are brought down the sides of our body as though pushing down the universe until the hands come back together in front of our abdomen to complete the circle.

Generally, the cycle of *ten-no-kokyu* and *chi-no-kokyu* is repeated 3 times in succession. When practiced by itself, there is usually a quiet pause of *kishin* at the end of the breathing cycle. When combined with the other exercises the transitions change and the *kishin* may move to the end of the combinations.

*Furitama*, *torifune*, and *ibuki* are often practiced together in various combinations. Sometimes the *furitama* is interwoven with *ibuki*. Other times *furitama* is interwoven with *torifune*. These practices vary a great deal from aikido association to aikido association as well as from dojo to dojo even within associations.

It's interesting to note that aikido associations heavily influenced by Koichi Tohei (Ki Society, AAA, Seidokan, etc...) practice a great many other *kihon undo ki* or [aiki-taiso](#) exercises that Tohei embraced and extended... said to help manifest *ki* and focus on the *one point*. As his interests shifted from the old Shinto ways and his attention became focused specifically on the principles of *ki*, he took some of the old chinkon-kishin exercises and modified them to compliment his newly codified catalog of *ki* exercises.

some years later I noticed Saotome Sensei introduce his students to *furitama*, *torifune*, and *ibuki kokyu*, possibly as he was rediscovering his own roots in aikido and paying tribute to those early traditions.

Because the origin and motivation of these techniques is rarely taught or discussed in the dojo... students are often left to wonder what they are doing or how to properly embrace the movements they are following. A basic understanding of the source and history of these mysterious movements helps provide a foundation from which to enrich and develop our own practice. May your practice be grounded and fruitful.

