

## *Chapter Five: Aikidō and Shingon Mikkyō - body, sound and mind*

Of the two main symbolic ways in which Ueshiba described *aikidō*, one was in terms of the Shintō *kami* and the other was in the geometric iconography of Shingon *Mikkyō*<sup>510</sup> (also known as Esoteric, or Japanese Tantric, Buddhism), a school of Buddhism systematised by Kūkai (774-835) in the ninth century.<sup>511</sup> The *aikidō* teacher Tetsutaka Sugawara relates, for example, that Ueshiba described *aikidō* as “triangle, square, and circle, with breath”, a clear reference to symbols used in Shingon.<sup>512</sup> Ueshiba’s discourse also included reference to deities of the Shingon pantheon, such as Amida, Fudō Myōō, or Kanzeon (Avalokitesvara),<sup>513</sup> all of whom are *bodhisattvas* associated with compassion who matched his vision of *aikidō* as an art expressive of universal love.

It is also apparent from several sources that performance of Tantric exercises formed part of Ueshiba’s daily spiritual practice and that his interest in Shingon’s colourful, evocative rituals dated from his childhood in the Tanabe area where Shingon temples were prevalent.<sup>514</sup> As, in his youth, Ueshiba is said to have frequently practised asceticism in the mountains, he may well have

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<sup>510</sup> Shingon means “true word” and *Mikkyō* means “secret teaching”, that is the teaching of the “secret (unrevealed) Buddha”, in contrast to *Kengyō*, “revealed teaching”. See Kiyota Minoru, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1978), 27.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>512</sup> C. Jeffrey Dykhuizen, “Sugawara Tetsutaka Discusses Aikido, Ueshiba Morihei, & the Kagura-Kotodama Staff,” *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* 12, no. 2 (2003): 76. The triangle, circle and square are also used diagrammatically in Shintō, but are there represented superimposed on each other rather than in a vertical structure; see Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 188.

<sup>513</sup> See Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 4,” 35 and 38. Amida (Amitabha), also the main deity of Pure Land Buddhism, is known as the Buddha of Infinite Life because of his infinite compassion. Fudo Myoo (Acala) is a wrathful deity who cuts through delusion with the sword held in his right hand, and binds those led by their passions with the rope in his left in order to lead them to the correct path. He is nevertheless a compassionate figure who has vowed to save all beings for eternity. Kanzeon (Avalokitesvara) is the “Bodhisattva Who Perceives the Sounds of the World” and vowed to hear the voices of people, save those who suffer and dispel evil. He can change into many different forms to save people and often appears in female form performing acts of compassion with many hands. See Shingon Buddhist International Institute, *Jusan Butsu the Thirteen Buddhas of the Shingon School* [Web site] (HeavenEarth Net, 1998[accessed on 2003]), available from <http://www.shingon.org/deities/deities.html>.

<sup>514</sup> Ueshiba Kisshōmaru, *Aikido Kaiso Ueshiba Morihei Den*, 51-52.

acquired further knowledge of Shingon practices from adepts of Shugendō, which combined elements of Shintō and Tantric Buddhism and had a centre in the Kumano mountain range to the east of Tanabe.

Kisshōmaru has suggested that it was Ueshiba's knowledge of Shingon teaching which paved the way for his ready assimilation of the teachings of Ōmoto, particularly those concerning *kotodama*, the science of sacred sound, which were influential in the creation of *aikidō* as will be shown in the following chapter.<sup>515</sup> This is entirely credible given that Shingon, which predates Zen in the history of Japanese Buddhism, has had many centuries of interaction with Japanese indigenous beliefs. Noting its far-reaching impact on Japanese culture, one of the foremost contemporary Japanese scholars of Shingon, Hakeda Yoshito, observed that Esoteric Buddhism has many "elements compatible" with Shintō, such as:

the idea of the oneness of man and nature, a belief in the magical efficacy of the word (mantra in the former, *kotodama* in the latter), and the concept of a ritually consecrated realm.<sup>516</sup>

He also suggests that the fusion of Buddhism and Shintō (*honji suijaku*) owed much to the system of thought elaborated by Kūkai,<sup>517</sup> who expressed the view that all the Shintō *kami* were aspects of the *Tathāgata*.<sup>518</sup>

When Ueshiba mentioned concepts or deities normally classed as belonging to Shintō, therefore, he might equally well have been referring to the Shingon teachings with which they are often interchangeable. The Shintō *kami* Amaterasu ō-mikami, whom Ueshiba particularly venerated, for instance, has

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<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>516</sup> Yoshito S. Hakeda, *Kūkai Major Works Translated, with an Account of His Life and a Study of His Thought*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary, trans. Yoshito Hakeda, *Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 7.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>518</sup> Pierre Rambach, *The Art of Japanese Tantrism*, trans. Barbara Bray (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), 85.

been equated for centuries with Mahāvairocana (Dainichi nyorai in Japanese), the Shingon personification of ultimate truth.<sup>519</sup> In this manner, Shingon may have contributed to the development of *aikidō* in more ways than can be immediately recognised. There are certainly strong grounds for believing that the Shingon method, particularly its use of visualisation techniques and combination of body, mind and sound, inspired Ueshiba in his adaptation of the body movements of traditional Japanese martial arts. Such an application of Shingon practices was not without precedent, for Shingon is known to have influenced the development of at least one swordsmanship school, the Katori-ryū.<sup>520</sup> A contemporary explanation of some Shingon symbolism used in *kendō* such as the *mudrā* known as the Hokkai jō-in<sup>521</sup> has also been given by Inoue Yoshihiko.<sup>522</sup>

### **History of Shingon Mikkyō in Japan**

Shingon is one of two schools of Tantric Buddhism which developed in Japan in the ninth century, the other being Tendai, founded by the monk Saichō (767-822). Kūkai and Saichō travelled to China at the same time in 804 to broaden their knowledge of Buddhism.

Kūkai is said to have been dissatisfied with the Japanese Buddhism at that time, that of the Six Nara Schools, which was closely regulated by Confucianist law.<sup>523</sup> According to Ryūichi Abé, who has put forward a new theory to explain Kūkai's journey to China, Kūkai's main criticism of the Nara Schools was that they were unable to link philosophy (such as Māhāyana concepts of Void and

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<sup>519</sup> Bocking, *A Popular Dictionary of Shinto*, 4.

<sup>520</sup> Kiyota, *Kendō*, 19-20.

<sup>521</sup> A Shingon hand gesture representing union with the cosmos. See *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>522</sup> Inoue Yoshihiko, "Hokkai-Join and Reflections on the Meaning of Mokuso," *Kendo World* 11, no. 1 (2001).

<sup>523</sup> Ryuichi Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 28.

dependent origination), to actual experience.<sup>524</sup> According to Abé, it was discovery of the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* (*Dainichi-kyō* in Japanese), a Buddhist text little known at the time and which referred to practices to transpose theory into experience, that motivated Kūkai to travel to China to elucidate its meaning, including reading it in the original Sanskrit.<sup>525</sup> In other words, the *sūtra* provided a vital link between the theory of enlightenment and the practical means to attain it. This emphasis on actualisation of theory which is a distinctive feature of Shingon provides an important clue to the relation of Shingon to *aikidō* as will be shown below.

Kūkai became a resident priest at the Hsi-ming-ssu, a major centre of Buddhist learning in Ch'ang-an, the capital of the Chinese T'ang court.<sup>526</sup> He was introduced to Hui-kuo (746-805), a famous Chinese Buddhist master who instructed him in the "mantras and Sanskrit hymns, the mudrās and visualization of the sacred symbols, all of which constitute the yogic system of the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*".<sup>527</sup> After only thirty months in China, Kūkai was ordained a Master of Esoteric Buddhism and the Eighth Patriarch, and returned to Japan in 806, laden with *sūtras*, texts, mandalas, portraits and other religious items.<sup>528</sup> He later enjoyed imperial patronage and became administrative head of the Tōdai-ji in Nara. Kūkai is credited with many achievements, such as founding a school of art and science, compiling the first Japanese dictionary and the architectural design of the great Shingon temple complex on Mount Kōya.<sup>529</sup>

From this brief sketch it can be seen that Kūkai introduced to Japan a style of Buddhist teaching not hitherto known there and characterised by the use

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<sup>524</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>525</sup> Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 109.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>528</sup> Rambach, *The Art of Japanese Tantrism*, 29.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

of colourful iconography, ritual resonance and symbol. It is noteworthy that at the time of Kūkai's journey, Tantric Buddhism had been established in China for only about one hundred years and was therefore still close to its Indian roots.<sup>530</sup> This proximity is reflected in the strong correlation between Shingon practice and the Indian spiritual techniques of kundalinī yoga, a relationship which is significant for understanding the connection between Japanese Tantric Buddhism and *aikidō*.

### Identification with the cosmic Buddha

Tantric Buddhism, also known as Vajrayāna,<sup>531</sup> is a branch of Buddhism which shares the doctrinal ground of Mahāyāna but has developed its own distinct theories of spiritual practice. These come in the class of what Buddhism calls "skilful means" (*upāya* in Sanskrit), that is methods of attaining enlightenment based on "skilful" techniques to transform human consciousness. The term "tantra" means "a thread" and is used to refer to religious literature which deals with devices, such as incantation or iconography, used to represent truth.<sup>532</sup>

Like the Mahāyāna schools of Buddhism, Vajrayāna rests on the Mādhyamika, Yogācāra and *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrines concerning "Emptiness", dependent origination and Buddha-nature. The outstanding feature of Vajrayāna, however, is that it identifies ultimate truth with the "eternal enlightened body" of the cosmic Buddha, the *dharmakāya*.<sup>533</sup> In Buddhist philosophy, the latter is a term used to designate one of three bodies of the Buddha, the others being the *nirmānakāya* (the physical body of the historical Buddha) and the *samboghakāya* ("literally a 'rewarded-body', that is the body of

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<sup>530</sup> Byron Earhart, *Japanese Religion*, 86.

<sup>531</sup> Vajrayāna (literally, "Diamond Vehicle") arose mainly in north-east and north-west India around 500 AD and reached Tibet, China and Japan from Central Asia and India. See Schuhmacher and Woerner, *The Rider Encyclopedia*, 398.

<sup>532</sup> Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*, 5.

<sup>533</sup> Reginald A. Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World the Tantric Buddhism of Tibet. The World of Tibetan Buddhism Vol. 2*, First paperback ed. (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2002), 117.

one who is 'rewarded' with the fruits of enlightenment as the result of having perfected *bodhisattva* practices").<sup>534</sup> The *dharmakāya* is a kind of "illuminating principle", that exists independently of all the Buddhas but is nevertheless often personified as Tathāgata ("He who has become aware of ...things as they are") or Mahāvairocana (Dainichi-kyo).<sup>535</sup>

The essence of Vajrayāna is its emphasis on transformation of the human being through identification with the cosmic Buddha. Its methods are based on the premise, derived from the Yogācāra philosophy of contingency, that the mind is not fixed and hence is capable of being transformed from a deluded state to a non-deluded one.<sup>536</sup> Such transformation can take place within the world of everyday reality but requires special practices.

In common with Zen Buddhism, Vajrayāna holds the view that the naturally enlightened mind, or Buddha-nature, exists in all sentient beings but is "covered over by defilements of all sorts" issuing from "rigid and defensive ego structures". This Buddha-nature is the same as the *dharmakāya*,<sup>537</sup> an equivalence which forms the basis for identifying the human person with the cosmic Buddha, and makes possible the Esoteric Buddhist practices which aim to actualise Mahāyāna philosophy through "the integration of man with the cosmic Buddha".<sup>538</sup> The basic aim of these techniques is to dissolve the egoic self so that the Buddha-nature may be revealed.<sup>539</sup>

Like Zen Buddhism, Shingon sees the pure mind as that which is "unpolluted by acquired knowledge" which fragments the world.<sup>540</sup> However,

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<sup>534</sup> Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*, 58.

<sup>535</sup> Rambach, *The Art of Japanese Tantrism*, 15.

<sup>536</sup> Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*, 59.

<sup>537</sup> Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World*, 103-4.

<sup>538</sup> Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*, 2.

<sup>539</sup> Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World*, 107.

<sup>540</sup> Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*, 31.

while Zen reaches this understanding by methods aimed at cessation of discriminating thought, Shingon uses “forms, colors and movements” to “purify their [practitioners] delusions, thoughts, and actions”.<sup>541</sup> The function of these techniques is to bring about a transformation in the mind such that it can perceive the Dharma-realm, “where insight penetrates into the mutual interfusion of everything”.<sup>542</sup> Through these techniques the practitioner comes to realise that:

the apparently solid and enduring “I” is an illusion and is actually a superficial label attached to the endless flow of experiential moments...<sup>543</sup>

This understanding leads to *prajñā* (wisdom), which means “right cognition” and is synonymous with “the understanding of emptiness as the ontological basis of existence”.<sup>544</sup> It is achieved by transforming the deluded mind and leads to the perfection of the qualities of the *bodhisattva*, for insight into emptiness makes possible the heart of the *bodhisattva*, a heart “without agenda”, which gives freely to others and is thus unconditionally compassionate.<sup>545</sup>

Here some correlations with *aikidō* in both the intent and function of Shingon can already be observed. As seen, Ueshiba conceived of the Universe as having an invisible structure founded on a principle which could be apprehended by the *aikidō* practitioner through practice of *aikidō* movements. In *aikidō* this structural principle is not personified as the *dharmakāya*, but it is nevertheless visualised as spherical and spiralic patterns of cosmic dimension coordinated round a central axis into which the practitioner aims to integrate his or her

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<sup>541</sup> Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 133.

<sup>542</sup> Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 119.

<sup>543</sup> Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World*, 93.

<sup>544</sup> Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*, 61.

<sup>545</sup> Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World*, 96.

movement. *Aiki* in this context conceivably becomes equivalent to merging with the cosmic Buddha.

The emphasis that Ueshiba put on the need to dissolve the ego and *aikidō*'s incorporation of Zen methods for doing this have already been mentioned. In addition to practice in non-fixation of thought, however, *aikidō* can also be seen to provide practice in transformation of mind. This can be seen, for example, in the core *aikidō* turning motion, *taisabaki*, which is not only a physical movement but also an exercise in turning round one's mind.

### ***Aikidō* and Tantric perspectives on the body**

The method elaborated by Kūkai to achieve integration with the cosmic Buddha is that of the "three secrets" (also called "three mysteries", *sanmitsu* in Japanese) of body, sound and mind, combinatory exercises which integrate breath and hand movements, enunciation of sound and visualisation. The "three secrets" are:

the secret language of the Dharmakāya's body, speech, and mind, through which the cosmic Buddha unveils his innermost enlightenment, the language that, according to the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* (T 18:4a-5a), is ritually replicated in the gestural sequences of mudrās, the chanting of mantras, and the visualization of mandala images.<sup>546</sup>

The theory behind them is described in Kūkai's *Shōji jisso gi* (*The Meaning of Sound, Word and Reality*).<sup>547</sup>

The claim being made here is that Ueshiba's creation of *aikidō* was greatly inspired by Kūkai's system. In order to understand how this is possible, it is necessary to situate Shingon in the wider context of Indian Tantric Buddhism from which it derives. The correlation with *aikidō* stems from the fact that Shingon inherited from Indian Tantra the idea that mind and matter are an

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<sup>546</sup> Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 129.

<sup>547</sup> Hakeda, *Kūkai Major Works*, 234-46.



interrelated flux of energies, linked to a universe in similar flux. The motivating idea of Tantric spiritual practice is to free energies in the human person and redirect them to harmonise with universal energies, usually personified as deities or symbolised through other images. The concordance with *aikidō* derives from this common theme of harmonisation of psychophysical energies.

The parallels with *aikidō* are particularly evident when the practices of Tantric kundalinī yoga are considered. The exercises of this yoga are based on the notion of the “vast potential of psychic energy” at the base of the spine, known as the Kundalinī Śakti, which must be stimulated to rise through the spinal column and the system of psychic centres known as *cakras*, until it becomes fused with pure consciousness, symbolised by the Indian deity Śiva situated above the crown of the head.<sup>548</sup>

The awakening of kundalinī and its journey through the *cakras* is aided by exercises (whose similarity with Inner Alchemy Daoism has already been noted) to purify the channels through which currents of psychic energy flow. The purification process recalls in many respects the notion of *aikidō* as *misogi* and will be considered further below. Grounds for believing that *aikidō* is to some extent an adaptation of the Tantric system are found in Ueshiba’s metaphor for *aikidō* practice as the ascending and descending spiralic dance, to left and right, of the Shintō *kami*, Takami Musubi and Kami Musubi.<sup>549</sup> This image bears a striking similarity to Tantric descriptions of kundalinī’s spiralic progress through the main channels, the Sushumnā and “its two flanking channels: the white, ‘lunar’ nādī, Idā, on the left, and the red, ‘solar’ nādī, Pingalā, on the right”.<sup>550</sup>

A further common feature of the Tantric and *aikidō* systems is the association of the inner organs and segments of the body with the five

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<sup>548</sup> Ajit Mookerjee, *Kundalini the Arousal of the Inner Energy*, 2001 Reprint ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1982), 10-11.

<sup>549</sup> Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 4,” 77.

<sup>550</sup> Mookerjee, *Kundalini*, 16.

irreducible constituents of the universe. These five elements, which represent the totality of universal reality, are typically depicted throughout Asia in the form of the Buddhist *stūpa*, replicated in architecture, iconography and statues. *Stūpas* generally represent Ultimate Reality in the form of cube (representing earth or solidity), on top of which is a circle representing water, then a triangle symbolising the flame of fire, topped by a half circle representing ether (all-penetrating) and a composite *cintāmani* (triangle joined to a half circle).<sup>551</sup>

A parallel image of the human body serves to indicate how ultimate reality may be apprehended. Just as the elements of the cosmos are in equilibrium, so they must be correctly balanced within the human person. The purpose of spiritual exercise is to achieve this balance, an effect of which is to open the psychic energy centres, the *cakras*. In this way, a link is made between the symbolism of the five elements and the *cakras*.

That Kūkai's explanation of reality (although positing six elements – the sixth being human consciousness) was close to this model can be seen in his work *Attaining Enlightenment in this Very Existence*, for example. Here he wrote: "The Six Great Elements are interfused and are in a state of eternal harmony."<sup>552</sup> Among Shingon practices which apply this understanding to the human body is the meditation on the body composed of the five Elements (*godai-jōshin-kan*).<sup>553</sup> In this exercise, the practitioner visualises his or her body in the form of the five elements (where each element corresponds to a *cakra*), performs the related *mūdra* and recites the associated seed syllable which is also visualised.<sup>554</sup> Similarly, it has been suggested that, in *aikidō*, the act of aiming to remain perfectly balanced at the centre of six forces of attraction and dispersion

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<sup>551</sup> Rambach, *The Art of Japanese Tantrism*, 56.

<sup>552</sup> Hakeda, *Kūkai Major Works*, 88.

<sup>553</sup> Adrian Snodgrass, *The Matrix and Diamond Mandalas in Shingon Buddhism*, ed. Lokesh Chandra, 1997 reprint ed., vol. 354-55, *Sata-Pitaka Series Indo-Asian Literatures* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 1988; reprint, 1997), 68.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-71.

(six types of potential movement), which requires subtle awareness of fine fluctuations, is a manner of meditation on six elements.<sup>555</sup>

Ueshiba made clear reference to *stūpa* symbolism in the diagrams he drew to describe *aikidō* and in his exhortation to practitioners to “Build a Buddhist tower” within themselves.<sup>556</sup> He also referred to the need to “learn to control the universal elements within the human heart”.<sup>557</sup> The conclusion to be drawn is that in his view *aikidō* practice could lead to a state of internal harmony which one might reasonably suppose to be similar to that required in yoga for the opening of the *cakras*.

### The three “secrets” as inspiration for *aikidō*

Of the three “secrets” posited in Shingon, the first is the secret of the body, that is use of the body to perform exercises conducive to spiritual development in the Shingon mode. Such exercises include breathing techniques (*prānāyāma*) to harmonise the energy flow and still thoughts, and performance of *mūdras*,<sup>558</sup> ritual finger movements or hand gestures which “illustrate and express the movements of the mind”.<sup>559</sup> It would be difficult to deny a correlation with *aikidō* here because of overwhelming evidence of the importance of performing technique in conjunction with harmonised breathing. For example, Ueshiba referred to the need to “Give in to the Universal Breath”,<sup>560</sup> and Abe Seiseki, interpreting Ueshiba’s poetry, described the *aikidō* breathing methods known as *kokyuhō* as “the underpinning of the ki in aiki”.<sup>561</sup>

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<sup>555</sup> J. D. Cauhépé and A. Kuang, *Le Jeu des énergies respiratoires, gestuelles et sonores dans la pratique de l'aikido* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, 1984), 74-75.

<sup>556</sup> Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 4,” 83.

<sup>557</sup> Ueshiba, *Budō*, 34.

<sup>558</sup> The term *mūdra* means a “sign”, or “seal” (Japanese: *in*).

<sup>559</sup> Rambach, *The Art of Japanese Tantrism*, 69.

<sup>560</sup> Ueshiba Morihei, *Budo Training in Aikido*, 14.

<sup>561</sup> Ueshiba Morihei, “O-Sensei’s Songs of the Way (6),” 48.

Among *aikidōka* who have particularly noted the importance of harmonised breathing in *aikidō*, one could cite Kuang, who sees the role of *aikidō*'s rhythmic breathing in association with a sustained thought (for instance, the notion of purification) as being to effect psychic transformations within the human person.<sup>562</sup> Harmonised breathing, she notes, plays an essential part in all *aikidō* movements. It is first established during the warm-up exercises (*aiki-taiso*) and should ideally be maintained throughout a training session.<sup>563</sup>

As mentioned, *mūdras* were used in several Japanese martial arts for various purposes, such as belief in their magical power. In *aikidō*, where hand and finger movements to direct the flow of *ki* are especially important,<sup>564</sup> there are grounds for inferring an application of *mūdras* not for magical purposes, but for spiritual intent as defined here. An example of such hand gesture is the open upward-facing receptive palm (which indicates a “state of being poised to receive energy”).<sup>565</sup> Reasons for believing this include the observation that, rather than techniques to grasp or dominate, as one might expect of a fighting art, *aikidō* movements are primarily concerned with balancing the flow of *ki* within one's body.

In the application of the second “secret”, that of speech, uttered as a single syllable or mantric phrase, the relation to the freeing of energy in the *cakras* is even more evident. This is because of the effect of each sound, which produces a different vibration frequency, as described by Ajit Mookerjee.<sup>566</sup> In Shingon, the sounds used are Sanskrit letters termed *bījas*; these are: A VA RA HA KHA HŪM.<sup>567</sup> Correct pronunciation of the *bījas*, in an appropriate state of

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<sup>562</sup> Cauhépe and Kuang, *Le Jeu des énergies*, 105.

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>566</sup> Mookerjee, *Kundalini*, 22.

<sup>567</sup> Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*, 66-67.

mind, is held to have the power to raise a person's state of consciousness by putting one in tune with the "same vibrations as created the Universe".<sup>568</sup>

The relation of sound to states of consciousness provides an important clue to how Ueshiba understood the function of *aikidō* as spiritual practice. Some might object that incantation is not part of *aikidō*, but there are many eyewitness accounts of Ueshiba performing *aikidō* movements while enunciating syllabic sounds (as will be explored further in the next chapter). Further, it is here suggested that Ueshiba may have achieved the objective of Tantra, which is to refine intonation until a "root-sound" or "sound-potential" is attained, a "sound with practically no vibration, which has an infinite wave-length". The ability to detect such fine vibration would equate to a spiritual state described by Mookerjee as "Sonic Consciousness" and could explain Ueshiba's extraordinary sensitivity to light, movement, and sound vibrations.<sup>569</sup>

The meanings of the *bījas* are elaborate and too extensive to be examined in detail here. It should, however, be mentioned that the *bīja* A was particularly favoured by Ueshiba in his application of *kotodama* theory. This *bīja*, pronounced on exhalation, represents Emptiness and all-pervasiveness<sup>570</sup> as well as the element Earth. *Stūpas* are inscribed on one side with the *bījas*, and on the other with the syllable Vam (Va+M), representing the Void, which covers the whole *stūpa*, thus indicating that the Void equals the "complete interpenetration between the five elements and consciousness".<sup>571</sup> The meaning thus implied is that the ultimate insubstantiality of things, Emptiness, can be apprehended when the five elements in the human person are in balance.

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<sup>568</sup> Rambach, *The Art of Japanese Tantrism*, 62.

<sup>569</sup> Mookerjee, *Kundalini*, 30-31.

<sup>570</sup> Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*, 71.

<sup>571</sup> Rambach, *The Art of Japanese Tantrism*, 60-62.

As will be seen in the next chapter (see page 157), Ueshiba often accompanied his *aikidō* movements with utterance of sounds. Although taken from *kotodama*, they have a close relation with the Shingon system. It is therefore reasonable to surmise that Shingon provided the original inspiration for Ueshiba's application of the *kotodama* theory. Sound, such as *kiai*, is used in the martial arts as a fighting tool, but the evidence is that Ueshiba used sounds differently, in a manner more in keeping with the Shingon and Shintō traditions.

The third "secret", mind, means the use of the visualisation faculty to transform the mind from its limited everyday state to one in which it identifies with the *dharmakāya*. Visualisation plays an important part in Shingon spiritual practices, with one of the main instruments for effecting it being the mandala, a complex depiction of the nature of reality. The term itself, composed of the Sanskrit term "manda", meaning "essence" or "bodhi" (enlightenment), and "la" meaning "completion", denotes a state in which bodhi is completed: "Mandala means circle: thus all the virtues are joined together in a ring and absolutely all of them are there".<sup>572</sup> They are not mere pictures, however, but living symbols into which the practitioner may literally enter, either by positioning him or herself between them in a Shingon temple, or by stepping into one drawn on the ground or through visualisation.<sup>573</sup>

"Completion" in the Tantric context means an ideal state in which the five basic wisdoms are fully developed. This is achieved through visualisation exercises in which the mandala acts as a guide. In the course of practice, the adept discovers the insubstantiality of rigidly held beliefs and actualises a non-ego-centred vision (a vision of reality unmediated by the discursive mind). This is done in many different ways, for instance through rituals to invite the various wisdoms to enter into oneself from all four directions (South, North, East and West), or through performance of *mudrās* (for instance, of offering) or other

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<sup>572</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

body movements (such as prostrations, indicating surrender of the self), repetition of which has a transformative effect on the mind.

That this type of visualisation featured in Ueshiba's personal practice is suggested by his descriptions of himself as Maitreya, or of seeing himself as "the body of Fudo Myo Ou carrying a great shining light of fire on its shoulders" or as the "body of Kan Zeon Bosatsu".<sup>574</sup> His reference to building "god's (Kami) mind (Kokoro) inside Man's physical body" can be interpreted as having the same implications as Shingon visualisation.<sup>575</sup> Although Ueshiba's *aikidō* was enacted in a non-religious framework that did not require practitioners to venerate or visualise deities, instances can be found where he instructed practitioners to visualise cosmic motion, as here:

Contemplate the movements of the stars while imagining that you are carried away with them in space. Images of this type will allow you to join with the universal system which is born of "opposites", that is, with Heaven and Earth.<sup>576</sup>

An example of how *aikidō* develops skill in visualisation is provided by George Leonard's description of practising the *aikidō* technique *shihonage* (four-direction throw):

Performing the necessary turn while remaining upright and centered can be a tricky matter. Rather than teaching this maneuver piecemeal, Nadeau [Leonard's teacher] asks us to meditate on the *idea* of the perfect turn. This turn, he tells us, *already exists* at the uke's side. We may think of it as a whirlpool, already spinning there. Once we have this idea firmly in our minds and bodies (and for Nadeau the two are not separate) all we have to do is move to the uke's side, into the whirlpool, into the perfect turn. Everything else – balance, centering, posture, feet, arms, hands – will take care of itself. We are Americans and

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<sup>574</sup> Ueshiba Morihei, "Takemusu aiki 1," 35.

<sup>575</sup> Ueshiba Morihei, *Budo Training in Aikido*.

<sup>576</sup> Nocquet, *Maitre Morihei Uyeshiba présence et message*, 150.

pragmatic. Will it work? We give it a try and find that Nadeau is right. The shiho-nage flows most smoothly when the reality of the *idea* is fixed firmly in the consciousness, and no analysis is needed.<sup>577</sup>

The main mandalas used in Shingon are the Garbhadātu (Womb-pattern) mandala, and Vajradhātu (Diamond-pattern) mandala. The former represents the “knower”, that is “our deepest consciousness”, depicted by the image of Mahāvairocana in its centre. From this central image emanate four Buddhas, each with an accompanying *bodhisattva*: Samantabhadra (to the south-east), Manjusri (to the south-west), Avalokitesvara (to the north-west) and Maitreya (to the north-east).<sup>578</sup> The central image of the Diamond-mandala, meanwhile, is the Tathāgata, the Absolute, Enlightenment, in its active aspect, suggesting the “freedom of movement belonging to Knowledge”.<sup>579</sup>

Mandala imagery is complex and beyond the scope of this study to describe in detail. However, since *aikidō*'s world view shows similarities with their depiction of reality, a few of their essential aspects will be described here. The following analysis draws extensively on Ray's description of the view of reality depicted in mandala.<sup>580</sup> Vajrayāna, he explains, understands being as consisting of fundamental energies rooted in the Buddha-nature. These energies are associated with five primary aspects of enlightenment known as the “five wisdoms”. The objective of practice is to express all five wisdoms fully, “in an open, selfless, and unobstructed way”. The understanding of human behaviour and the path to enlightenment as associated with balancing and expression of energies is what links Shingon visualisation to *aikidō*, which is similarly concerned with harmonising of *ki*.

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<sup>577</sup> Leonard, "Aikido and the Mind of the West," 176.

<sup>578</sup> Rambach, *The Art of Japanese Tantrism*, 52.

<sup>579</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>580</sup> Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World*, 131-43.



How *aikidō* movements help to achieve this freeing and balancing of energies will be shown in the next chapter in relation to the Shintō practice of *kotodama*. Here the comparison will be confined to practice of the five wisdoms. These are: “all-pervasive spaciousness” which is developed by contemplation on the element of space; “mirror-like wisdom” which reflects things clearly, just as they are, and is associated with unshakability; “wisdom of equanimity which is all-accommodating” and appreciates the “richness and resourcefulness” of every situation; “wisdom of discriminating awareness” which appreciates the “ultimate beauty and sacredness of each ‘other’ encountered”; and “all-accomplishing wisdom” which manifests as “heightened awareness of the momentum and unfolding of events” rather than self-conscious accomplishment.

The practice of *aikidō* can be shown to develop aspects of the human person on a basis similar to that of the five wisdoms. The first wisdom, all-pervasive spaciousness, is developed, for example, through visualisation of expanded consciousness which is necessary to sustain awareness of the flow of *ki* fundamental to *aikidō* movement. The second wisdom, unshakability, is developed through the requirement to maintain a centred body posture which is never unbalanced by the partner’s momentum. The third, equanimity which appreciates resourcefulness, is nurtured by practice of a wide range of techniques requiring continual adaptability to dynamically changing situations. The fourth, discriminating awareness, is enjoined by the obligation to maintain respect for one’s partner’s *ki*, for instance through the principle of *maai*, correct distance. The fifth, all-accomplishing wisdom, is developed through the practice of responding appropriately to every encounter in order to bring it to harmonious conclusion.

There is ample evidence that Ueshiba’s *aikidō* entailed a conjunction of body movement, breathing, visualisation and enunciation of sound similar to that used in Shingon practice of the “three secrets”. As *aikidō* also had, for Ueshiba,

the same intent as Shingon in providing access to the true nature of reality, it can reasonably be concluded that his *aikidō* was a form of spiritual practice closely patterned on the Shingon method.