

# Chin Kon Ki Shin

## Shinto Elements in a Modern Warm-up

written by Dan Penrod, April 1st, 2004

### Chin Kon Ki Shin:

*"A practice intended to aid one in joining with the universal spirit and to help one understand the devine 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* ; **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 it's 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 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..

The ancient tradition of *chinkon-kishin* , historically, had largely fallen out of practice in the Shinto tradition until Onisaburo Deguchi revived the



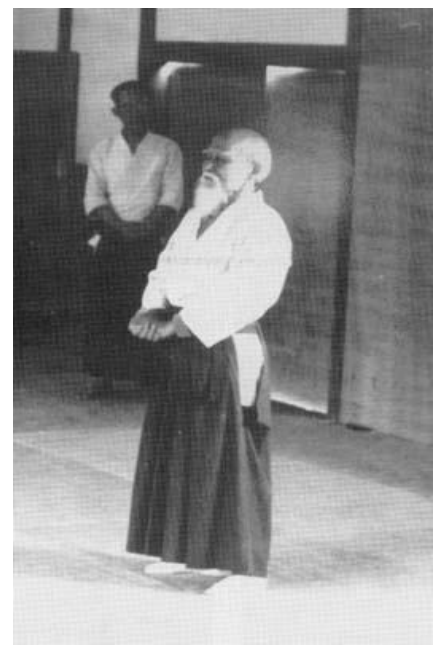
practice, within the Omoto-kyo Shinto religious sect, in the early 1900's. When O-Sensei met Deguchi and embraced the Omoto religion he also embraced the practice of *chinkon-kishin* as taught and practiced by the shaman priest. O-Sensei had embraced the rich traditional Shinto culture and mythology since his childhood. Omoto-kyo, as a new form of an ancient religion and its charismatic leader, Onisaburo, had a profound impact on O-Sensei's spiritual path. The founder and another Omoto believer are shown here practicing *kishin* meditation with their hands folded into esoteric *mudra* or *kuji-in*; 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 of the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters) regarding Emperor Chuai, and in the *Nihon Shoki* (Chronicle of Japan) in the record of Empress Jinko. *Chinkon-kishin* was practiced for many years in Omoto-kyo which attracted large numbers of 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 by the Omoto-kyo because of the profound and often surprising effects it had on its practitioners. The practice was never abandoned by O-Sensei and is found blended 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 well understood (even by many of O-Sensei's uchideshi) are still practiced in many aikido dojo around the world. They are practiced for their obvious physical benefits as well as for their historical significance. But generally the exercises are practiced because they are 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 many 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



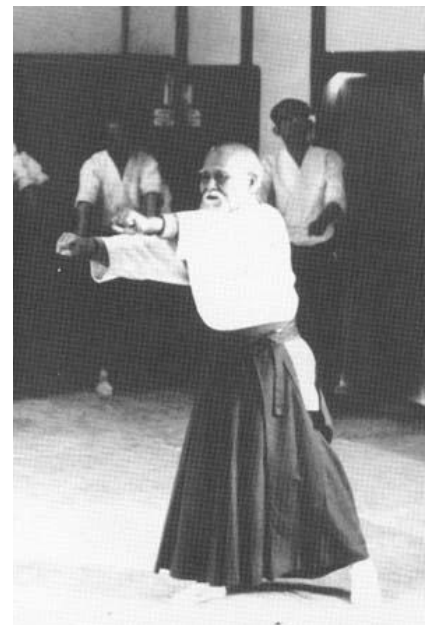
together with the left hand over the right. A small space is left between the hands. The hands are placed in front of the abdomen and shaken vigorously up and down. Inhale to the top of the head rising up naturally. Then exhale to the bottom of your feet as you continue shaking your hands up and down. 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.

A related movement that had been referred to as *Otakebi* was a variation of "*vibration of the spirit*". In *Otakebi* the practitioner raises his hands over his head, shaking them vigorously with the fingers are extended and ending with throwing the hands down toward the ground. In the original practice they would shout "*eee-aaaay!*" while exhaling and throwing the hands down; Hence the name *otakebi*, meaning *war cry* or *roar*. Today the exhalation is mostly silent. The founder would speak of shaking the dust from the joints when referring to this wrist loosening exercise. For Ueshiba 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 in aikido as *kogi-fune* or *funakogi* is best known as the *Rowing Exercise*. It involves the arms and body moving in a boat rowing motion. According to an important text on Shintoism titled *Kami no Michi*, 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. However, 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. These vocalizations have their roots in the *Kotodama*, the ancient mystical practice combining spirit and sounda re-popularized in Omot-kyo.

**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.



An interesting side-note is that aikido associations heavily influenced by Koichi Tohei (Ki Society, AAA, Seidokan, etc...) practice many other *kihon undo ki* or [aiki-taiso](#) exercises which Tohei designed to help manifest *ki* and focus on the *one point*. As Tohei's 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.

When I began practicing aikido in the mid-80's I don't recall seeing Mitsugi Saotome Sensei lead us in any of the *chinkon-kishin*. This may have been because O-Sensei de-emphasized the practice in his later years or it may have been because O-Sensei left his students to wonder about, or even choose to ignore, these old Shinto practices which were seen as increasingly anachronistic in a modern Japan. It was some years later that I noticed Saotome Sensei re-introduce his students to *furitama*, *torifune*, and *ibuki kokyu*, possibly as he was revisiting his own roots in aikido; 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.

Dan Penrod  
Budo Dojo