

"...Imagine drawing energy down, through your outstretched arms,
from the heavens,
and up, through your legs,
from the earth
as you breathe in...

Then settle, hold, letting the energies concentrate in your *hara*, your center...

... And as you exhale, extending *ki*, this energy, life-energy,
down through your legs and deep into the earth,
and equally through your arms, and fingertips, out into the universe..."

(stretching, first *Aikido* class, November 1986)

Hara (Center)



The width of two fingers below the navel;
the width of two fingers in...

The body's natural center of balance and movement;
the source of the body's vitality,

All the traditions agree,

Manipura chakra

Kath

Dan-tien

Tan-den

Cinnabar, Mercury, Fire, Red
the alchemist's crucible -
for forming the internal pill of immortality...

[India]

[Saudi Arabia]

[China]

[Japan]

But can I feel it in my body?

Don Juan's vibrant image of the human body as enveloped, like a luminous egg, with lines of radiant energy converging at the navel (Yaqui Indian). "The energy...to move and to seek...the *will*...the power to select, to assemble" stems from an area an inch or two below the navel.

Polynesian Wayfinders - navigating without instruments, sitting cross-legged in the bottom of his outrigger canoe, sensing the direction and strength of the ocean swells through his testicles; whose entire sense of orientation to the vastness of ocean and sky he is taught as emanating from his center point, or *piko*.

[Polynesia]

(Recalls the expression from the early days of aviation: "flying by the seat of your pants". No doubt a strongly felt sensation!)

The philosophies are interesting, appealing. The agreement of traditions from different cultures (many voices speaking together) is *intellectually* convincing.

But I want to feel it for myself, in *my* body. If I speak about it, I want it to be from personal experience - a tangible sensation, a physical certainty that I can point to within. How else can such truths be sustained if they cannot be re-discovered? The philosophies themselves are unimportant except, perhaps, to inspire, to guide, and to validate the experience once felt. And in the sense of connection they provide with those before me who have known these truths and have tried to express them.

In daily practice I continue to visualize, to look within, to search for the elusive feeling of center, and of being centered.

"Centering: the act which precedes all others on the potter's wheel. The bringing of the clay into a spinning, unwobbling pivot, which will then be free to take innumerable shapes as potter and clay press against each other. The firm, tender, sensitive pressure which yields as much as it asserts. It is like a handclasp between two living hands, receiving the greeting at the very moment that they give it."

[M.C. Richards]

Ki (Energy)

Ai (Harmony)



Many mouths, speaking together...

In the etymology of the Kanji character *Ai*, harmony, we find two primitives: the triangle and the square.

The triangle symbol representing three, or many. The square representing mouth.

Thus, many mouths speaking together, agreement, harmony.

Or, for me, in a musical sense, the combination of simultaneous musical notes in a chord: three voices, soprano - tenor - bass, singing together, in Harmony (different from unison), creating a whole that is richer, fuller, more textured, and more dynamic than the sum of its individual voices.

The Triangle of Breathing:

inhale (from above and below), settle (center), exhale (expanding sphere).

Striving for Harmony in the Three aspects of the human form: mind, body, and spirit.

Triangle, circle, and square in Zen calligraphy.

And as symbols representing the principles of Aikido.

Seiza, upon Squares of tatami - the squares of resolution. Zazen.

Many voices, through time, through Aikido -
experienced

Like waves of light streaming through a Triangle of Glass, a prism.

Green of branch that yields without breaking

Blue of placid sky and ocean waves

Red of Caring Heart and quickening fire

I never had the opportunity to train with O'Sensei. And yet I feel as though I am able to experience, through each of my teachers, as coloured beams of light, aspects of the source, the white light of O'Sensei's Aikido. Each reflects on the prism of my mind-body-spirit and reveals both themselves and the quality of larger Truths. As I strive to bring all these experiences together, to center them, to focus them upon an inverse prism within, the white light, in brief flashes, reappears.

And I imagine O'Sensei practicing Aikido in a Heavenly dojo, on tatami of cumulus clouds, throwing Terry in high falls of thunder, and joyous laughter...

'I' (Heaven/Earth)



I imagine drawing energy from such heavens... into my center...

The Kanji character which represents the self, or 'I', is derived from the primitive symbol 'X', a numerical sign meaning Five. It represents, says the Glose, the live elements (four sides and the center).

Later, to this symbol two strokes were added, one above and one below, to represent Heaven and Earth.

Thus, in stylized form, the modern Kanji character, while meaning Five, symbolizes the two principles,

yin and yang, begetting the live elements between Heaven and Earth.

This symbol, found on a few ancient Chinese coins, was sometimes also used to represent the human form.

Together with the square-shaped symbol, meaning mouth, it forms the character which represents the self, or 'I'. It seems a curious conjunction of symbols: Mouth, or voice, with Five, or the live elements. I. Embodiment of five senses? As a voice, or a unique Self-expression, of Nature, perhaps?



Or, hidden between rocky cliffs and ocean waves, a sun-warmed
rock in an elevated tide-pool:

I, Nature,
an Eye
to admire
Herself.

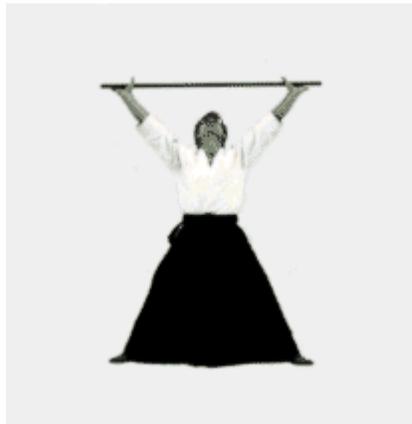
Aikido has been my path to self-discovery, self-awareness, self-improvement.
At the same time, it has deepened my awareness and sense of connection to others and of the
world around me.

It has been a *misogi*, removing the dust of fears and expectations from the prism of my
mind-body-spirit.

Enabling the energy of Heaven and Earth to flow more freely through me.

Energy which may then radiate back into the world - in unique colors - as an expression of
the gift of Life.

Thus, X



as a symbol for myself,
as a symbol of the Unknown,

as two triangles, balanced at the center point,
as the form of my stance,
as I breathe in -
 receiving the energy of Heaven,
 drawing in the energy of Earth...

(stretching, *Aikido* class, April 1993)

Nidan Essay
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