

Basic Aikido Vocabulary

[The following vocabulary list is by no means complete, but it contains some of the more commonly encountered terms one may encounter during an aikido class.]

Aikido = The word "Aikido" is made up of three Japanese characters: ai - harmony, ki - spirit, mind, or universal energy, do - the Way. Thus Aikido is "the Way of Harmony with Universal Energy."

Ai hanmi = Mutual stance where uke and nage each have the same foot forward (right-right, left-left).

Atemi = (lit. Striking the Body) Strike directed at the attacker for purposes of unbalancing or distraction. Atemi is often vital for bypassing or "short-circuiting" an attacker's natural responses to aikido techniques.

Bokken = bokuto = Wooden sword. Many Aikido movements are derived from traditional Japanese fencing. In advanced practice, weapons such as the bokken are used in learning subtleties of certain movements, the relationships obtaining between armed and unarmed techniques, defenses against weapons, and the like.

Dan = Black belt rank. White belt ranks are called kyu ranks.

Do = Way/path. The Japanese character for "do" is the same as the Chinese character for Tao (as in "Taoism"). In aiki-do, the connotation is that of a way of attaining enlightenment or a way of improving one's character through aiki.

Dojo = Literally "place of the Way." Also "place of enlightenment." The place where we practice Aikido. Traditional etiquette prescribes bowing in the direction of the shrine (kamiza) or the designated front of the dojo (shomen) whenever entering or leaving the dojo.

Funakogi undo: Rowing exercise

Gi = Training costume. Either judo-style or karate-style gi are acceptable in most dojo, but they must be white and cotton.

Gyaku hanmi = Opposing stance (if uke has the right foot forward, nage has the left foot forward, if uke has the left foot forward, nage has the right foot forward).

Hakama = Divided skirt usually worn by black-belt ranks. In some dojo, the hakama is also worn by women of all ranks, and in some dojo by all practitioners.

Hanmi = Triangular stance. Most often aikido techniques are practiced with uke and nage in pre-determined stances. This is to facilitate learning the techniques and certain

principles of positioning with respect to an attack. At higher levels, specific hanmi cease to be of importance.

Hanmi handachi = Position with nage sitting, uke standing. Training in hanmi handachi waza is a good way of practicing techniques as though with a significantly larger/taller opponent. This type of training also emphasizes movement from one's center of mass (hara).

Happo = 8 directions; as in happo undo (shomen uchi undo in 8 directions) The connotation here is really movement in *all* directions. In Aikido, one must be prepared to turn in any direction in an instant.

Hara = One's center of mass, located about 2" below the navel, one point, location of center of ki. Traditionally this was thought to be the location of the spirit/mind/(source of ki). Aikido techniques should be executed as much as possible from or through one's hara.

Irimi = (lit. "Entering the Body") Entering movement. Moving into (opposite of tenkan)

Jo = Wooden staff about 4'-5' in length. The jo originated as a walking stick. It is unclear how it became incorporated into aikido. Many jo movements come from traditional Japanese spearfighting, others may have come from jojutsu, but many seem to have been innovated by the founder. The jo is usually used in advanced practice. **Kata** = A "form" or prescribed pattern of movement, especially with the jo in aikido. (But also "shoulder.")

Ki = Mind. Spirit. Energy. Vital-force. Intention. (Chinese = *chi*) For many Aikidoka, the primary goal of training in Aikido is to learn how to "extend" ki, or to learn how to control or redirect the ki of others.

Koho tento undo = standing up exercise

Kokyu = Breath. Part of Aikido is the development of "kokyu ryoku," or "breath power." This is the coordination of breath with movement. A prosaic example: When lifting a heavy object, it is generally easier when breathing out. Also breath control may facilitate greater concentration and the elimination of stress. In many traditional forms of meditation, focus on the breath is used as a method for developing heightened concentration or mental equanimity. This is also the case in Aikido.

Kokyu dosa = seiza ki exercise

Kokyunage = timing throw

Kotegaeshi = one of the wrist turn holds.

Kyu = Any rank below shodan

Ma ai = Proper distancing or timing with respect to one's partner. Since Aikido techniques always vary according to circumstances, it is important to understand how differences in initial position affect the timing and application of techniques.

Misogi = Ritual purification. Aikido training may be looked upon as a means of purifying oneself; eliminating defiling characteristics from one's mind or personality. Although there are some specific exercises for misogi practice, such as breathing exercises, in point of fact, every aspect of Aikido training may be looked upon as misogi. This, however, is a matter of one's attitude or approach to training, rather than an objective feature of the training itself.

Nage = The thrower.

Obi = A belt.

Randori = Free-style "all-out" training. Although aikido techniques are usually practiced with a single partner, it is important to keep in mind the possibility that one may be attacked by multiple aggressors.

Sensei = Teacher. It is usually considered proper to address the instructor during practice as "Sensei" rather than by his/her name. If the instructor is a permanent instructor for one's dojo or for an organization, it is proper to address him/her as "Sensei" off the mat as well.

Seiza = Sitting on one's knees. Sitting this way requires acclimatization.

Shihonage = Four direction throw

Shodan = First degree black belt. (Nidan = second degree black belt, followed by sandan).

Shomen = Front or top of head. Also the designated front of a dojo.

Shomenuchi ikkyo undo = Arm exercise

Suwari waza = Techniques executed with both uke and nage in a seated position. These techniques have their historical origin (in part) in the practice of requiring all samurai to sit and move about on their knees while in the presence of a daimyo (feudal lord). In theory, this made it more difficult for anyone to attack the daimyo. But this was also a position in which one received guests (not all of whom were always trustworthy).

Tanto = A dagger.

Tenkan = Turning movement, esp. turning the body 180 degrees. (see tai no tenkan)
Tsuki = A punch or thrust (esp. an attack to the midsection).

Uchi deshi = A live-in student. A student who lives in a dojo and devotes him/herself both to training and to the maintenance of the dojo (and sometimes to personal service to the sensei of the dojo).

Udefori undo = exercise in which arms cross body

Udefori choyaku undo = same with motion

Uke = Person being thrown (receiving the technique), person who attacks. At high levels of practice, the distinction between uke and nage becomes blurred. In part, this is because, from a certain perspective, uke and nage are thoroughly interdependent.

Ukemi = Literally "receiving [with/through] the body," thus, the art of falling in response to a technique. Ideally, one should be able to execute ukemi from any position and in any direction. The development of proper ukemi skills is just as important as the development of throwing skills and is no less deserving of attention and effort. In the course of practicing ukemi, one has the opportunity to monitor the way one is being moved so as to gain a clearer understanding of the principles of aikido techniques. Just as standard Aikido techniques provide strategies for defending against physical attacks, so does ukemi practice provide strategies for defending against falling (or even against the application of an Aikido or other technique).

Ushiro = Backwards or behind, as in ushiro ukemi or falling backwards.

Waza = Techniques. Although in Aikido we have to practice specific techniques, Aikido as it might manifest itself in self-defense may not resemble any particular, standard Aikido technique.

Yokomen = Side of the head.

Zengo undo = shomen uchi undo in two directions.

Common Attacks

Katate tori (also katate mochi) = One hand holding one hand.

Kata tori = Shoulder hold.

Ryote tori = Two hands holding two hands.

Ushiro tekubi tori = Wrist grab from the back.

Ushiro kubi shime = Rear choke.

Shomen uchi = Overhead strike to the head.

Yokomen uchi = Diagonal strike to the side of the head.

Tsuki = Straight thrust (punch), esp. to the midsection, forward thrust.

Pronunciation

A = aardvark

I = pizza

U = blue

E = egg

O = bone

Counting to 10 in Japanese:

ichi, ni, san, shi (yon), go, roku, shichi (nana), hachi, kyu (ku), ju.
