

## Misogi: A Way towards unifying Kokyu and Ki

When Abe Sensei came to LA in November 1984, he shared his techniques with us, which he learned from O Sensei, the techniques from Osensei's later years. I had the first time an opportunity to take his ukemi during this seminar. I didn't understand why I went down on the matt every time when I grab his arm. That was the technique of kokyu. I remember he was explaining to me about the importance of kokyu or breath training. And how you develop the power of kokyu is the key to improve my Aikido. He told me that misogi is the one of the methods by which to make our kokyu and concentration stronger. His explanation on misogi was not beyond our understanding. His explanation has a realistic approach on this. He said that the essence of Aikido is how you use kokyu in each technique. Misogi training helps us to make our kokyu and concentration better and stronger. The following article is the first time for the public he shared this secret of Aikido with us. Let's grasp the concept and apply it in your training!

Matsuoka Sensei

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### Going back to Ancient Simple Life, "Misogi"

---- At first, regarding to Misogi, in former interview (No. 105) with Abe-Sensei, he touched Misogigyou of Kawazura-Sensei, and Misogi is formalized routine activities that ancient Japanese people did in front of shrine. That means Misogi is not coming from Buddhism from India or Confucism from China, and it was existed in Japan originally and everyone practiced it, and it has been formalized. How was Misogi distributed up to today?

Abe: In present, before people visit Ujigami-sama(Guardian God), they wash their hands, gargle their mouths. Also, when they wake up in the morning, the first things they do are washing their faces and brushing their teeth. Misogi can be something more outstretched than those. The form was established by ideas that would be considered as ideal. The form has been told as Gyohou. There is a Haishinnogyou (Deed for worship to God) with Nihaiyonhakushu (2 times bow, 4 times handclaps). When it comes to Misoginogyou, it is quite stringent and practice for dear life.

---- Please tell us about Misogigyō.

Abe: First, I will explain about Genshokunogyou (Deed for Reduced Diet). Generally, people would hate the idea of Mizunogyou (Deed for Water). Anyway, most difficult thing would be Genshoku (Reduced Diet). This is different from doing a fast. Fasting makes you feel very good, and when you do a fast for one week, you feel like you want to do more. But, if you eat right after the fasting, your stomach will be irritated very badly. So, when you do a one week fast, you need to spend two to three weeks to go back to your regular pattern of eating. Otherwise, there is a possibility that the fast can cause death. In Aikido, fasting would be good, but because of the consequences, we usually conduct Genshoku instead of fast.

Genshoku is eating only 0.26 lb rice twice a day. Side dish is either umeboshi (pickled plum) or sesame seeds with salt. Of course, the rice should be genmai (brown rice). So, comparing to regular diet, it is very hard to do. You endure this reduced diet. When you make the rice well, amount of the rice would be two cups, and when you eat the rice with the side dish, the rice would taste very good. This gives you a real good taste of food, and you could really taste the delicious rice. Today's Japanese people tend to eat more side dishes and hardly eat the main

dish (brown rice). When you practice Genshoku three times during one week, you would be like ancient people physically and mentally. It is like our ancestor's existence.

---- Do you mean that your mind is getting clear and you are not getting hungry?

Abe: Yes, that is right. Your whole body is getting cleansed. Then, you feel like you want to do something - you are energized. It is a mystery. Only three days per week changes you.

Agony of human life (reduced diet) would be forgotten after three days and we would get used to it. You would get used to a fast in two days. Pain of being human is just like that in common-sense terms.

Mizunogyu (Deed for Water) is when you bathe with water after Ichireiichihakushu (1 bow and 1 handclap) at the beginning of the deed. Your attitude is like accepting water gratefully. Pouring water over you without worship is so-called Reisuiyoku (cold bath). We put ourselves in water at sea, lake, and river. Mizunogyu is started with instep of your left foot, not started with throwing cold water on your head. Then, your right leg, knees, and back receive water in order. Next is your head. You carry out this for thirty seconds. It is so-called Mizunogyo. When you think of pouring water on yourself, you feel it must be cold. In order to bear coldness, we do Furitama (Shaking spirit; Putting both hands together in front of the lower abdomen and shaking them up and down ). Furitamanogyu (Deed for shaking spirit) is practiced many times during eight deeds.

In Chinkonkishin (Deed for Quietening Soul), when you have muddle in your mind, you practice Furitamanogyu. Furitama is as wonderful as Genshokunogyu. It is Muganogyu (Deed for Being Perfect Blank Mind). That seethes inside of your body and you are able to focus on what you are seeking, easily. In addition, the movement of Furitama helps you to have good blood circulation. Doing Furitama will cure the stiffness in shoulder that only Japanese people have. It definitely works.

Chinkonkinshin connects the seal. You can make connection by doing this. There are many other ways, too.

---- Is there any meaning for the form?

Abe: It makes easy to unify your feeling by connecting this way. Even though you practice only Chinkonkishin in eight Gyou, it would be light Misoginogyu. This is "Motion is in silence." Next to motion of Furitama is ultimate silence. Motion and silence.... The reason of connecting seal is because it makes you easy to enter the silence.

What do you seek in the ultimate silence? There is nothing in your heart and you do not have any greed.... In other words, there is nothing and that is why there is no gap either. This aspect is superb. Praying or thinking what is coming next does not make you unified. God of Chinkonkishin is your sincere heart itself. This is deed for opening enlightenment. Even though this one has been trying for sixty years, he hardly can do it. (Laughter)

Amenotorifunenogyu (Deed for Method of Respiration) means taking a dugout canoe ride because this county is an island.

---- Generally, it is called “Practice to row”, isn’t it?

Abe: This is a method of respiration. Vocalization, Breathing, and shaking spirit work all together. Because your activity is large, your blood circulation becomes very good. When the method of respiration expands to be vocalized, it is called Otakebiokorobinogyou.

Otakebiokorobinogyou is practiced by good straight posture with grabbing belt tightly and practice deep breathing and vocalizing three times each. At the first movement, rise your heels and shoulders. Keep body straight and drop whole body to the ground...(Editors Note: in this article it wasn’t explained completely).

When you do Okorobi, draw the sword thinking yourself into Samurai spirit; just like that, taking a backswing of sword above your head, then banging it down. At the same time, you practice vocalism (Yei-Ei). Ibukinogyou is practiced after Otakebiokorobinogyou is done.

Kami (God) And “Ka”, “Mi” ----- Recognition of Yamato Language

Abe: The letter of “Kami” (神) means God in Chinese, and in Japanese, “Kami” is consisted of combination of “Ka” and “Mi”.

In China, God (神) is above the clouds or in heaven. Also, he is above and looks down onto people far below. God is interpreted very widely, like bringing all nature out, God of nature, God of ancestors, heart functioned as ethereal and spirituous, something incredibly precious, or superior. Place of the God lives is very unfathomable, and the God is above to monitor people.

Japanese “Kami” is from the word “ka mi”. “Ka” describes something above self. “Ka”- there were so many meanings in this, for example, “ka” of kami (hair), “ka” of kao (face), and so on. All of those are above something. Shoulder is located above hand, and the word, kata (shoulder) was originally from the meaning of “ka”, that is located above “te” (hand), and later, kate transformed into kata.

“Mi” means see or recognize. When someone is taller than me, he is kami. Someone, fatter than me is kami, someone has longer leg is also kami, and smarter people are called also kami and they were very respected. Kami had also various meanings.

Indication of respect to those big existences is shimenawa that was wrapped around big trees and stones. It means even just stones and trees were respected, and when considering present life and life styles, I think concept of kami for Japanese people is majestic. Our ancestors spoke a lot of words naturally, didn’t they?

The meaning of “Kami” for Chinese people does not have anything but God as this Chinese character itself. They don’t have any other concepts, which are contained within the word, God. We need to distinguish Yamato language by acknowledging these.

In the old Japanese educational system, Chinese characters were considered more important to learn than Yamato language. Over the next educational concept, it is all right that one can't write Chinese characters as long as he can read them. But, I feel this is not reliable education. We should learn both of richness of meaning of Chinese characters and spread of Yamato language in wide range.

## Unlimited Divine Power of Misogi

---- Did O'Sensei practice deeds as professor Kawazura said, didn't he?

Abe: Yes, he stayed over at my aikido school from one week to 10 days. We practiced Misogi, together. Even in the year he passed away, he practiced Misogi before he leaves for head office in the morning of February 1st, 1969. After he went home, he had to stay in bed and, he passed away on April 26th. When I visited him last time, he said, "You don't have to come and visit me because you live far from here." When I held his hands, I felt such thick hands. I still remember the feeling of his hands at that time.

Mizunogyo is the deed practiced without speaking anything. For 30 minutes... When you feel cold after pouring water over yourself, you do Furitama, and again, you pour water over yourself and then practice Furitama.... Or, when you started having muddle in your mind, you do Furitama. You practice over and over again until reaching the deed you are ultimately seeking for or your mind becomes perfectly blank. When you can't reach it, you do practice next day again.

---- Do you practice Aikido or calligraphy after the deed?

Abe: Yes, that's right. Continuous muddle in my mind is Aikido. (Laughter) So is calligraphy. People can't achieve mental concentration easily. But, that's why people can live life. Well, Divine Power of Deeds would be such a thing, and the Divine Power of Aikido would be same as that.

O'Sensei accomplished connecting with Divine Power at the well when he was pouring water over himself and he opened a way to enlightenment. When we opened a way to enlightenment, it means to continue forever and not an end itself. So, we will reach the Divine Power someday. But, it is not the end. We strive for Divine Power, which is above the places we can reach, to get rid of our anxiety. It is great thing about Misogi.

---- Do you mean, once achieving enlightenment, this is the beginning and it keeps going?

Abe: Yes, exactly. This way of life is significant. It gets close to Chinese style God. The God, who has mystifying abilities, is Chinese God  
Invisible Heart and Invisible Breathing

---- I heard that you broke through your slump by practicing deeds....., you became to understand deepness.

Abe: Well, I guess there is certain deepness, but it is very hard to reach. But, I get a clue to the solution. Like, if I do this, it would work out. In other words, I can visualize the purpose. I can only tell such limited things.

Aikido is just same as this. It is a key when real concentration power appears. Ultimate is focusing on one point. A dot. "There is a location, but there is no size," – it is a dot. We realize that the point is deep inside. Reaching the point is Misoginogyou.

The master describes Aikido as "Divine Power of small door (Gap)." ("Odo no Kami Waza") This small door ("Odo") indicates Cape Udo in Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters) .

[\*Note Cape Udo: This is the place spirit of Izanaki practiced Misogi. After his wife, Izanami, passed away, the spirit of Izanaki went country of Yomi (Hades) to see her. His strong wish was that he wants to see her, made himself dream, which is called Yomi (see at night). The spirit of Izanaki was chased by Oni (Devil) and he woke up bathed in sweat. The place he washed off the sweat was Cape Udo.]

Our first ancestor is Amenominakanushi. He taught us that inside was important. In terms of human beings, they have body (physical) and invisible heart (spirit). When considering which one is more important, the answer is invisible heart. Kokoro (heart) changes korokoro (frequently), that's why it is called kokoro. Something that never changes is Magokoto (genuine heart). All the more reason, we should have Magokoro.

Even in the world of Aikido, there are body and invisible heart, and there is also invisible respiration (kokyu). Seeking those is what Aikido means. There is a secret of Aikido in the invisible heart and invisible breathing.

---- In calligraphy, it is what you teach: shapes, how to write, and respiration, which you mentioned as "one more thing", isn't it?

Abe: Yes, respiration. Breathing method can't be told. We have to learn how to breathe by feeling. When and where you can learn is actually, you can learn often. Your breathing is same as mine.

But, you can tell the breathing when you throw an opponent. The breathing, all of a sudden you are touched, can be transferred. This is the importance of respiration.  
My Calligraphy is together with Aikido

---- You mentioned about importance of breathing in Aikido and Calligraphy. Did you notice it by practicing Aikido?

Abe: It took so much time to realize. It took 60 years. Usually, people cheat well or take short cuts. They can't really perceive it by themselves, by saying this should be enough or that would be it.

---- They can understand things only at their stratification level...

Abe: Therefore, it is important to choose a good master. When it comes to my Aikido, I didn't get the essence, but there was some kind of strength that the master was always next to me and with good luck.

Even though we write characters, we won't develop ourselves without knowing the essence of skill. When I consider such meaning, living with someone in the same house is very important.

---- You were with the master for one week in a month for past twenty years, weren't you?

Abe: Yes. The master stops by my place and then visits Hikitsuchi Sensei (Michio Hikitsuchi: 1923-. Master of Kumanojukudoujyou in Shinguu, Wakayama Prefecture.) in Shinguu, and he then goes back to Iwama from the head office. This is his one-month course.

Mr. Hikitsuchi is a sword. The master instructs using a sword. He receives with sword. He walked around and found his life worth living in there. He was thinking how he should leave his technique, how he could leave a way of living. This is so called philosophical life style, and he left them at the place.

The master devoted deep study to literature. Most recent study was about Einstein. He really deeply studies. He also studied about Nihonshoki (Chronicles of Japan) and Kojiki long time ago.

The other day, I went to Iwama. Saito Sensei told me that I can take books which the master had read as many as I want, and I got many. There were many Nihonshoki and also, there were some books about traditional belief, world affairs, and so on. He has not only skills, but also great knowledge. The reason he can express the deepness of his skills is because he pursues learning.

---- Did O'Sensei always stop by without notice?

Abe: No, he usually scheduled. Mr. Shigehiro, Office Manager of the main Aikido school, called me and said; "The master rides on which train and at what time. He is very glad." The master has an idea what calligraphy he is going to write for the week. He saves one or two days only for calligraphy, other than days for aikido practice.

The master said, "Even though I have taught a lot, fellow pupils do not develop ability of technique very well. In this case, I only can leave behind the calligraphy I write.

Within all of these calligraphies the master has written the secrets of Aikido. The best kind way of teaching is making students compare by seeking carefully every time they learn a new technique. There are such great number of secrets of techniques and tips. Usually, we have to write explanations of technique within one hundred to two hundred words. If it is calligraphy, all techniques should be included in one line and one ○. Therefore, the master said, "Calligraphy is interesting." And, there is esotericism in these (calligraphies the master wrote).

When we see his writing next to him, we know the place of the secret. It is up to people how to take the secrets into their skills. In my case, the master directly teaches me sometimes by saying, "Like this", or "This technique should be like this."

---- This must be only for you, Mr. Abe. This sounds like a special discipline, isn't it?

Abe: Yes. I feel lucky. Therefore, my duty is very heavy.

---- I heard that most difficult thing in O'Sensei's calligraphy was where you write your name.

Abe: After you wrote a piece, there is created balance by writing your name in the piece. The balance is same as Aikido. I mean, when a part is missing, main body is ruined.

O'Sensei knows such things. It is very meaningful when I was told by him that this is the most important spot.

After he wrote a piece, he would give me a test. O'Sensei had already determined where he would write his name, but he still asked me, like "Here, or here?" I can tell that he does this on purpose. (Laughter)

Like this way, he teaches me tips, key points, and openings. He teaches there, "Writing my characters is same as Aikido." I am very lucky to have such moments with him.  
What is true Aikido and Sho?

---- Did O'Sensei always write down songs in notebook even when he was at your place to write calligraphy?

Abe: Yes, that's right. One night, the master woke me up when I was sleeping. When I went to his room (he was sleeping next room to my room.), he opened window and was looking at the moon. He said to me, "I just wrote a song. What do you think of this?" I was very touched. Well, this was one of my fondest memories.

When he was touched or moved by something, he writes down in his notebook just like this. And, when he finishes writing, he shows it to me, asking, "What do you think?" He has not only severe side, but also such a humorous side.

---- Does the aspect of his enlightenment appear in his Sho and Douka (Songs with words of wisdom including morals)?

Abe: Yes, partly what you deal with will be universal. What I mean is this "universe" is universe of enlightenment and not universe of the word itself. There is an article about this in every Aikido Newspaper issue.

---- Even though the part of each subject is universal, I guess there were some changes before and after the war...

Abe: In the beginning, Aikido was also part of martial arts, so it was a matter how fast you kill. After the war, it became more philosophical. You can tell this change from Douka. You can really realize what Aikido is. Then, Aikido reaches to the place called, a Divine Power of small door (Gap). It means that there is a path between universe and human beings. You need to work hard if you want to master Aikido. There is always something deeper inside; so that, you should not be skin-deep or superficial.

Human beings exist integral with God. It is a fact that even though the way of appearing and vanishing of existents is different, the root is same. We shall practice deeds with keeping words of wisdom in the bottom of our hearts. Finally, is that we truly be good to each other and live in harmony.

---- Thank you very much.

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Translation by Shizuka Watanabe for Aikido Doshinokai