Transmission, Inheritance, Emulation 13 by Peter Goldsbury

INTERLUDE
VI: The Question of *Kotodama*:
Part 1: Preliminaries: Kukai (Kobo Daishi) and the *Man'yoshu*

The last two columns have discussed language and aikido. The reason for this was to lay the foundation for a discussion of another major aspect of language and aikido that needs to be considered. What is known in Japanese as *kotodama* was discussed in the last two columns very generally, first, by means of examining in detail a small segment of Morihei Ueshiba's own discourses on the subject and, secondly, from the viewpoint of general language and linguistics. We now need to consider *kotodama* in the more specific context of Japanese culture in general and aikido in particular. For some aikido practitioners, I think one of the issues here is whether something that is supposedly crucial to the art has been lost to postwar aikido. As the *AikiWeb* discussions on internal skills have shown, some who have devoted much time and effort to aikido training over the years have become aware of the possibility that there is a dimension to the art that they have never explicitly been taught, or even exposed to.

The reactions to this state of affairs are varied. Some do not care anyway. For many Japanese, Morihei Ueshiba is too distant, having lived in another age, when *kotodama* appeared to mean something but no longer does. For many non-Japanese, also, Ueshiba is too distant, having lived in another country as well as in another age: O Sensei's aikido died with him and these students have learned aikido from their own teachers—this is sufficient for them. Others go into a state of denial and deny that such a thing is possible: they believe that the transmission they have inherited is the whole transmission from O Sensei and that there is nothing more to be transmitted. Yet others feel resentful that they have been short changed over the years they have been training. Sometimes, these discussions become part of a 'pre-O Sensei' and 'post-O Sensei' debate, with the watershed roughly around 1942 -- 1945, when World War II was being fought. *Before* was the Golden Age, when training was fully imbued with *kotodama* and resonated with the ancient truths of the *Kojiki*; *After* was the beginning of a Dark Age, when the old truths began to be lost, or lost sight of, or even formally abandoned.

There is another reaction to such a state of affairs that is more practical. In the case of *kotodama*, some students have accepted the watershed, but have also tried to turn back the clock and reinstate *kotodama* training in aikido, the assumption being that only O Sensei's aikido is really worth practicing. Just as in some dojos there are intense attempts to train with the sword and staff exactly as Morihei Ueshiba did in Iwama after 1942 (especially with Morihiro Saito after 1946), or to incorporate into their training specific 'internal' exercises, so also, in some dojos there is training in *kotodama* chanting, in an effort to replicate at least some of the training that Ueshiba himself apparently did. Whether these attempts are successful, or worthwhile, is something that individuals will need to work out for themselves. It is a tall order, in my opinion, to recreate in all details the precise training path that O Sensei eventually carved out for himself—doing so largely by trial and error. Even the adaptation (rather than strict replication) of Morihei Ueshiba's *kotodama* training to modern postwar conditions seems to me to entail that one can accurately reproduce the Founder's own training, at least in essentials.

I believe, furthermore, that there is a substantial difference between attempting to recreate the kind of training in 'internal' skills that Morihei Ueshiba undertook and attempting to recreate his *kotodama* activities (the term is intended to both practical training and study of texts). With 'internal' training, apart from the need to put in the necessary 'mileage' and train the body in new ways, the main issue is the appropriateness, or not, of the metaphors used to visualize the transformation of the body by the mind: the direction, or redirection, of the forces of the body—the person's own body, not that of the opponent—by the mind. However, the results can be seen for what they are—and explanations can be given for the physical processes leading to these results: there is no need for an entire cosmology. In Morihei Ueshiba's case, the *kotodama* activities appear very much to be tied closely to such a cosmology and a major issue for contemporary aikidoka is whether *kotodama* and the cosmology can be separated. In this respect, also, *kotodama* is quite different from Zen, which can be practiced without a cosmology, but which Morihei Ueshiba appears never to have practiced himself. Those who tie aikido closely to Zen, therefore, are adding something of their own, no matter how strongly they argue that aikido and Zen fit closely together. On the other hand, Ueshiba not only did much *kotodama* training, but also defined his aikido in terms of *kotodama* cosmology. Thus the postwar attempts to reinstate *kotodama* in some form or other need to be examined carefully and assessed for what they contribute, or do not contribute, to our common knowledge of aikido.

The thinking and practice of Morihei Ueshiba with respect to *kotodama* embodies the final stage of one branch of a very long tradition, which began, at least in ancient India and con-

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tinued successively without much interruption in China and Japan. It is final, because Morihei Ueshiba appears to have [had] no clear successor within Japanese aikido. This will, it is hoped, become clearer in this column, which offers a critical survey of *kotodama* from its supposed origins right through to the 'modern' incarnation discussed in William Gleason's latest book, entitled, *Aikido and Words of Power*. Since these columns are becoming progressively longer, as I find more subjects that I need to discuss, the treatment of *kotodama* will follow a recent pattern and be divided into several parts. This column, the first part, will examine the antecedents of *kotodama*: its putative origins in Sanskrit 'seed' syllables, together with the few references to the term in the *Man'yoshu*, Japan's earliest collection of *waka* poetry. In the second part, I will look at *kotodama* as it is dealt with by the nativists: Motoori Norinaga and Hirata Atsutane, and also by Onisaburo Deguchi, especially in his mammoth *Reikai Monogatari*. We will then see the extent to which Morihei Ueshiba used the Shingon antecedents and the Omoto cosmology to create his own version of *kotodama*—and the way that his son Kisshomaru Ueshiba quietly abandoned this version. The third part will start from World War II and continue the discussion of *kotodama* in postwar aikido, from Mutsuru Nakazono onwards. The survey in these three columns, of *kotodama* as 'Aikido Language and Spirit', is intended as a sequel to the survey of 'Aikido Language and Thought,' undertaken in the two previous columns, and the issues raised in these earlier columns are very relevant here. The only problem I have with this division is that it suggests a bifurcation between spirit and thought (or a clash between 'Eastern = spiritual' and 'Western = logical' attitudes) that I wish to avoid.

1. Prologue and Preliminaries:
Under the Spell of Plato

Nevertheless, some bifurcation is unavoidable and so it is important to remember the creative tension, discussed in the previous column, between: (1) letters, and combinations of letters as words, whether understood as keys or tokens and whether uttered in sounds or written in script; (2) spoken utterances, such as ritual prayers; (3) the meaning(s) common to both; and (4) the actions with which the meanings are intimately connected—all of which are in play with *kotodama*. In this respect, the revolutionary nature of Plato's discussion in the *Cratylus*, which goes against the entire rhetorical tradition up to this point, must be emphasized.

Until Plato—who was following an iconoclastic tradition that began long before with the Presocratic philosophers—raised the question whether names or words were keys or tokens, it had been assumed that they were keys, which unlocked the doors to deities, to the spirit world, or to 'essences', and that this is why they had to be 'correct'. In fact, a glance at the writings of Kukai (Kobo Daishi) will reveal a long linguistic tradition that identified the constituents of words with the deities themselves. The question raised by Plato was left unanswered in the *Cratylus*, but the way that his student Aristotle answered the question a few years later—that words were mere tokens established by convention—was crucial (1) in tilting the uneasy balance struck in the *Cratylus* away from preserving the tradition of establishing the 'correctness of names' and, as a consequence, (2) in determining the future course of Greek rhetoric, and then Roman rhetoric, and then the rest of western rhetoric—and then the whole western science of linguistics. The mere fact of this development is the main reason why it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, especially for a western practitioner of aikido unknowingly following the traditions of language use based on Aristotle, to turn back the clock and look at the relation between words and the world as if Plato, Aristotle and his successors had never existed. In my opinion, it is more appropriate to consider the rhetorical traditions of the ancient Near East, India, China and Greece side by side, in a comparative exercise. This type of exercise has begun only recently, with a pioneering study by George A Kennedy (see Reading, at the end of this column).

Timeless Truths About Language?

Although this column is not specifically concerned with the linguistics of *kotodama*, this aspect cannot be ignored completely and so, as stated above, we need to draw attention to some of the general categories discussed in the earlier columns, especially that concerning syllables, sounds, words, and meanings. As we shall see in what follows, some texts on *kotodama* have a habit of ignoring these essential categories, but still announcing 'timeless truths' concerning language. Given the fact that language is also remarkable for being ever-changing, it is as well to remember that these texts were the work of human authors, who were living at a particular time and in a particular place, and who were stating their 'timeless truths' also at a particular time, in a particular language, within a particular context, and for a particular reason. Of course, it is hardly necessary to add that the mere fact of stating 'timeless truths' does not, of itself, make them either timeless or true. Though Kukai was also given to stating 'timeless truths' on virtually every page of his writings, this problem seems less obtrusive in discussions of Shingon Buddhism. The writings of Kukai have led to a vast body of commentary and also scholarly works, exemplified in the sober writings of Taiko Yamasaki, Ryuichi Abe and Yoshito Hakeda, all used in this column. Apart from the relevant sections of Jin'ichi Konishi's history of Japanese literature (see Reading, below), there are no studies of *kotodama* in English of comparable quality, and

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very few in Japanese.

To begin with, it is important to keep in mind the word *kotodama* itself, which is written as two Chinese characters, read in the Japanese *kun* fashion (as *koto**D**ama* or *koto**T**ama*). Taken simply as constituents, *koto* 言, or 事, can mean either a particular word, in any language, or the entire language, whereas *tama* 霊, or 靈, or 魂, means soul or spirit. There is an ambiguity here, also. For example, the original meaning of soul was the form that was immanent in a living being: the crucial element that distinguished a living being from a dead one. Since living human beings breathed, the concept was tied to breath and breathing. Thus by analogy, the 'soul' or 'spirit' of a sound or word can be said to be immanent or living in that sound or word, especially when there is an utterance, using breath. However, the notion that the coherent multiples of sounds or words, of a ritual prayer, for example, can themselves cause a particular deity to possess the person who utters the words of the prayer or the hearers of the prayer, is somewhat different, for another process is taking place.

The Catholic sacramental system provides a useful analogy. The words uttered and actions taken in a sacrament are believed to cause certain divine actions and happenings, but God and the action of God are not immanent in the words and actions themselves: they are something extrinsic to them, an external source of power. Catholicism has always condemned the variation of monism known as pantheism and has taught the dualistic doctrine that God is completely separate from the world He created.

Kotodama, however, has it both ways. The Omoto doctrine of a Great Universal Deity, expressed as the Jewish Yahweh, the Christian Trinitarian God, or the Muslim Allah, for example, has this deity immanent not only in the three 'worlds' (the heavenly world, the human world, the spirit world), but also in all the deities populating these worlds, who are manifestations of this universal deity. Given this fact, the notion that a soul/spirit or even a deity can be immanent in words or sounds and also that a quite different deity can act as a result of the words/sounds being uttered is quite acceptable. The consequence, as we shall see from considering some works of Kukai, is that language itself and also individual words and sounds themselves, can be considered as an actual manifestation or instantiation or 'part' of the Buddha or an individual deity or all or several deities.

Nine Types of Ambiguity

Put together, the combination 言霊 can have a variety of meanings, but the meanings that are paramount in Japan and Japanese are: (1) the actual manifestation of a deity / deities—when we are 'enlightened' our words are also 'enlightened', (2) the spirit or soul of the Japanese language as a whole, or (3) the spirit or soul of individual sounds or words in the Japanese language, whether (4) spoken singly, or (5) spoken together in utterances, or written, (6) in *kana*, or (7) in Chinese characters. A consequence of this is (8) the more general sense, which seems to be favored in the *Man'yoshu*, of *kotodama* as 'words followed by appropriate actions': the actions have to match the words exactly. John Stevens also uses it (9) in the sense that many of the above uses of *kotodama* can be applied to any language. In the discussion that follows, *kotodama* is used in all or any of these senses and occasionally, where the ambiguity needs to be made clear, the specific senses of the term will be given. I have also left the term untranslated, but also underline the special quality of the term by italicizing it.

One major issue with *kotodama*, as we shall see, is the extent to which it is supposed to be uniquely Japanese. *Kotodama* was taken over by the nativists, in their search for the genuine roots of Japanese identity. Thus Motoori Norinaga and Hirata Atsutane found the essence of *kotodama* in the 'pure' sounds of original Japanese, which they 'discovered' by cutting away the accretions of Chinese. Hirata seems additionally to have had the image of wholesome Japanese peasants, uttering these 'pure' sounds as they tilled the soil. Onisaburo Deguchi was not really a nativist, but took over some of Hirata's theorizing and made these 'pure' sounds elements in a vast theological superstructure, elaborated in *Reikai Monogatari*. Morihei Ueshiba, who had a copy of *Reikai Monogatari* and annotated it with his own notes, appears to have followed the lead of Onisaburo Deguchi and taught that *kotodama* originated in the sounds—and some of the meanings—represented by the Japanese *kana* syllabary. Sanae Odano followed quite a different route and saw the basis of the **Japanese** phenomenon of *kotodama* in the complex interplay of the readings—not the sounds or syllables, of the **Chinese** characters used to write Japanese. As implied above, John Stevens believes that the underlying realities expressed by *kotodama* apply to any language, but he still uses Japanese sounds as chants. An underlying issue here is the relation between sounds or letters and meaning, which was discussed in the previous column. It seems to me that Stevens, for example, really discounts the meanings and focuses more on the sounds as ways to achieve correct breathing.

In view of the above discussion, probably the best analogy for an examination of *kotodama* in postwar aikido is wading through a large, extremely ancient, but also highly cross-culturally enriched, swamp—of sacred mud. (You have to wade through the mud first, in order to enjoy the benefits that

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kotodama supposedly affords—which are available only after you have practiced *misogi* and experienced its cleansing effects.) Unlike the more worldly mud that Japanese farmers regularly wade through when they plant their rice, the *kotodama* ooze is full of important *budo* nutrients, it looks very attractive and also seems spiritually satisfying in a primal kind of way—just the thing for jumping into with joyous abandonment and, as one chants the sounds, thereby feeling that in so doing one becomes closer to O Sensei as a person; and coincidentally deepening one's understanding of aikido, especially O Sensei's aikido. O Sensei chanted *kotodama* sounds every day before beginning training: if we do the same thing—and especially if we get the pronunciation and breathing right, then it would seem to follow that we shall feel that much closer to the way O Sensei trained and probably have the same experiences that he did.

Or so we might believe. Nevertheless, it is still mud that we are wading through and needs to be dealt like mud, probably in the same way that Koichi Tohei regarded aikido training: Totally relax; Maintain the one point; Keep weight underside (though I am not sure whether this last one is really appropriate for wading through mud). Otherwise, the discussion will gradually sink into the depths. We will come back to this analogy during the discussions that follow in the next few columns.

2. Antecedents:
Sanscrit, Syllables and Shingon

We have to go back to India, to the Sanskrit language, to find the antecedents of *kotodama*. The putative Sanskrit origins of *kotodama* are extremely important for the study of Morihei Ueshiba's own *kotodama* practice. Morihei Ueshiba's explanation of the role of *kotodama* in the creation of the universe (a brief portion of which was discussed in Column 11) is not original to Ueshiba himself, but was borrowed from his teacher Onisaburo Deguchi. As we shall see, Deguchi borrowed in turn from Motoori Norinaga and Hirata Atsutane, and grounded *kotodama* in a tradition going back to the recording of Japan's earliest creation myths. The poems in the *Man'yoshu*, which contain references to *kotodama*, go back as far, but we do not know to what extent the *Man'yoshu* references borrowed from the still older tradition of Sanskrit ‘seed' syllables. It seems highly unlikely, on the other hand, that the substance of what is called *kotodama* in Japanese was indigenous to Japan.

Part of Morihei Ueshiba's early schooling involved learning the Chinese classics (= Confucius and Mencius), as any Japanese youth from a respectable samurai or farming family was supposed to do. In his biography of his father, Kisshomaru Ueshiba quotes one Yamaji Kishi, who made notes of O Sensei's words during his discourses:

- "*I studied* Shisho Gokyo (Chinese classics) *from Master Mitsunori Fujimoto as an assistant priest. It was so hard to understand that a lot of times I nodded off. I liked* Chinkon *and* Kaji Kito *better; I enjoyed imitating the priests and learned almost all of the* Shuhos (general rituals)." (*A Life in Aikido*, p. 56.)

Mitsunori Fujimoto was the priest of the Jizo Shingon Buddhist temple that doubled as the *terakoya* attended by Morihei Ueshiba as a child. Kisshomaru further states that in 1903, just before the Russo-Japanese War broke out, when Ueshiba went off to serve in the army, Fujimoto

- "*performed a* Goma *fire ritual on his behalf. He did all the ceremonies prescribed in Shingon Mikkyo and presented O Sensei with an* Inkyo *(a certificate of enlightenment). Master Fujimoto also installed in O Sensei's* hara *(or center) the spirit of Daigensui Myo-o as his guardian deity. In later days O Sensei spoke of this with great pride.*" (Op. cit., p. 67.)

So Ueshiba grew up with the *mantra* (chants) and *mudra* (gestures) of Shingon Mikkyo or Esoteric Buddhism. Thus it is very plausible to suppose that his notion of *kotodama* comprised elements from Shingon Buddhism: that it was actually a blend of Shingon Buddhism and Shinto (via the Omoto religion).

Kukai (Kobo Daishi) and Shingon Buddhism

Shingon Buddhism was founded by Kukai (posthumously named Kobo Daishi). Kukai was born on the Japanese island of Shikoku and, over a thousand years earlier than Morihei Ueshiba, studied the same Chinese classics. Eventually Kukai tired of studying the Chinese classics and became a monk. He was sent to China from 804 to 806, where he studied under the Chinese master Hui-kuo. On his return to Japan, Kukai composed a detailed explanation of the importance of Sanskrit syllables in Shingon Buddhism. The doctrine of voiced/‘seed' syllables, however, presupposes a vast cosmic structure, a complex blend of the cosmological, the metaphysical, and the mundane, resulting in what a Christian theologian, in quite a different context, called making a ‘sacrament of the present moment'. This column does not purport to deal with all aspects of Shingon Buddhism, for I am in no way qualified to do so. However, in order to see the implicit importance of ‘seed' syllables in the view of *kotodama* embraced by both Onisaburo Deguchi and Morihei Ueshiba, it will be necessary to have some idea of this cosmic structure. (As will be clear to some

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readers, in the few next sections I have borrowed very heavily from the works of Taiko Yamasaki and Yoshito S Hakeda. In particular, Yamasaki's book, entitled *Shingon*, offers a detailed account of the theory and practice of Shingon Buddhism and presents a mass of data in a very stark fashion. Most of the issues that arise with *kotodama* begin right here. Quotations from Yamasaki are all from this book.)

Enlightenment Here and Now, Through Training

The bedrock of Kukai's message was that man was originally enlightened from the very beginning, but that his perception of this was hidden by the bondage of evil karma. This was the reason for Kukai's insistence on the possibility and importance of *sokushin jobutsu* (促進成仏: *Attaining Enlightenment in this Very Existence*, or, *Becoming a Buddha in One's Own Lifetime*). This state of enlightenment was to be achieved by means of rigorous ascetic training known as *shugyo* (修業, 修行). It is important to note the revolutionary nature of this message, which stems from the fundamental differences between Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism.

The earlier exoteric Buddhism was based on the teachings of the historical Shakyamuni Buddha, and held that,

- "*direct human knowledge of universal Buddha nature was impossible. Universal Buddha nature was the Dharma Body, the eternally self-existing being of Truth, the embodiment of perfect enlightenment. According to the general exoteric view, the Dharma Body was prefect Truth itself and for that reason without manifestation; it was abstract, cold, distant; it had no color, form or activity*." (Yamasaki, *Shingon*, p. 58.) .

A corollary of this exoteric view of the Dharma Body is that enlightenment transcends all language and understanding. No words, or thoughts, or means of expression can communicate it and it can thus be approached only in negative terms, or by analyzing the delusions that block it. (This is a common linguistic problem when dealing with any 'perfect' being or state: it can be discussed only in terms of absolute or negative attributes—or "passed over in silence", as Wittgenstein wrote.) Enlightenment, therefore, begins from a completely unenlightened state and becomes a very long and arduous process, which can be accomplished only over several lifetimes.

Esoteric Buddhism, on the other hand, held that the Dharma Body was an actually existing entity, existing eternally, and continually informing all things. Esoteric Buddhism

- "*sees the pure realm of Dharma-nature not as fixed and static, but as dynamic, continually acting and evolving. It is an all-illuminating, all-penetrating, all-embracing life-energy. It may be perceived as a holy principle or as a universal being, but, deeper still, it is an absolute, infinite Dharma-entity, transcending any duality between individual beings, things and principles. Far from being a silent abstraction, therefore, the ultimate Dharma Body is the activity of life itself, present in all that exists, and its teaching never ceases.*
- "*The quality of the Dharma Body that enfolds all things is also called compassion and the scope of its activities includes phenomenal things, the senses, and the activities of body, speech, and mind. It extends throughout the all-pervading Dharma Realm, is eternal and is omnipresent in all level of being (the ten realms). The teaching of the Dharma Body is perceptible through the symbolic elements of earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness—in other words, all things.*" (Yamasaki, op.cit., pp. 59-60.)

Enlightenment (*jobutsu* 成仏) actually means, 'becoming the Buddha'. Yamasaki explains this quite succinctly.

- "*According to Kukai, to become a Buddha means to understand the nature of the three minds of self, other (including all things and beings) and Buddha (the macrocosmic enlightened being). As everything else in the universe is endowed with Buddha-nature, these three are aspects of an inseparable unity, and Buddhahood is the realization of the equality of the three minds…The purpose of esoteric practice is to realize the Buddha-self… Meditative techniques utilize all the faculties and energies of the human body-mind, focusing them on Buddhahood. The capacities to think, feel, perceive, know, and act are summed up in the three secrets (*sanmitsu*), the basis of esoteric practice, which are the all-pervading, enlightened activities of Buddha's body, speech and mind, reflected in the individual. Quite simply, when one's three activities of body, speech and mind unite with those of the Buddha, one becomes Buddha.*" (Yamasaki, op.cit., p. 61.)

The notion of attaining enlightenment here and now is not, of course, without problems. It was stated earlier that Morihei Ueshiba received an *Inkyo* (certificate of enlightenment) after participating in the *goma* fire ritual. However, if human beings are enlightened anyway, there would seem little point in this

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ceremony, unless, like a dan rank, it was intended as a spur to Ueshiba's dedication to the *shugyo* that is intended to achieve the actual realization or awareness of enlightenment. Kisshomaru Ueshiba also reveals more than a hint of skepticism.

- "*O Sensei always invoked the deities with great devotion when he performed the* Chinkon *and* Kishin *rituals (for quieting the soul and opening a channel of communication with the divine)—it seems that his devotion was rooted in this experience* [of having the spirit of Daigensui Myo-o installed in his *hara*]. *The guardian spirit in whom O Sensei had the most faith throughout his life was Ameno-murakumo-kuki-samuhara-ryuo-no-omikami. Not everyone believes that you could be inhabited by spirits and I don't completely accept the idea myself, so it would be easy to laugh at O Sensei's ideas. But human existence, by its nature, has elements of weakness and pain—believers discover a remedy in such things. The more you believe in something, I think, the more truth you find there.*" (*A Life in Aikido*, p. 67.)

Kisshomaru's skepticism concerns possession by, rather than awareness of, the deity, but the issues are similar. The Catholic version of Christian spirituality preferred to leave the matter of enlightenment to the individual's private intercourse with God and placed the importance of ascetic *shugyo* purely in the achievement of sainthood, which was a life of heroic good works. The Christian counterparts of the Buddhist *sanmitsu* (see below) were simply prayer: talking to a God that was completely separate from the world. There was no built-in expectation that ascetic *shugyo* would actually result in enlightenment. If it did, the individual would certainly know about it—and would not have the words to describe the experience.

An essential—and revolutionary—part of Kukai's message, however, was that in spite of the limitations of ordinary language, enlightenment does in fact communicate itself. The Dharma-Body wants everyone to know by experience that they are part of it. The vehicle for such communication is 修業（*shugyo*), the ascetic training of the body, speech and the mind. The consequence is the crucial importance of correct use of the special language of mantras, gestures, Sanskrit syllables, mandalas, images of deities etc, in revealing the Shingon cosmos and its crucial relevance to the individual in achieving Buddhahood.

Secrets and Syllables

Kukai summed up the basis of esoteric practice as *sanmitsu* ('three secrets'), which involve body, speech and mind. As will be seen, the three 'secrets' are not actually so secret; what makes them secret—and revolutionary—is the cosmological significance assigned to them in Esoteric Buddhism. Yamasaki offers the following explanation.

- "*Mikkyo (Shingon/Esoteric Buddhism) is based on the universality of the Dharma Body, the activity of which permeates all things. Its teachings are thus considered equally suitable for all people in all situations at all times. Based on the universal concept that all phenomena are themselves manifestations of universal Buddhahood, Mikkyo uses any possible means to transform the "deluded" individual into a Buddha.*
- "*For the body, there are prescribed hand gestures called* mudras, *movements of the entire body, the smell of burning incense, and the taste of certain herbs. There are ritual implements to manipulate, sculpted and painted forms of art to contemplate. Such ritual art is an important element of practice. For speech the practitioner recites prescribed invocations called mantras, as well as related verse prayers and chants. For the mind, there are visualizations of deities and symbolic forms, involving colors, movements, thoughts, imagination, and feelings.*" (Yamasaki, *op.cit*., p. 61-62.)

Thus Shingon Buddhism is very 'Catholic' in its use of movement, speech and mind. Anyone who has participated in a solemn High Mass, in the presence of bishops, priests and deacons, sung in Latin with Gregorian chant, with bells and incense, in a cathedral full of religious art, can realize very vividly that the Catholic Church sanctions the similar use of movement, speech and mind. In monasteries, too, the use of the 'three secrets' is rendered more intense and concentrated than for lay people. Even a document like *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola, which was the spiritual foundation for the missionary activities of the Jesuits—not by any means a monastic order, lays down very precise directions for the use of movement, speech and the mind in meditation and daily activities. The directions can be varied only with the sanction of the individual's spiritual master. In this case, as with Kukai and Shingon Buddhism, it is the overall significance of the movement, the speech and the activities of the mind—the close connection with the 'Divine', that accounts for the 'secrecy'. In this particular respect, though, the two cases of Catholicism and Shingon are quite different.

The general significance of speech is explained by Yamasaki.

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- "*The Mikkyo teaching of* shoji jisso (声字実相） *expresses the esoteric approach in condensed form.* Shoji *means literally "voice letters", referring not only to human speech and writing, but also to the meanings expressed in the elements, the senses, the various realms of being (of humans, gods, bodhisattvas, Buddhas etc)—in fact, all that can be seen, heard and known. The "letter" points to the symbolic quality of the "voice" of all phenomena. This voice is the fundamental energy that takes form in all things that exist, which at the most profound level is understood to be the activity of Dainichi Nyorai's three secrets.*
- "*The mandalas, ritual objects, visualized forms, and Sanskrit sees syllables used in esoteric practice are so employed as to concentrate in themselves this universal energy. They are perceived as the direct communication of enlightenment, which is not separate from the self.* Jisso *means "actual aspect", the truth of all that is. Thus, Mikkyo says* shoji soku jisso*: this universal energy is itself Truth.*" (Yamasakki, op.cit., p. 62.)

Sowing the Seeds

Earlier, I stated that on his return to Japan, Kukai composed a detailed explanation of the importance of Sanskrit voiced syllables in Shingon Buddhism. The explanation is given in three works: *The Meaning of Becoming a Buddha in This Body* 『即身成仏義』; *The True Meaning of the Voiced Syllable,* 『声字実相義』; and, *The Meaning of the UN-Syllable* 『吽字義』. All three works share a common theme. The first statement of this theme comes in an interpretation of a stanza in *The Meaning of Becoming a Buddha in This Body*『声字実相義』:

The six symbolic elements interpenetrate without obstruction and are in a state of eternal union.
They are not apart from any of the Four Mandalas.

- *Through practice of three-secrets empowerment, they manifest immediately.*
- *The universal web is what we call this body.*
- *All things are naturally endowed with bodhisattva wisdom transcending the essential mind, the subsidiary minds and the objects of the senses.*
- *Each of the Five Wisdoms is endowed with unlimited wisdom.*
- *Since it is the power of the perfect mirror, this is true enlightened wisdom.*

Some brief explanation is necessary, though there is no space to go into much detail.

The six symbolic elements are: earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness.
The Four Mandalas are: the Great Mandala, depicting the deities in perfect human form; the Samaya Mandala, depicting the deities in their symbolic samaya forms; the Dharma Mandala, depicting particular aspects of the deities in the form of Sanskrit seed syllables; the Karma Mandala, which are three-dimensional and depict the deities in sculptured form.
The Five Wisdoms are:
The Wisdom of Accomplishing Metamorphosis, which expresses realization of the enlightened nature of the first five levels of consciousness, the senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch), and symbolizes the universal activity that encompasses the activity of all individual things and beings, the numberless manifestations of undivided reality.
The Wisdom of Magical Perception, which expresses realization of the enlightened nature of the sixth level (consciousness), penetrates all delusion, and realizes the essential purity of all things and beings as integral parts of the whole.
The Wisdom of Equality, which expresses realization of the seventh level (ego-consciousness: the awareness of the individual self) and realizes the equality of the essential nature of all things and beings.
The Great, Perfect Mirror Wisdom, which expresses realization of the enlightened aspect of the eighth level (storehouse consciousness: the underlying substratum of mind, existing beneath individual awareness) and, like a mirror, reflects the universal life-energy that informs all things and beings.
The Wisdom of the Nature of the Dharma Realm body, which expresses the enlightened aspect of a ninth level (pure consciousness), explains the true nature of the all-pervading Dharma-body, and perceives the whole of reality as mysteriously fulfilled in each individual (There is yet another level, which is consciousness of the one as one.)
(Adapted from Yamasaki, op.cit., pp. 93-94.)

All this is to be achieved by "the practice of three-secrets empowerment", which must be explained further, for it is the training in the empowerment of the *sanmitsu* that constitutes *shugyo* (修行 修業). Kukai gives a brief explanation in *The Meaning of Becoming a Buddha in This Body*『声字実相義』:

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- "*If a Shingon practitioner carefully observes the meaning of this (sc. the empowerment of the three secrets), forming mudras with the hands, reciting mantras with the mouth, dwelling in samadhi* ["concentration": the spiritual state obtained through meditation, Faure, 2009] *with the mind, then the three secrets bring about the response of empowerment and he quickly attains great enlightenment.*" (Yamasaki, op.cit, p. 107.)

Of course, a concept like empowerment is necessary, for the three types of activities need to be given a spiritual dimension and connected directly with the Divine. In the Catholic sacrament of baptism, the pouring of the water over the person, or the person stepping into water, actually effects the transformation that it symbolizes and the same is true of *misogi* in Shinto. When Izanami performed *misogi* after his encounter with his dead wife in the Land of Yomi, he was actually purified and many august deities came into existence as a result—including Amaterasu, the most powerful *kami* in the Japanese pantheon. What Yamasaki terms 'empowerment' ("*using symbols commonly known in the world and making them into secret symbols of the transcendent world*") is necessary in all three cases. With Shingon Buddhism, the three types of activity are fused more closely together. This is achieved by adding a new dimension to the making of gestures and the uttering of sounds. What is added is the visualization or contemplation of something and sometimes it is contemplation of the letters themselves that are uttered and so correctly produce the sounds. We will consider each aspect of *sanmitsu* in turn.

(1) Ritual gestures have been used in many religions. The *gassho* gesture: the gesture of respect and reverence in which the hands are placed together palm to palm at the breast, is not only a powerful *mudra* in Shingon Buddhism, but also a powerful Christian symbol of prayer. Shingon, however, adds a further, and more complex, element. The *gassho* gesture is one of several different ways of paying homage to the Buddha. Held together in *gassho*, the hands symbolize the unity of the eternal Buddha realm (right) and the transient world of phenomena (left). There are also further variations of the same basic gesture. Yamasaki sums up the significance of such gestures.

- "*Mikkyo finds several levels of esoteric meaning in mudras. The fingers, for example, represent the symbolic elements (counting from the little finger) of earth, water, fire, wind, and space. (The consciousness element is understood as penetrating all the other elements.) The same fingers are associated with the corresponding mantric syllables. The five fingers on each hand also represent the sense-aggregates—form, perception, thought, will, and consciousness—that in Buddhism are considered to make up all phenomenal beings. To join the two hands, therefore, signifies in many different ways the inseparability of microcosm and macrocosm.*" (Yamasaki, op.cit., p. 114-115.)

(2) In addition to gestures, the Shingon practice of *sanmitsu* uses the activity of speech, in the form of mantric syllables. However, the practice of mantras involves much more than simply vocalizing prescribed sounds. In Shingon Buddhism, *nenju* (念誦) has the connotation of "mindful recitation", employing the sound, the image, and the meaning of the syllable. Of course, this recitation can be spoken out loud, or be silent. Kukai gives a description of different ways of mantra recitation and these are closely connected to the third element, which is visualization.

- "*Voice-Bearing Recitation. The practitioner visualizes a conch shell above a lotus within his mind, and recites so that his voice issues as though from the conch.*
Lotus Recitation. He recites so that his voice can be heard only in his own ears.

- *Vajra Recitation. The lips and teeth are held together and only the tip of the tongue moves slightly in recitation*
Samadhi Recitation. Without moving even the tongue, the practitioner recites only in the mind.

- *Light Recitation. While the practitioner recites, whether silently or out loud, he constantly visualizes light streaming from his mouth.*" (Yamasaki, op.cit., pp. 116-117.)

A rather more complex meditation builds up from syllables to words and phrases. The practitioner begins with an image of the Buddha and visualizes a lotus within the deity, on which appears a moon disk. The syllables appear within this disk and emit light. The practitioner then visualizes the syllables individually, as they grow brighter—and then enter his own body through the crown of the head. They circulate round the body, removing impurities in the process. The next stage is sound, emitted by the syllables like a bell in the wind. This, too, circulates through the practitioner's body. After this, the syllables and sounds form the words and phrases that express the 'true' meaning of the mantra. The practitioner visualizes this mean-

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ing as the mantra itself, which is, at the same time, the Dharma Body. The final stage is to visualize the mantric phrases—a unity of form, sound and meaning, moving within the practitioner's own breath in and out of the body, in tune with breathing. From the mouth they enter the deity's abdomen, circulate through the moon disk in the deity's breast, leave by the deity's mouth, and enter the practitioner through the crown of his head. They circulate through the moon disk visualized in the practitioner's own breast, and leave by the mouth, to begin the cycle over again.

I have condensed and paraphrased Yamasaki's more detailed description, but Yamasaki adds that, "by continuing this practice over thousands of recitations, the [Dainichi-kyo] sutra says, the practitioner can gain certain phenomenal powers to bring good fortune and avert disaster." But he quickly moves to dilute the force of this, earlier, emphasis on performing magic, by adding that, though this meditation can indeed magically benefit others, in Mikkyo, the primary purpose is to cultivate wisdom.

Why is this complex visualization necessary? (Readers might like to compare this explanation with the discussion concerning Wittgenstein and recording the ‘S' sensation in a diary, in Column 12. Note that Wittgenstein does not argue that one cannot have private sensations: he merely argues that these sensations cannot be identified in a language that is supposedly private to the person actually having the ‘S' sensation—or the ‘S' visualization. Though, of course, Wittgenstein never talks of visualizing the actual shape of the letter: this is not the same as visualizing an essentially private sensation *qua* sensation, not a sensation of something else.) Kukai's answer is that the mantra—as ‘empowered' speech—is a fundamental way of actually achieving the union of the practitioner with the deity of practice. Shingon deities are represented in a wide variety of forms (compare the description of mandalas, above.) The deity can be depicted in a particular posture, in particular clothes, with a prescribed *mudra* or object, or as the deity's particular attribute, such as a lotus or sword, or, again, as a mantric syllable: the deity itself is the ‘seed' syllable (‘seed' meaning having immense potential as a ‘condensed' symbol, able to change into other symbolic forms), which symbolizes the essence of the deity in a single Sanskrit syllable.

The Dharma Body, the enlightened self, can itself be described in symbolic elements from five different perspectives, and the description of these is embodied in mantric syllables based on their Sanskrit names. The *Dainichi-kyo* sutra describes the Dharma Body as:

Originally unborn: A -- syllable
Apart from all explanations: BA -- syllable
Absolutely undefiled: RA -- syllable
Apart from dependent causation: KA -- syllable
Absolute unobstructed void: KYA -- syllable

Shingon Buddhism considers the A -- syllable as the root of all syllables and mantras. Literally present in all Sanskrit syllables, the A -- syllable provides a metaphor for all-pervading enlightenment. It was also considered the primal human sound:

- "*In the sound made when the mouth first opens, there is always the sound A. To be apart from the sound A is to have no words. Therefore it is the mother of human speech.*
- *The languages of the three realms all depend on names. Names depend on syllables. Therefore the* siddham [the style of written Sanskrit used in Buddhism] *syllable A is the mother of all syllables.*
- *This you should know. The true meaning of the A -- syllable penetrates all Dharma beings.*"

(*Commentary on the Dainichi-kyo,* quoted by Yamasaki, op.cit., p. 118.)

(3) The above discussion mentioned what was involved in types of recitation and this leads naturally to the third ‘secret' of *sanmitsu*, namely, internal visualization of deities, mantric syllables and other symbolic items. (Note that the discussion on metaphor in the previous column is also very relevant here. The visualizations discussed below could be called metaphors, that are intended to achieve the state intended by the transferred meaning: thinking about the Dharma-Body with the correct visual metaphor enables one to become aware of actually being the Dharma-Body.) Exoteric meditation had the goal of ‘no-mind; no thought', a state of non-activity and non-thought that is supposed to resemble a void. Esoteric meditation, on the other hand, uses all forms and phenomena, just as they are. Kukai explains:

- "*The three secrets of the Dharma Body are not limited even in the finest particles, and are not dissipated even by the filling of all spaces. They enter stones, plants and trees, without discrimination. They enter humans, gods, demons and animals without choosing. They extend to all places. There is nothing through which they do not act.*" (Quoted by Yamasaki, op.cit., p. 119.)

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However, not just any visualization will do. Yamasaki gives an account of a meditation called the Five-Aspect Attainment-Body Visualization. This is supposedly the meditation by which Shyakamuni attained Buddhahood, in which the practitioner in five stages visualizes the Buddha-body perfected in his own body. The five stages correspond to the Five Wisdoms, cited earlier.

- "*The practitioner begins by visualizing his innately enlightened mind with his own breast as a moon disk covered by a light mist. In order to increase the radiant wisdom of his mind, the practitioner contemplates the moon disk as a symbol of awakening mind, visualizing the mist disappearing to reveal the moon shining bright and clear. The practitioner visualizes a vajra* (an implement, with prongs, originally a weapon) *within the moon disk, and thus symbolically attains the adamantine mind. Contemplating within the moon disk the immovable firmness of the five-pronged vajra (the symbol of enlightened wisdom), the practitioner realizes his own innate vajra-nature. Seeing the moon disk and vajra as symbols of his true self, he then gradually expands them in size until they become one body with the Dharma Realm, thus attaining oneness of his body with the universal Buddha-Body. They are then contracted to their original size before the meditation ends.*" (Yamasaki, op.cit., p. 121.)

Another practice that represents the Five Wisdoms of enlightenment is the Five-Syllable Sublime-Body Visualization, which uses the mantric syllables referred to earlier (earth [A]. water [BA], fire [RA], wind [KA], and space [KYA]), but actually visualized within the practitioner. "While forming mudras, the practitioner visualizes the areas of his body in the shapes associated with the elements and within those shapes visualizes their respective mantric syllables." (Yamasaki, ibid.)

Thinking About A

Yamasaki includes in his book detailed accounts of various Shingon rituals and meditations, including one stage of the *goma* fire ritual, which Morihei Ueshiba underwent in 1903 before joining the army. The book's concluding chapter includes an account of the Morning Star meditation and the A-Syllable visualization. The former is a rigorous, intensive, practice which involves reciting a mantra over one million times in prescribed circumstances—which include complete seclusion in an isolated setting, like the top of a mountain. The latter is much less rigorous and is practiced in different forms according to the circumstances.

Yamasaki gives a vivid account of his own experience with the Morning Star meditation. He performed it for over thirty days in a temple on Mt Misen on the island of Miyajima, not far from Hiroshima. His meditation was supervised by his master and consisted of sitting in a lotus posture and performing a single 'three-secrets' ritual at an even, unbroken pace for two five-hour periods each day throughout the whole time (with ritualized breaks for eating and sleeping). Since the Morning Star meditation has been practiced by many people over many centuries—and was practiced in Japan well before the time of Kukai, there is to hand a vast accumulation of experience and commentary concerning the trials a particular practitioner might undergo, such as experiencing hallucinations, and the nature of the end result. The same is true of types of Christian mediation or mental prayer, such as the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola. (I myself have done the *Spiritual Exercises* over thirty days—and in complete silence, and the only differences I can see from Yamasaki's account, on pp. 188-190 of his book, lie in posture and the length of the individual meditation sessions. In the *Exercises*, they are interspersed with short discourses given by the Spiritual Director. But basically, you are alone with yourself for thirty days, bound to follow a very prescribed and unusual lifestyle, including a very disciplined exercise of the body and mind; some find it impossible to accept this, or persevere in such exercise, and give up.)

Similarly, there is a vast accumulation of commentary on the A-Syllable visualization, in the form of manuals going as far back as Kukai himself. In the text said to contain the oral teachings of Kukai, transcribed by his disciple Jichie, we find:

- "*Just as the sea embraces a hundred rivers, the roots of all good are gathered in this single syllable. Therefore it is called the mantra of the ocean mudra samadhi. Thus if you visualize this syllable one time, it surpasses the merit of reciting simultaneously the eighty thousand Buddhist teachings.*" (Yamasaki, op.cit., p. 193.)

Yamasaki continues:

- "*Mikkyo sutras and texts contain abundant explanations of the A -- syllable, which is seen variously as a symbol of the void of potentiality, of the originally unborn nature of all things, and of Daichi-Nyorai—in other words, the ungraspable reality of the universe. For Shingon, recitation and visualization of the A -- syllable therefore represent union with one's true mind. The* Aji-gi *(The Meaning of the A -- Syllable), attributed to Kukai, states*:
- *'The A -- syllable is originally unborn, ungraspable void.*

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This ultimate ungraspable void is endowed with a multitude of virtues and embraces the truth of all Buddhas everywhere. Because it is based on mutual empowerment with the void, it embraces all Buddha truths…'

- *Mikkyo thus crystallizes the entire universe in a single syllable.*"
- (Yamasaki, op.cit., pp. 193-194.)

For someone who is not a Shingon Buddhist and so already 'in' the system, Yamasaki's book is a clear introduction to the vast structure that is Shingon Buddhism. However, he takes much for granted that a non-Buddhist like myself would never take for granted and there are many questions. In particular, there is one fundamental question that he does not answer and probably does not think he needs to: after all, he has done much of the *shugyo* he describes in the book. The question is 'Why?' Why go to such an immense effort of *shugyo*? I am not, of course, stating that some form of what in Japanese is termed *shugyo* is never necessary. The Greeks had a very practical belief that discipline / training enabled one to gain power, hence the term 'Spartan' training methods. In his letters, St Paul, himself a Greek, applied the practice of 'chastizing the body in order to bring in into subjection.' (Paul had a rather dim view of the body.) Nevertheless, one can ask if there is an inherent duty in all human beings to subject themselves to such intense *shugyo*, in order achieve Buddhahood (namely, sainthood) in this body. Yamasaki appears to take it for granted that there is. Superficially, Shingon Buddhism appears to lighten the burden with which human beings are saddled from birth (or births). Proclaiming that we are all enlightened here and now seems much more optimistic than proclaiming that we are not. However, Kukai still insists that we have to realize, to experience, that we are actually enlightened, to remove all the delusion. However, he does not explain why we are deluded in the first place. With Christianity, the reason is right there, in the early pages of *Genesis* and later in the Passion of Christ. Some Shinto scholars have seen the journey of Izanagi to the Land of Yomi as a kind of Original Sin, but I think this is quite different. Removing pollution and atoning for a sin, such as the murder of Cain by his brother Abel, are of quite a different order. There is an ethical dimension in the latter, which is lacking in the former. Kukai does not really explain why the realization of enlightenment requires sainthood—or his version of it.

The question has some relevance to Morihei Ueshiba, *kotodama* and aikido. One can understand the importance of intense *shugyo* for Ueshiba himself, in supposedly ridding himself of his own delusions. It is the general argument of these columns that Ueshiba fused together the following elements into one structure, which became Ueshiba's **own** aikido: (1) his practice of Shingon Buddhist rituals, involving mantras, *mudras* and images (=visualizations); (2) his generally random training in the martial arts, especially intensive training in Daito-ryu: training that he undertook for reasons of which he seemed generally unaware, other than to excel and become 'perfect' in some way; and (3) his gradual penetration and absorption of the belief system of Omoto, which was easily as complex as that of Shingon. Ueshiba fused all these elements into a vast hybrid cosmological structure, but it was a structure in which he himself played a crucial role.

Like the 'three secrets' training, Ueshiba's own *kotodama* training was in effect a continual, but essentially private, restatement of the world as he himself found it and of his own place within it. This last point is of some importance, for one can then go on to argue, as Kisshomaru Ueshiba and others have done, that what Morihei Ueshiba created and bequeathed to later generations was, actually, not his own experiences of *kotodama*, but the art of aikido: an internally coherent, self-standing structure, a path along which others could go, but one which did not need the continued presence of its creator. However, more importantly, those following the path would not have to undertake a similar arduous process of replicating the same structure, or creating an identical path for themselves, for all the necessary spadework had been done already. 'Sainthood' had already been achieved by Ueshiba himself: all that was necessary for his successors and disciples to do was play their allotted part by practicing the *waza* he had bequeathed. Of course, Kisshomaru also believed that training in aikido *waza* could lead to sainthood, but his paradigm of training was not the monastery (as one might conclude from Yamasaki's treatment of Shingon Buddhism), where all are striving for a perfection quite narrowly defined, but the world outside the monastery walls, where there are far more 'sinners' than 'saints'.

The Seeds Take Root

In his book on the life and writings of Kukai, Yoshito S Hakeda sums up the effects of Shingon Buddhism on Japanese culture in general (and the martial arts in particular). The following account is probably not without controversy, but will suffice as a general outline.

- *The Esoteric Buddhism which Kukai systematized was an artistic religion of rich symbolism and it appealed to Heian Japan. As a result, one area of Kukai's influence on Japanese culture was in the arts. Minutely regulated religious ceremonies; mysterious and exotic liturgies in Sanskrit; a rich iconography; abundant use of sound*

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instruments; the systematic structure of the altar in squares, rectangles and circles; colorful paintings; gorgeous costumes, and elaborate ritual instruments—all these hall marks of Esoteric Buddhism fascinated the Heian intellectuals, stimulating their imagination and refining their aesthetic sensitivity…

- *In relation to the arts, the effect which Kukai's Esoteric Buddhism had on the methods of transmission of traditional culture in medieval Japan should be considered. Individualistic and international Esoteric Buddhism had a personal way of transmitting religious knowledge from master to disciple. Kukai's introduction of this way of transmitting Esoteric Buddhist teachings had a far-reaching effect on Japanese culture, for almost all divisions of learning, art and craftsmanship in medieval Japan came to follow this method. Indeed, some of the traditional arts are still not free of it. This aspect of Kukai's influence may have been reinforced several centuries later by the arrival from Sung China of Zen Buddhism, which had a similar method of transmission.* (Hakeda, *Kukai: Major Works*, pp. 4, 5.)

Hakeda gives an introduction to his translation of Kukai's writings, in which he offers an explanation of how Shingon Buddhism and Shinto blended in such a way as to appeal to an individualistic Japanese (like Morihei Ueshiba). As we know, Morihei Ueshiba combined his practices of Shingon Buddhism with his belief in the syncretistic Omoto religion, which took elements from Shinto, Buddhism and even Christianity.

- *A sense of individual salvation was weak or absent in the Nara period. Generally speaking, Nara Buddhism served the well-being of the state or of communities; or it became an object of academic learning. Confucianism was less a religion than an ethico-political teaching, one which every aspirant to an official post was obliged to study. Taoism represented a way to lead a life of escape, or means to prolong one's life span. Shinto, which involved shamanistic practice, was the binding spiritual force among Japan's clan-centered communities; hence it could hardly encourage the notion of individual salvation.* (Hakeda, op.cit., p. 6.)

According to Hakeda, Kukai's Shingon Buddhism supplies the missing ingredient.

- *Esoteric Buddhism's message of individual salvation allowed the devotee to develop a sense of religious hope and despair, for it encouraged an aspiration towards salvation at the same time that it made plain the remoteness of the goal. This message prompted the Japanese to look within, to develop a sense of individual moral and religious responsibility and to become aware of the weight of personal karma.* (Hakeda, op.cit., p. 6.)

In comparing Shingon and Shinto, Hakeda also notes the similarities between (Shingon) *mantra* and (Shinto) *kotodama*. Such a comparison is not without problems.

- *The thought of original enlightenment appealed to the basically optimistic Shinto mentality of the Japanese. The Esoteric Buddhism of Kukai, though incomparably more complex and sophisticated than Shinto, had many elements compatible with the latter. A few of these were the idea of 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. It was only natural that as time went by Esoteric Buddhism should come into close contact with Shinto.* (Hakeda, op.cit., p. 7.)

The unspoken implication in the above paragraph, which is written in the past tense, is that *kotodama*, or what later became known as *kotodama*, was an important feature of early Shinto and preceded the introduction of Shingon Buddhism. Thus Shingon *mantra* (chants) and *mudra* (gestures) became wedded to something already there—and considered essential, almost certainly as an element of the shamanistic practices conducted by the priests or priestesses in prehistoric Japan. We will return to this point later.

Shingon and Shinto

Hakeda goes on to stress the affinities between Shingon Buddhism and Shinto, his main point being that Kukai's religion was a religion of both mountains and plains. The monastic center was on Mount Koya, which was deep in a remote mountainous forest of gigantic cedars. The other center he established, at Toji in Kyoto, was the base from which he disseminated his religion to the world: the institution devoted to the well-being of the country: *chingo kokka* -- 'pacifying and defending the nation'. Mt Koya was regarded as the locus of divine power and it was this aspect of Esoteric Buddhism that, according to Hakeda, underlay its relationship with Shinto.

- *In ancient Japan, the mountains, where kami resided, were believed to be more sacred than the plains. In the Nara period many quasi-Buddhist ascetics, followers of*

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> *an unsystematized Esoteric Buddhism (*zomitsu*), disciplined themselves in the sacred mountains with the aim of attaining occult power. The government frequently prohibited their activities but without success. Naturally these mountain ascetics were not free from a Shinto mentality and prayed both to their Buddhist guardians and to the kami of their respective mountains for success in their endeavors and for protection from danger. These mountain ascetics made no distinction between the Buddhist guardians and the Shinto kami as objects of prayer. Thus there arose, through practical necessity rather than through any theoretical speculation, a real fusion between Esoteric Shinto and Shinto. This developed into Shugendo, an indigenous, ascetic mountain religion which greatly affected popular spiritual life up to the early Meiji period. Shingon and Tendai Esoteric Buddhism, as a religion of the mountains, had provided Shugendo with its theories and patterns of practice. Moreover, the influence of Esoteric Buddhism on Shinto did not stop at the systematization of Shugendo, but penetrated into the heart of Shinto. It was not Kukai, as is popularly believed, who identified the kami with the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the Shingon mandalas on the theory that the former were incarnations of the latter. (This doctrine, known as* honji suijaku*, held, for example, that the Sun Goddess Amaterasu was the incarnation of Mahavairocana* [*Dainichi Nyorai*]*, the central Buddha of the Shingon pantheon.) Yet I believe that the fusion of Buddhism and Shinto, a feature of Japanese religious life at large, owed much to Kukai's establishment of Esoteric Buddhism as a system of thought, as a way of life and as a religion congenial to the Japanese mental climate.* (Hakeda, op.cit., p. 8.)

Lack of space does not permit a detailed discussion of *honji suijaku* here, but Hakeda rather simplifies the matter. In the introduction to a collection of essays on the topic, Mark Teeuwen and Fabio Rambelli (2003) argue that it is a mistake to see Shinto and Buddhism as two distinct entities existing side by side in pre-modern Japan. This is not so much a problem with the specific flavor of Buddhism that was Shingon, especially as Kukai described it, but more a problem with pre-modern Shinto and, in particular, with the role of *kotodama* in pre-modern Shinto.

Nevertheless, it is easy to see Kukai—"a holy ascetic of magical power who from time to time descended from the sacred mountain into the world to help people"—as a kind of archetype or role model for Morihei Ueshiba. In his biography, Kisshomaru Ueshiba tells us that,

- "*According to my aunt Kiku, O Sensei was so drawn to the miracle stories of Kobo Daishi* (= Kukai) *that his mother thought seriously of placing him in the monastery and making a priest… Master Deguchi's famous concept of Miroku Gesho, or the incarnation of Miroku (Buddha)—the apocalyptic prophecy that Mirokubosatsu will come down to earth from Tosotsuten to save us from suffering many millions of years after his death—echoes a widespread belief in Shingon Mikkyo, where it is also associated with the prophecy that the great teacher Kobo Daishi would return to earth after his death. There are some differences, but the basic concept is similar, and so it is not surprising that O Sensei became a convert to this religion. Perhaps his closeness to Master Deguchi reflected the importance of these childhood memories and influences.*" (*A Life in Aikido*, p. 57.)

General Comments on Kukai

As we begin our journey through the 'ancient sacred mud' that is *kotodama*, we can ask about Kukai's ability as a guide. Like Sméagol / Gollum, piloting Frodo and Sam though the Dead Marshes in Tolkien's *The Two Towers*, Kukai seems very sure of himself as a guide and, like Gollum, appears to have the experience of having 'been there; done that'. Unlike Gollum, however, Kukai had utterly benevolent intentions and was very sure that the trip through the mud would have results that were crucially beneficial. Nevertheless there is a circular quality to reasoning that proceeds from uttering syllables in the prescribed way, to the identity of the syllables with the entire universe, to the need for the 'enlightenment' of the individual as a result of intensive *shugyo*, which is achieved by uttering the syllables in the prescribed way, to the identity of the syllables with the entire universe, and so on. As with God, if one accepts the starting point, everything in the charmed circle follows; if one rejects the starting point, then nothing else seems to follow.

I have spent considerable space discussing Kukai for two reasons. The first is the obvious fact of his influence on Morihei Ueshiba. Kukai gives a painstaking analysis of the origins and nature of syllables that Morihei Ueshiba takes for granted in his own discussions of *kotodama* and its relationship to aikido. Moreover, I hope it will be clear from the discussion that it is very difficult to divorce Kukai's doctrine of voiced syllables from the rest of his complex cosmology and this fact will become relevant when we consider Morihei Ueshiba on *kotodama*.

The second reason is to prepare for the examination of *koto-*

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dama in the *Man'yoshu*. It is very likely that Morihei Ueshiba would have been at least acquainted with this collection of *waka* poems, for it is one of the 'foundation' texts of Japan. The *Man'yoshu* is certainly aware of *kotodama* and the question arises about the extent to which Ueshiba took for granted the supposedly **Japanese** connotations of the concept. Clearly, the concept denotes a relation between words and 'spirit' that is unlikely to have been completely indigenous to Japan, even though the earliest of the poems in the *Man'yoshu* were written long before Shingon Buddhism reached Japan, for Buddhism itself (including some forms of Esoteric Buddhism) actually arrived in Japan long before Kukai.

We have discussed the general relationship between Shingon Buddhism and Shinto, as Hakeda sees it, but before examining the evidence of *kotodama* in the *Man'yoshu*, we need to look a little more closely at early Shinto. The issue here is to what extent there was any incipient awareness of the later content of *kotodama*. This is quite an important question, for the question of Japanese 'uniqueness' has bedeviled discussion on *kotodama*, especially in Japan. The argument goes that since *kotodama* is a unique component of Japanese culture, it must therefore have been present in some form from the very beginning, despite the lack of evidence to support such a view. Consequently, the very general and almost 'universal' hypothesis that, since a belief in the spiritual power of words has existed in every culture, it must have existed in Japan, is thought to lack certain crucial elements, since it does not account for the 'unique' features of the Japanese version of the belief.

3. Early Shinto

In his 1993 essay, entitled, "Early Kami Worship", Eiji Matsumae divides the evolution of Shinto into four periods. These periods roughly parallel another generally accepted division, given, for example, in *The Princeton Companion to Classical Japanese Literature*: prehistoric (up to 539), historic (539-645), Yamato 645-711), and Nara (712-793). We will briefly look at each period, always from the viewpoint of looking for potential or actual signs of *kotodama*. (Note that it would take us too far away from the main focus of this column to examine the very interesting question to what extent Kuroda's argument [that the term *Shinto* was basically a much later concept, which was applied retrospectively] is relevant to Matsumae's essay.)

Period 1. Genesis and Early Forms

Matsumae suggests that the roots of *kami* worship lie in animistic forms of nature worship and cites a text in the *Nihon Shoki*:

- "*In that land there were many* kami *that buzzed like the flies. There were also trees and herbs that could speak.*" This text is of great importance to scholars like Jin'ichi Konishi, who uses it to demonstrate the presence and importance of *kotodama* (see below). In a statement remarkably evocative of Morihei Ueshiba's daily religious practice, he continues,

- "*In some rural areas even today, elderly villagers face the sun each morning, clap their hands together, and hail the appearance of the sun over the peaks of the nearby mountains as 'the coming of the* kami*'.*" (Matsumae, p. 328.)

It is possible that "traces of primitive beliefs still linger", but the traces offer little evidence of what the primitive beliefs actually were.

The Shinto view of the cosmos contains influences from Asia and Oceania. In the Shinto view, the universe is divided into five parts. First come the three 'levels', of *Takamanohara* (High Plain of Heaven), the Earth, and *Yomi no Kuni* (Kingdom of the Dead and evil spirits), each level rules by the appropriate *kami*. These parallel levels are found in many other cultures, including the shamanistic belief-systems of northern Asia, even in the first creation story in the *Book of Genesis.* The last two parts of the Shinto world are *Watatsumi no kuni* (containing various creatures like fish and dragon kings) and *Toyoko no kuni* (a utopia, lying somewhere across the sea, where people never age or die). So, while there are putative belief systems in place, there is no trace of any activities that suggest belief in what was later called *kotodama*.

Matsumae sees hardly any continuity between the beliefs of the prehistoric Jomon and Yayoi periods and those of later periods. Jomon culture was supported by hunting, fishing, gathering, and later by primitive agriculture, probably introduced from outside Japan. Yayoi culture was an agrarian culture, where rice was grown as staple food and bronze and iron implements were used. It is a very safe bet that religious practices reflected the methods people used to survive. Thus suggestions, based on very flimsy evidence abound. Accordingly, the figure of the mother deity *yama no kami* in present-day folk beliefs of northeastern Japan possibly stems from the female *dogu* figurines indicating pregnancy. Similarly, stone rods shaped like the male phallus were probably worshipped. Of course, the fact itself that deities were worshipped can be taken as prima facie evidence that Jomon and Yayoi people believed that such deities had some important influence on their survival—and that therefore they had to be prayed to, with the use of words and rituals. Thus, there were elements of *kotodama* here. However, there are no traces of anything that

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was specifically *kotodama*.

The Chinese chronicle *Wei chih*, compiled in the 3rd century CE, gives a picture of one region of Japan (of unknown location). The *Wei chih* offers evidence of certain elements of Yayoi culture that formed part of what later became Shinto. All three are elements in what was later called *kotodama*, especially by Morihei Ueshiba. First, the kingdom of Yamatai was ruled by a woman named Himiko, who ‘occupied herself with magic and sorcery, bewitching the people' and who was assisted in ruling the country by a younger brother. The general assumption is that Himiko was a shaman: the locus of intercourse between the deities and the people. Secondly, a divination method was used to make political decisions and this is referred to in the *Kojiki* as *futomani*: the application of heat to a deer's scapula and answers to questions deduced by the length and shape of the resulting fissures. Morihei Ueshiba refers to *futomani* (but with his own interpretation of the term) in his discourses. A third element is the *norito*, which we will discuss in more detail below. These ritual prayers were offered to Toyouke, the food *kami* /rice spirit which, Matsumae suggests, hints at primitive agrarian beliefs that came with wet-rice agriculture. Of course, neither shamanism, nor methods of divination, nor veneration of the rice spirit through *norito* ritual prayers are indigenous to Japan,

Period 2. From Primitive Shinto to Clan Shinto
The *kofun* or Burial Mound period (c. 250 -- 600 CE) saw the evolution of shrine Shinto along with the evolving political system. According to Matsumae's summary,

- "*The early Burial Mound period was one in which Shinto took on the basic forms that characterize it today. Nature kami were named and their functions and places of operation were delineated. Clan adopted kami as tutelary deities, sometimes named them as ancestors, and monopolized their worship. The connection between sacred and secular authority was further strengthened, and the stage was set for sanctioning the position of the Yamato nobility through religious means.*" (Matsumae, *op.cit.*, p. 341.)

Apart from archeological evidence, Matsumae cites "mythology", as "another form of evidence that we can use with increasing efficacy." In particular, "the myths recorded in eighth century chronicles and gazetteers supply us with many tales about the adoption of tutelary *kami* by powerful clans." (Matsumae, *op.cit.*, p. 335.) However, some care is necessary here. The chronicles referred to, of course, are the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, which were written in Chinese and which used Chinese concepts. There is thus the problem, also faced by Motoori Norinaga and the nativists, of evaluating the myths as evidence relating to particular clans. It is one thing to relate the myths; it is quite another to assign particular myths to particular religious activities of particular clans and it can be seen from the Japanese editions of the *Kojiki*, for example, and also from Philippi's translation, just how conjectural are the evaluations based on the myths.

One point that is very clear, however, and is stated by Matsumae, is that religious authority was used to sanction temporal power. From the beginning of this period, clans were assuming control over specific territories and they found it necessary also to claim the religious authority attached to the worship of the region's important *kami*. These *kami* were sometimes called *kunitama*—the ‘country' (province) soul or spirits, and protected the region's lands, or guaranteed rain and good harvests. The *kami*, moreover, entered the world of human beings in prescribed ways, always involving rituals—sometimes of purification, and by prescribed routes, especially via the mountains and the sea, and sometimes taking a particular form (the serpent being quite common). Thus the ingredients of a particular type of *kotodama* ([1], [5], and [8]; See above,"*Nine Types of Ambiguity*") are already present: prescribed words used in rituals, which symbolize—and ensure—the presence of the *kami* in a particular place and at a particular time.

Period 3. From Clan Shinto to State Shinto
This period (c. 500 -- 700 CE) marks the gradual encroachment of the Yamato court on the political power and magical-religious authority of powerful provincial clans. This is the period in which the early poems of the *Man'yoshu* were composed. Matsumae notes that the assumption of supreme religious authority by the Yamato court was very gradual and involved the appropriation of local ceremonies, myths, sacred treasures, and *kami*. For this, the chronicles compiled under imperial auspices, like the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, need to be compared with local traditions, myths and shrine ceremonies.

There are a number of common developments or features between the rites and myths of Yamato and those of other provinces, notably Izumo. One common feature is the strengthening of connections between sacred and religious functions by powerful local clans. The religious leaders who monopolized the worship of local *kami* regarded their predecessors as *kami* and themselves as *kami* incarnate. Special rites sanctified and confirmed each new leader. Another common feature are the creation myths associated with local clans. The imperial myth is of the creation of Japan by Izanagi and Izanami. The former is the father of Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess; thus emperors are linked with the vary *kami* who created the land they rule. The

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Yamato rulers apparently took over a local *kami*, worshipped by fishermen of Awaji Island, in the Seto Inland Sea. Awaji was directly ruled by the Imperial court from the 4th century onwards. However, there is a parallel creation myth recorded in the *Izumo Fudoki* (compiled in 733), according to which the creator *kami* travelled overseas and brought various pieces of land back to Izumo, where he attached them to the Izumo coast, with its numerous islands and jagged shoreline. A third common feature is the worship of the sun *kami*, thought to be the supreme *kami*. Amaterasu is directly linked with the present emperor and enshrined at Ise and this link with the supreme kami was regarded by the Yamato rulers as justifying their seizure and maintenance of temporal power. However, worship of the sun as the supreme *kami* was not limited to the Yamato clan and was common throughout Japan.

As for *kotodama*, we shall see in a later section that the poems in the *Man'yoshu* show a distinct bias towards the Yamato court. The poets praise *Yamato-no-kuni* (the country of Yamato) for being the place where *kotodama* (in the sense of [1], [2], and [8], above) has brought good fortune: it is a country where words—with the spirit within the words—are matched by deeds in a very important way.

Period 4. The Maturing of State Shinto

Matsumae regards this period (c. 700 -- 800 CE) as the final stage in the evolution of Shinto, which paralleled the 'sinification' of the Yamato government. The Council of Kami Affairs (*Jingikan*), quite different from anything in Chinese bureaucracy, was established on the same level as the Council of State (*Daijokan*) and controlled Shinto affairs both in the court and locally. The principal occupation in this period was the proper organization of the *kami* by the Yamato court and the compilation of the chronicles that would, according to Matsumae, "use history to its advantage". The *kami* were subdivided into heavenly *kami* and earthly *kami* (probably following political criteria, again according to Matsumae), to create a pantheon headed by the Sun Goddess, with the *kami* of important clans also playing important subsidiary roles. The myths were also arranged in a logical sequence and those thought to be specifically Japanese—rooted in fertility and rice production—were preceded, following Chinese precedents, by seven generations of 'single' and 'hidden' *kami*, following the spontaneous appearance of three similar creator *kami*. The result connected the Yamato line with the creation of the universe.

This fourth period is also important for the importation of Buddhism, which challenged, influenced, embraced, and in so doing revolutionized Shinto. This process has been described above by Hakeda (op.cit., p. 8). Like Hakeda, Matsumae also notes the parallel development of 'aristocratic' Buddhism, which was taken on board by the imperial court in the Nara period (710 -- 794 CE), with the less sophisticated but more complex 'spiritual' needs of the non-aristocrats.

- "*The great temples built under official auspices…served the function of ensuring the welfare of the state. The salvation of individual souls or the rebirth of individuals after death were concerns left largely to the unordained clergy, who practiced magic, divination, and shamanistic methods of healing and were persecuted for their heresy.*" (Matsumae, *op.cit.*, p. 355.)

Matsumae places the beginnings of an 'official' syncretistic system of Buddhism and Shinto at the end of the Nara period.

- "*The* kami *were seen as sentient creatures, one step higher than human beings still possessed by carnal passions and in need of the Buddha's salvation. On the other hand,* kami *were regarded as guardians of the Buddhist law. The development of this syncretism reflects similar efforts in India and China to incorporate native deities into the Buddhist order.*" (Matsumae, *op.cit.*, p. 356.)

He concludes his account of this period with the observation that

- "*Shinto was retained in the Japanese belief structure, even though it never developed the metaphysical worldview or system of ethics that characterize world religions. Perhaps this was because of its close association with Japanese Buddhism, which had enough metaphysics ands ethics to serve both. On the popular level, Shinto still functioned as the guarantor of a plentiful supply of food, whether from field, mountain or sea. Thus Shinto continued to be focused on people's most basic fears—illness, natural disaster, infertility, and harvest failure—and to give them hope that such disasters could be prevented by supernatural intervention.*" (Matsumae, *op.cit.*, p. 358.)

As for *kotodama*, the term does not appear at all in the ancient chronicles and the designation of the supernatural intervention referred to above as *kotodama*, together with the general expansion of the connotations of the term is really *ex post facto* and was made later. In particular, there is no evidence in early Shinto of any awareness of *kotodama* as the Japanese analogue of the Sanskrit 'seed' syllables, explained at such length by Kukai. The sole connection lies in the assumed commonalities

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between the practice of chanting Buddhist sutra, which preceded Kukai, and the chanting of 祝詞（*norito*) prayers to the *uji-gami* (tutelary deities of a clan).

祝詞：Norito

Donald Philippi did a major service to the scholarship of ancient Japan, when he made a critical translation of the *Kojiki*. He supplemented this with a translation of *norito* ritual prayers. The prayers are contained in Volume 8 of the *Engi-shiki*, which is a compilation of laws and customs, put together in 927 CE. An English translation of the first ten volumes was made by Felicia G Bock and this has now been collated with a Japanese text at the University of California at Berkeley: http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/JHTI/Engi%20shiki.html. Philippi's translation contains a preface, by Joseph Kitagawa, in which *koto-dama* is discussed. In his introduction, Philippi makes the following comment:

- "*What are the sentiments expressed in the* Norito*? Some of them, it is true, are petitionary prayers; for instance, the central portion of the Grain-Petitioning Festival* norito *can be summarized: "If you, O Deities of the Grain, vouchsafe an abundant harvest, such-and-such desirable offerings will be presented to you." However, a close examination of the texts reveals that a large number of the older* norito *contain elements more akin to incantation than to prayer. The Japanese scholars love to dwell on the role of* koto-dama, *the mystical power believed to dwell in words, or in words arranged in certain magical formulas. Surely there exist elements of sympathetic magic in, for example, the beautiful passage of the Divine Congratulatory Words of the Kuni-no-miyakuto of Izumo, which begins:*
- *As the white jewels,*
- *May you abide with hoary hairs and in the entire first paragraph of the House Blessing Formula of Princess Woke.*"
(Philippi, *Norito*, p. 3.)

Philippi does not tell us who these Japanese scholars are, nor does he quote this paragraph, but he gives a translation on p. 80:

- "*The ropes of the young* muro *house built up,*
The pillars built up
- *Are the mainstay of the heart of the lord of his house.*
The beams laid in place
- *Are the flourishing of the heart of the lord of this house.*
The rafters laid in place
- *Are the setting in order of the heart of the lord of this house.*
The crosspieces laid in place
- *Are the levelness of the heart of the lord of this house.*
The ropes tied in place
- *Are the firm securing of the life of the lord of this house.*
The grass thatched on the roof
- *Is the abundance of the wealth of the lord of this house.*"

In his commentary, Philippi notes that the first section is a "magical formula imparting blessings on the lord of the house by analogy with various portions of the house." (Philippi, *Norito*, p. 14.) He continues in his introduction:

- "*It is abundantly clear that the ancient Japanese delighted in the pronouncing of 'blessings' designed to ensure longevity and prosperity by referring adroitly to, for instance, the abundance of the grass thatched on the house or the firmness of the ropes tied in place around the beams. It is also quite possible that divine authorship was attributed to these blessing formulas; and that the person pronouncing them, when possessed of the necessary qualifications, assumed the sanctity and blessing-potentiality of the original deity, somewhat like the priest in the Catholic sacrament of the eucharist.*" (Philippi, *Norito*, p. 3.)

Philippi offers this as a "possibility". In his preface, Kitagawa takes up Philippi's point about the Japanese passion for *koto-dama* and quotes a renowned expert of Japanese literature:

- "*Many scholars agree with Donald Philippi…But there is a wide variety of opinions concerning the* koto-dama *itself. I happen to share Konishi's view on the subject. Konishi, citing a* Man'yoshu *poem presented to the Japanese ambassador to the T'ang court, suggests that the* koto-dama *was a 'concept formed from an awakening consciousness of the existence of one's own country [as well as the uniqueness of the Yamato language] in contrast to foreign lands.' He further states:*
- *'The ideal of the* kotodama *may have been further emphasized by a contemporary perception that the heyday of the* kotodama *was long past. In other words, the* kotodama, *which had functioned vigorously in the Archaic Age, at-*

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tenuated in the Ancient Age. But as people directed their consciousness towards foreign matters [during the eighth and ninth centuries], the kotodama *was rediscovered.*'" (Kitagawa, in Philippi, *Norito*, p. xxxvii.)

The problem here is that Kitagawa does not offer any more information about the "wide variety of opinions" and offers no evidence for his support of Konishi. In addition, everything is expressed very tentatively. In particular, Kitagawa accepts Konishi's thesis that the *Man'yoshu* poet believed in the uniqueness of the Yamato language. Elsewhere, he simply refers to *kotodama* as

- "*an ancient Japanese notion, according to which beautiful words, correctly pronounced, were believed to bring about good, whereas ugly words or beautiful words incorrectly pronounced, were believed to cause evil.*" (Kitagawa, *On Understanding Japanese Religion*, p. 68.)

Kitagawa bases this on a definition given in a dictionary, entitled, *Basic Terms of Shinto*, and published in 1958. Konishi's views need to be considered further.

Konishi on *Kotoage*, *Kotowaza*, and *Kotodama*

The first volume of Konishi's massive history of Japanese literature has a lengthy section devoted to *kotodama*. Konishi argues that the term is closely related to *kotoage* and *kotowaza* and offers an elegant theory about the relationship of the three. (NB. The terms are not defined here; the meaning will become clear in the discussion below.)

Konishi offers two texts as evidence of *kotoage*, which he translates himself. The first is from the *Nihon Shoki* chronicles. The deity Okuninushi creates the land of Izumo:

'*Then he uttered this kotoage (spell):*

- *"That the land in the Midst of the Reed Plains [Japan] has long lain desolate. All its creatures, down to the very rocks and plants, are fierce and wild. But once I had overpowered them, not a rebellious one remained.*'" (Konishi, p. 100.)

The immediate context is the decision by Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, to send her grandson, Ninigi, to govern 'the Land in the Midst of the Reed Plains.' The *Kojiki* records the land as 'being in uproar', the uproar being caused by 'many unruly earthly deities' in the land. The *Nihon Shoki* is more explicit:

"*In that land there were many deities who shone like the lights of fireflies and evil deities buzzing like flies. Also there were plants and trees all of which were able to speak.*" (Konishi, p. 101; also quoted in Philippi, *Kojiki*, p. 121.)

A similar account appears in one of the Engishiki *norito*:

"*The Land of the Plentiful Reed Plains and of the Fresh Rice Ears*
During the day seethes as with summer flies,
And during the night is overrun with gods who shine as sparks of fire.
The very rocks, the stumps of trees,
The bubbles of water all speak, and it is truly an unruly land."
(Quoted in Philipi, *Norito*, p. 73.)

Konishi's point here is that Okuninushi quelled the disorder by means of speech—by *kotoage*. He explains that:

- "*The purpose of kotoage is to make [the very rocks and plants] cease their violence. The god's use of the pluperfect ('Once I had overpowered them') emphasizes that this will indeed happen and is believed to be a means of coercing the rocks and vegetation. Such kotoage possessed authority because the rocks, trees, and other plants understood language.*" (Konishi, p. 100-101.)

Since the rocks and vegetation were complaining, Konishi concludes that this behavior is violent, but could be quelled also by means of language. There are two problems here, however. One is that the term *kotoage* is not found in the *kanbun* text of the *Nihon Shoki* and Konishi has to give the term a more specific meaning than merely 'speaking' or 'uttering'. The second problem is that the example does not show at all that *kotoage* was something particularly or uniquely Japanese. Talking trees that could be quelled by wizards uttering spells is the stuff of folklore and is used to good effect by Tolkien, who took all his examples from the myths of northern Europe.

The second text cited by Konishi is from the *Kojiki*. The deity Izanagi is doing *misogi*, washing away the defilement of death:

'*Then he uttered the kotoage:*

- *"Upstream the current flows too fast, downstream the current flows too slow," and he purified himself in midstream.*'" (Konishi, p. 101.)

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Konishi here argues that Izanagi utters this *kotoage* to inform the river that purification is efficacious only in midstream. The river, apparently, hears this and "manifests its power in accordance with the *kotoage*, with the result that Izanagi is able to cleanse himself of his death defilement." Again, the term is not actually used in the *kanbun* text of the *Kojiki* and the question remains how much this is an issue. In addition, the texts cited are thought by Konishi to be examples of *kotoage* because they were not pronounced in the manner of ordinary speech. However, this is probably true of all the chronicles and the Man'yoshu. It seems to me that Konishi is basing his argument on a prior theory about *kotoage* and seeing in the texts what fits this theory.

Another way of putting Konishi's assumption about *kotoage* is that if anyone, during the course of ordinary conversation, happened to speak in a similar way to that supposedly used in *kotoage*, there might be unexpected results. This phenomenon is exemplified by *kotowaza* (諺), which are proverbs, or, literally, word charms. The sung equivalents are *wazauta* (業歌): spell songs. (The Chinese characters for *kotowaza*, then, would presumably be 言業, but this is not used in modern Japanese.) Konishi explains the connection with *kotodama*.

- "*The* waza *of* wazauta *is synonymous with the* waza *of* kotowaza, *and if* kotowaza *is literally a word spell, then* wazauta *is a spell song. … They become omens of certain events because the* kotodama *within these poems is worked to cause the events, an activation signified by the word* 'waza'. *The* 'waza' *of* 'kotowaza' *is considered a related term in that it signifies a magical action that will cause a future event. In sum, considerable care had to be exercised in dealing with these* waza, *because the* kotodama *they controlled was known to work for evil as well as good fortune.*" (Konishi, p. 107.)

(I have given Konishi's explanation at some length because the Chinese character used by Morihei Ueshiba for *waza* in aikido is 業 (the same 業 as in *wazauta*: 業歌), as well as 技. Whether Konishi is correct or not, it is quite likely that Ueshiba saw his budo *waza* in a similar way: also as controlling the power of *kotodama*. We will discuss this in the next column.)

Thus, according to Konishi, the reason for the caution in uttering *kotoage*, or *kotowaza*, is found in *kotodama*:

- "*If its formidable power were directed towards the creation of an inauspicious event, it might result in the unleashing of a wholly unanticipated evil through the world. Moreover, if the kotodama was overworked at its task of bringing about felicitous events, its power ran the risk of debilitation. Whether invoked for good fortune or calamity, the kotodama was not to be unleashed frivolously.*" (Konishi, p. 104.)

Konishi bases his argument on evidence supposedly provided by the *Man'yoshu* and the two contemporary chronicles, *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*. Though Konishi believes that the poems in these works are thought to be actual examples of *kotodama*, the term is not to be found in these chronicles or the *norito* texts themselves. The term is, however, found in the *Man'yoshu* and it seems more related to the beneficial results achieved from the successful chanting of the *norito* prayers. Thus the *norito* ritual prayers provide an important link to the notions of *kotodama* expressed in the poems.

4. A Nation of Good Fortune:
Kotodama* in the *Man'yoshu

Kukai's biographers relate him to the Otomo clan, one of whose members, the poet Otomo Yakamochi, is reputed to have been the final editor of the collection of poems known as the *Man'yoshu*. The collection was put together from a variety of sources in the late Nara period (712-793) or early Heian period (794-1186). The authors of the *Princeton Companion to Japanese Classical Literature* assign the bulk of the collection to the period between 600 and 759. To place the *Man'yoshu* in the general context of early Japanese literature, the date given for the completion of the *Kojiki* is 712 and for the *Nihon Shoki* a little later, 720. Like the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, this collection of poems has received extensive commentary in Japanese, from the time of the Tokugawa nativists onwards. Unlike the writings of Kukai, the Japanese text of the *Man'yoshu* is freely available and in several scholarly editions, but an English translation of the *Man'yoshu* is not currently in print.

Preliminaries

In respect of *kotodama*, the *Man'yoshu* is a crucial text. It was cited by the nativists and also, as we shall see, by others as diverse as the ultranationalist military authorities (in the wartime *Kokutai-no-hongi*) and Kisshomaru Ueshiba. Most commentaries on the *Man'yoshu* simply make the general statement that *kotodama* is 言葉に宿る霊力: spiritual power residing in words. In his book on the *Man'yoshu*, Kazuomi Tada gives a very clear definition:

- "言霊とは、古代社会で広く信じられていた言語に

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潜む霊的な力をいう。あることば発すると、そのことばどおりのことが実現するという言と事と一体視する観念で(す)。〃(Tada, 1999, p. 163.)

Supplying the Japanese phrases where relevant, we can roughly translate this as:

- "*Kotodama* is a term that denotes the spiritual power (霊的な力) that was widely believed in ancient society to lie hidden (潜む) in language (言語). If a word was spoken (あることば発すると), it had to be true (実現する): the idea was that there was a complete matching (一体視する) between the word spoken and the corresponding state of affairs (そのことばどおりのこと).〃

This definition is interesting because Tada appears to be thinking in terms of *kotodama* in the senses of (1), (8) and (9), above ("*Nine Types of Ambiguity*"). He does not tie *kotodama* exclusively to the Japanese language and notes that it is a belief held in ancient society. Japanese does not generally distinguish between singular and plural, and there is no context here restricting the society to one society. Of course, in two of the examples that follow, *kotodama* is tied to the country of Japan, but this does not appear to be an exclusive attribute of *kotodama*. The attribute of exclusivity, which is found at its most strident in the wartime *Kokutai no Hongi* text, is a gradual accretion of later interpretations.

The second point in Tada's definition is the close association between 言（*koto*: word) and 事（*koto*: state of affairs). In fact, in the *genbun* text in the examples below, the term *kotodama* is sometimes written as 「言霊」 and sometimes as 「事霊」. It is not immediately clear from the poems themselves whether *kotodama* was already closely tied to actions (事) linguistically, even at this time, and therefore had two readings, each with its correct semantic components, or whether *koto* (事) or (言) were being used purely for the phonetic value.

The matter of Chinese characters was pointed to by Kunio Toyoda in his book, 『日本人の言霊思想』（*Nihonjin no Kotodama-shiso*: *Kotodama-thinking of the Japanese*). On p. 38 of his book Toyoda gives a chart, which breaks down the 282 occasions in the *Man'yoshu* poems where 事, 言, and some other characters are used interchangeably to mean a word or words, or a thing, fact or state of affairs. In the largest number of cases (129), *koto* (事) and / or (言) is used to mean words. In a smaller number of cases (69), *koto* (事) is used in its present meaning, to refer to things, facts or states of affairs, and in one case only, *koto* (言) is used to mean this. One can conclude from Toyoda's chart that at this time there was indeed much overlap between 事 and言 and this accounts for the belief that *kotodama* is closely tied to actions. Spiritual power resides in words because such words are always completely tied to the appropriate actions or states of affairs.

Three Texts

There are three references to *kotodama* in the *Man'yoshu* (Poems 894, 2506, and 3254) and these poems need to be examined very carefully. In the belief that *AikiWeb* readers who are studying Japanese need to experience real *kanbun* texts, which give the flavor of what Morihei Ueshiba himself took for granted, I have given the 'raw' *kanbun* text of the three poems, published on-line by the *Japanese Text Initiative* of the University of Virginia Library. However, in the interests of transparency (and to allow interested *AikiWeb* readers to test their own reading and translation skills), I have added a few more items.

(1) First there appears the *genbun* text (which will give *AikiWeb* students of Japanese an idea of what a *man'yogana* text actually looks like: modern *kanji* dictionaries will be of little use here).

(2) This is followed by the *kundoku* text (which looks more like modern Japanese).

(3) Then follows the transcription in *hiragana*, with commas marking the (generally) 5-syllable and 7-syllable *waka* syllable groups. In the first poem, the statements about *kotodama* are given in bold type.

(4) The *hiragana* transcription of (3) in Roman script.

(5) A modern Japanese rendering (summarized from the scholarly editions, such as the Iwanami 新日本古典文学大系or the Shogakukan日本古典文学全集).

(6) Since making an English translation of the *genbun* text is difficult, a translation is given of the modern Japanese rendering in (5).

(7) A brief commentary, which also summarizes the Japanese scholarly opinion on the poems, given in the editions mentioned in (5) above. The commentary also takes account of opinions of two other contemporary scholars: Kunio Toyoda (1980) and Kazuomi Tada (1999).

Book 5; Poem 894

(1) [原文]**神代欲理云傳久良久虚見通倭國者皇神能伊都久志吉國言霊能佐吉播布國等加多利継伊比都賀比計理 今世能人母許等期等目前尓見在知在** 人佐播尓 満弖播阿礼

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等母 高光 日御朝庭 神奈我良 愛能盛尓 天下 奏多麻比志 家子等 撰多麻比天 勅旨［反云 大命］<戴>持弖 唐能遠境尓 都加播佐礼 麻加利伊麻勢 宇奈原能 邊尓母奥尓母 神豆麻利 宇志播吉伊麻須 諸能 大御神等 船舶尓［反云 布奈能閇尓］道引麻<遠志> 天地能 大御神等 倭大國霊 久堅能 阿麻能見虚喩 阿麻賀氣利 見渡多麻比事畢 還日者 又更 大御神等 船舶尓 御手<打>掛弖 墨縄遠 播倍多留期等久 阿<遅>可遠志 智可能岫欲利 大伴御津濱備尓 多太泊尓 美船播将泊 都々美無久 **佐伎久伊麻志弖速歸坐勢**

(2) [訓読]**神代より言ひ伝て来らくそらみつ大和の国は皇神の厳しき国言霊の幸はふ国と語り継ぎ言ひ継がひけり 今の世の人もことごと目の前に見たり知りたり** 人さはに 満ちてはあれども 高照らす 日の朝廷 神ながら 愛での盛りに 天の下 奏したまひし 家の子と 選ひたまひて 大御言［反云 大みこと］戴き持ちて もろこしの遠き境に 遣はされ 罷りいませ 海原の 辺にも沖にも 神づまり 領きいます もろもろの 大御神たち 船舶に［反云 ふなのへに］導きまをし 天地の 大御神たち 大和の 大国御魂 The ひさかたの 天のみ空ゆ 天翔り 見わたしたまひ 事終り 帰らむ日には またさらに 大御神たち 船舶に 御手うち掛けて 墨縄を 延へたるごとく あぢかをし 値嘉の崎より 大伴の 御津の浜びに 直泊てに御船は泊てむ 障みなく **幸くいまして早帰りませ**

(3) [仮名], **かむよより, いひつてくらく, そらみつ, やまとのくには, すめかみの, いつくしきくに, ことだまの, さきはふくにと, かたりつぎ, いひつがひけり, いまのよの, ひともことごと, めのまへに, みたりしりたり**, ひとさはに, みちてはあれども, たかてらす, ひのみかど, かむながら, めでのさかりに, あめのした, まをしたまひし, いへのこと, えらひたまひて, おほみ こと, [おほみこと], いただきもちて, からくにの, とほきさかひに, つかはされ, まかりいませ, うなはらの, へにもおきにも, かむづまり, うしはきいま す, もろもろの, おほみかみたち, ふなのへに, [ふなのへに], みちびきまをし, あめつちの, おほみかみたち, やまとの, おほくにみたま, ひさかたの, あ まのみそらゆ, あまがけり, みわたしたまひ, ことをはり, かへらむひには, またさらに, おほみかみたち, ふなのへに, みて うちかけて, すみなはを, はへたるごとく, あぢかをし, ちかのさきより, おほとものの, みつのはまびに, ただはてに, みふねははてむ, つつみなく, **さきくいまして, はやかへりませ**

(4) 'Ka-mu-yo-yo-ri, i-hi-tsu-te-ku-ra-ku, so-ra-mi-tsu, ya-ma-to-no-ku-ni-wa, su-me-ka-ni-no, i-tsu-ku-shi-ki-ku-ni, ko-to-da-ma-no, sa-ki-wa-fu-ku-ni-to, ka-ta-ri-tsu-gi, i-hi-tsu-ga-hi-ke-ri, i-ma-no-yo-no, hi-to-mo-ko-to-go-to, me-no-ma-e-ni, mi-ta-ri-sh-ri-ta-ri '

(5-1)「神代以来　言い伝えられたことですが、（そらみつ）大和の国は　国つ神の威徳の　いかめし国　言霊の助ける国だと　語り継ぎ　言い継いできました　そのことは現代の　人もことごとく　目のあたりに　見ており知っています。」
(5-2)「神代から語り伝えてきたことには、（そらみつ）日本の国は、皇神の厳として厳めしい国、言葉の霊力の豊かな国であると、語り継ぎ、言い継いできた。今の世の人も皆、まのあたりに見たり聞いたりして、承知している ことだ。」

(6-1) **'The nation that prospers in *Kotodama* has been passing down the sacred power of the words from the very beginning.'**
The translation above is that given in Kisshomaru Ueshiba's biography of O Sensei. A more literal translation of (5-2) would be:
(6-2) **'What has been handed down is, "It is orally transmitted that right from the age of the gods this country of Japan (*soramitsu* = which looks good from the sky: on which the gods look with favor) is a country of great dignity with dignified emperors, and of good fortune with the spiritual power of words". This is something that everyone today, seeing with their own eyes and hearing such, also understands.'**

(7-1) This poem was written by Yamanoue Okura in the early 700s and is the first mention of *kotodama* as a 'divine power in words', which 'bestows good fortune' on a country. Yamanoue is thought to have been of recent Korean stock. The poem is addressed to an embassy official who is returning home.

(7-2) For those who can read Japanese, the commentary in the new Iwanami edition is worth quoting at length.

- 題 詞の「好去好来」は目録注参照。長歌の末で、「好去」は「幸くいまして」、「好来」は「はや帰りませ」と言い換えられている。言葉の霊力がめでたく発現し て、「好去好来」「幸くいましてはや帰りませ」という祈り の言葉が、言葉通りの幸い

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をもたらすだろうと述べて、全歌の序論とする。

Briefly, the poem has an introductory title,「好去好来」(*kara-kyo-kara-raika*: 'Have a good trip home'). The two parts of the title are other ways of expressing the valedictions that occur at the end of the poem. These are 「幸くいまして」(*Sakikuimashite*: '[May you] have good fortune') and 「はや帰りませ」(*Haya-kaerimase*: '[May you] return home early'). Given the time the poem was written, a trip by boat to China and back was no small matter, as can be gathered from Kukai's recollections of the same journey a century later. The spiritual power in words gives an auspicious effect to the utterance, and so the prayer, 'Have a good trip home', '[May you] have good fortune', '[May you] arrive home early', will be answered in fact: the envoy really will have a safe journey home because of the spiritual power in the words that have been uttered (in the prayer / poem). Hence the introductory title to the whole poem. The commentary then cites another poem, 3254 (text below), as having the same meaning.

(7-3) The really striking feature of this poem is the use of the term *kotodama* to refer to a power in words that confers a desired attribute on an entire country. Clearly, the *Man'yoshu* poets were sure enough of this power and its provenance to use the phrase in their courtly greetings to the Japanese who were part of the embassies to T'ang China.

(7-4) Can one derive from this poem Konishi's thesis that there was an "awakening consciousness" of the "uniqueness of the Yamato language"? Readers must judge for themselves, but my own belief is that one cannot.

Book 11; Poem 2506
This poem is rather more explicit about the supposed power of *kotodama*, its source, and how it is exercised. However, the 31-syllable *tanka* needs considerable interpretation.

(1) [原文]**事霊** 八十衢 夕占問 占正謂 妹相依

(2) [訓読]**言霊**の八十の街に夕占問ふ占まさに告る妹は相寄らむ

(3) [仮名], **ことだま**の, やそのちまたに, ゆふけとふ, うらまさにのる, いもはあひよらむ

(4) 'Ko-to-da-ma-no, ya-so-no-chi-ma-ta-ni, yu-fu-ke-to-fu, u-ra-ma-sa-ni-no-ru,i-mo-wa-a-hi-ra-mu'

(5-1) 言霊の振り立つ、八十の道辻で、夕占を問うた。すると、占いにはっきりと出た。「お前の思う妹はお前にきっと靡き寄るだろう」と。
(5-2) 言霊の　八十の巷で　夕占をしたところ　はっきり占に出た　あの妹はなびき寄るだろうと
(5-3) 言霊のはたらく八十の巷で夕占をした。占は正しく出た、妹は私に寄るだろうと

(6-1) **The working of *kotodama* happened in the evening at a busy intersection. When I sought my fortune, the answer came very clearly and accurately: "The girl you are thinking (= passionate) about will change her mind and accept you."**
(6-2) **'The *kotodama* was aroused in the evening at a crossroads. Asking my fortune, I learned it clearly: "The woman you care for will surely come to adore you."**

(7-1) The poem was written by 柿本人麻呂（Kakinomoto Hitomaro), who was court poet to three emperors: Temmu (reigned 673-686); Jito (690-697); Mommu (697-707).

(7-2) 八十衢：All the commentaries explain this term in a similar way. Yaso-ba (八十場）is a common place name in Japan and Yaso-chimata (衢：道−[*mi*]*chi*: road; 股−*mata*: the crotch) was a busy intersection where several roads met and where travellers were constantly passing to and fro. (There are other references, in Poems 125, 295, and 3101.)

(7-3) 夕占問：古代人は辻占を聞くためにしばしば夕方ここを訪れた。The ancients often frequented such places (intersections branching into may different roads), to seek omens or have their fortunes told. As in Europe, they did this at night (witching hour).

Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on.
[*Hamlet*, Act III, Sc. ii]

(7-4) 妹相依：It should be clear that his is poem basically a love poem. The poet is celebrating the fact that his beloved is showing interest in him.

(7-5) Earlier, I quoted the definition of *kotodama* given by Kazuomi Tada. Tada continues his treatment of *kotodama* with

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a detailed discussion of this poem. What follows is a rough summary, and further discussion.

- 「夕 占」は夕暮れの衢 / 巷に出て、行き交う人のことばを聞いて吉凶を占うこと。風の音と雲の動きに霊威（優られた威光）の発動をみた古代では、チマタに行き交う人々の、ざわめきにも似たことばにも霊威を察知した。この言霊が発現し、霊威に満ちた空間が「言霊の八十の衢」で ある。この場で聞き取った謎めいた異界のことばを夕占によっ て解読した結果、「妹は相依らむ」（思う人は靡き寄る）とのお告げ（神意）を得た。そこでうたい手は、この霊威に満ちたことばどおりに事が実現するものと 期待を抱き、胸をときめかせている。（Tada , 1999, p. 163.)

In the evening the poet went to a busy intersection, where people frequently pass to and fro. Coincidentally hearing the talk of these people, he also heard his fortune. The sound of the wind and the movement of the clouds were believed in ancient times to be the focus of the exercise of superior spiritual power. The place where this exercise of *kotodama* occurred was termed, the '*Kotodama no Yaso no Chimata*': ('The Yaso Intersection of *Kotodama*': 'The Meeting Place for *Kotodama*'). At this place, mysterious words from the other world were heard like a riddle and deciphered as telling the poet's fortune: the result was that he believed he received a divine revelation. The device of the poem is to proclaim the breath-taking expectation (that is, causing the heart to palpitate) that the words heard will turn out to be true.

- 夕 暮れは神の世界と人の世界とが交替する時であり、チマタは異界と此界が接する場所でもある。この時と場（夕暮れのチマタ）は、神意を問うのにもっともふさ わしい霊威に満ちた時空であった。この例からもわかるよう に、言霊の威力は日常言語では作用せず、呪術や祭式に由来する非日常言語に限って発揮された。さらに、言霊の発現には特定の時と場に加えて、特定の発声も 必要とされた。神前で唱える祝詞をはじめとして、人に幸を招 き寄せるホカヒ（寿ひ）や、人に禍をもたらすトコヒ（呪ひ）なども言霊の威力によるもので、時と場、得有の発声をともなうものであった。この非日常言語に 共通するのは韻律的・律動的であることが、これらの要素を兼 ね備えた歌もまた同様にみなせる。（Tada, 1999, pp. 163-164.)

The night hours (twilight) are the time when the world of the *kami* is substituted for the world of humans and *chimata* is the place where the other world and this world meet. So this time and place was exactly the time and place—where the divine power would be at its fullest—for one seeking the will of the *kami*. As we can understand from this example, the power of the *kami* was not something to function in mundane daily language, but would be manifested only in special language: language originally used in magical incantations or rites. In addition, besides the prescribed occasion and place, thought necessary for the divine revelations of *kotodama*, prescribed ways of utterance were also necessary. Examples of such prescribed ways of utterance were *Norito* prayers chanted in front of the deity, or congratulations expressing or inviting happiness or good fortune on someone, or magical spells wishing evil fortune on someone: all derived from the spiritual power of *kotodama* and so they had to be performed at an appropriate time, in an appropriate place and with appropriate forms of utterance. Shared with this special form of utterance were also rhythm and rhythmic movement, as exhibited in the poems (like those in the *Man'yoshu* and *Kojiki*) that combined all the above ingredients.

(7-6) One issue here is whether Tada is justified in finding all this in the above poem. We have mentioned *norito* prayers several times in the sections above and these are taken as prime examples of *kotodama*. One implication, frequently made, is that the words of the *norito* have to be uttered with great care:

- "*Particularly when expressed in certain forms, such as* norito *(ritual prayers) or* waka *poetry, it was believed that the words of the Japanese language could exert a special influence on people, the gods, and even the course of the world. Extreme care thus needed to be taken with the words to utilize their power properly, for good or ill.*" (*Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, 1993, Kodansha, p. 834.)

Even though the entire corpus of poems making up the *Man'yoshu* could be taken as evidence of the supreme importance of choosing words with extreme care, because they can "exert a special influence on people, the gods, and even the course of the world", the preoccupation itself with care over appropriate form of utterance (because words have this power) is not specifically mentioned in the *Man'yoshu* poems. Thus it can be argued that Tada is reading back into the poems a subtle interpretation of 'evidence' that was based on more general statements, such as those made by Kitagawa and Jun'ichi Kon-

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ishi, above, about what *kotodama* must be like, or must involve: it is assumed that *kotodama* must involve care in the choice of words and it is clear from *norito* that the language had a 'magical' quality and was prescribed. However, what Poem 894 specifically records is merely the transmission from ancient times that Yamato has enjoyed good fortune [from ancient times] due to the spiritual power of words. The rest is assumed to be 'implicit'.

Book 13; Poem 3254
(1) [原文]志貴嶋 倭國者 **事霊**之 所佐國叙 真福在与具

(2) [訓読]磯城島の大和の国は**言霊**の助くる国ぞま幸くありこそ

(3) [仮名], しきしまの, やまとのくには, **ことだま**の, たすくるくにぞ, まさきくありこそ

(4) 'Shi-ki-shi-ma-no, ya-ma-to-no-ku-ni-wa, ko-to-da-ma-no, ta-su-ku-ru-ku-ni-zo,
ma-sa-ki-ku-a-ri-ko-so'

(5) 我が磯城島の大和の国は、言霊が幸いをもたらしてくれる国なのです。どうかと無事で。

(6) **My country, Shikishima, the country of Yamato, is a country to which *kotodama* has imparted prosperity / good fortune. So I hope/pray that it comes to no harm.** (That is, to the extent to which the poem itself is an efficacious *kotodama*: ま幸くありこそ.)

(7-1) This poem, also written by 柿本人麻呂 (Kakinomoto Hitomaro), needs to be considered together with the previous poem (3253), to which it is a response. This and some other poems mention *kotoage* (言挙 speaking, utterance, disputation; in **bold** type in the text).

[Essential Digression: Book 13; Poem 3253
(1) [原文]葦原 水穂國者 神在随 **事擧**不為國 雖然 **辞擧**叙吾為 言幸 真福座跡 恙無 福座者 荒礒浪 有毛見登 百重波 千重浪尓敷 **言上**為吾〈[**言上**為吾]〉

(2) [訓読]葦原の 瑞穂の国は 神ながら **言挙げ**せぬ国しかれども **言挙げ**ぞ我がする 言幸く ま幸くませと 障みなく 幸くいまさば 荒礒波 ありても見むと 百重波 千重波しきに **言挙げ**す我れは〈[**言挙げ**す我れは]〉

(3) [仮名], あしはらの, みづほのくには, かむながら, ことあげせぬくに, しかれども, ことあげぞわがする, ことさきく, まさきくませと, つつみなく, さき くいまさば, ありそなみ, ありてもみむと, ももへなみ, ちへなみしきに, ことあげすわれは［ことあげすわれは］

(4) A-shi-ha-ra-no, mi-tzu-ho-no-ku-ni-wa, ka-mu-na-ga-ra, **ko-to-a-ge**-se-nu-ku-ni,
shi-ka-re-do-mo, **ko-to-a-ge**-zo-wa-ga-su-ru, ko-to-sa-ki-ku, ma-sa-ki-ma-se-to, tsu-tsu-mi-a-ku, sa-ki-ku-i-ma-sa-ba, a-ri-te-mo-mi-mu-to, mo-mo-e-na-mi, chi-e-na-mi-shi-ki-ni, **ko-to-a-ge**-su-wa-re-wa, **ko-to-a-ge**-su-wa-re-wa

(5) この葦原の瑞穂の国は、天つ神の御心のままに、言挙げなどしない国です。しかし、言挙げを私はする。何事も順調に、お元気ご無事でいらっしゃいと、つつがなくご無事であられたら、(荒礒波) 年月を経ても後にお目に 掛かりましょうと、百重波、千重波のように頻りに言挙げをします、私は。言挙げをします、私は。

(6) **This country, with its nodding ears of rice in the midst of the Reed Plains, is a country where the will of the heavenly deities is evident, and does not utter *kotoage*. However, I (will) utter *kotoage*. "May you be secure, may you have good fortune," and "If you meet with no hindrance, if you are blessed with good fortune, then I pray that I may see you." Waves strike the reefs, they spread themselves a hundredfold, a thousandfold, upon the shore: just so I shall utter *kotoage*; I shall utter *kotoage*.**

(7) This poem is also written by Kakinomoto Hidemaro and stresses the poet's attachment to *kotoage*. As we discussed above, there is an issue here concerning the meaning of the term *kotoage*. The term is usually translated as 'discussion or disputation' and this is the meaning understood in the part of this poem that is quoted in the ultranationalist *Kokutai no Hongi* text (to be discussed in the next column). However, in a quotation below, Kitagawa gives it a more positive and serious meaning: the act of the sovereign invoking the power and authority of the *koto-dama*. Kitagawa speculates that

- "*the ruling* uji *of Yamato was always served by the Otomo and the Okume, who were, among other things, experts in negotiating with the spirits residing in words (*koto-dama*) and songs. It was they who helped the sovereigns invoke the power and authority of the* koto-dama*; such an act was called* koto-age. *The ruling* uji *of Yamato also kept a*

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number of court poets." Kakinomoto was one such poet." Kitagawa, in Philippi, *Norito*, p. xxxiv-xxxv.)

Nevertheless, it has to be accepted that the poet believes he is an exception to a general rule (no *kotoage* in Yamato Japan), which suggests that *kotoage* was not a common activity.
End of Essential Digression]

(7-2) we can add to Kitagawa's comment the fact that the poets were called語り部（*kataribe*: court reciters), and their main task was "to craft iconic images which 'prove' the divinity of [the sovereign]."

(7-3) Poem 3254 responds to the previous poem, 3253, by implying that it is *kotodama* that renders *kotoage*, the verbal counterpart of *kotodama* in 3253, unnecessary. As with Poem 894, the point of the reference to *kotodama* here is to stress the good fortune that it affords the country of Yamato. According to Konishi, however, it is kotoage that actually activates kotodama, understood as the power residing in words. It is because of kotodama that kotoage is not usually practiced, since doing it wrongly can bring about dire results.

General Reflections on *Kotodama* in the *Man'yoshu*
Let us briefly sum up the attributes of *kotodama* found in the *Man'yoshu*.

(1) The first and third of the quoted poems appear to have one common theme: Japan is a nation that 'prospers' or 'enjoys good fortune' because of *kotodama*. Thus from one viewpoint, Poems 894 and 3254 seem to be fairly unadulterated 'Yamato propaganda'. The poets both proclaim that the country of Yamato is in this enviable situation because of the power of *kotodama*. This is the '*omote*' or '*tatemae*' version. The '*ura*' or '*honne*' version, which would be less likely to be expressed in such a collection of poems, is that the Yamato rulers had had the good fortune to overcome all opposition to establishing their power—and establishing a country where *kotodama* was generally considered to have such prestige and influence, and therefore Japan was a country to do business with: on equal terms with China, especially.

(2) The two poems employed the formal, courteous language appropriate for *kentoshi* envoys to T'ang China and both Kazuomi Tada and the Japanese scholarly commentaries take this as evidence that there was a conscious awareness in the 8th century of *kotodama* as a descriptive concept, that could be used within the general context of relations with a powerful foreign country like China. Thus one important attribute of *kotodama* is [spiritual] power, which is sufficiently strong to convey status. However, there is no overt implication that this spiritual power was unique to the country of Yamato.

(3) Konishi argues that the earlier poets of the *Man'yoshu* made some effort to use the Yamato language, since therein lay the workings of kotodama. Konishi draws this conclusion from Poems 894 and 3254. His point is thus stronger than that made in (1) and (2), above. The Archaic Age was the 'golden' age of *kotodama*, as he believes Poem 894 suggests, but with the sinification of Japan, this power gradually waned.

(4) In view of (1) and (2), above, the question arises whether *kotodama* had a restricted use in the *Man'yoshu* poems, in the sense that the activities designed to elicit the power of *kotodama* were restricted. Poems 894 and 3254 both state that Yamato is a country of good fortune from [the strong power of] *kotodama* and Poem 894 adds that everyone is aware of this ancient tradition. Earlier I quoted from Hakeda, to the effect that

- *Shinto, which involved shamanistic practice, was the binding spiritual force among Japan's clan-centered communities; hence it could hardly encourage the notion of individual salvation.*

The question thus arises whether *kotodama* and its supposed working was strictly regarded as the exclusive preserve of clan leaders and emperors, who were the established clan channels for the power of the divine world, and would not be something available to the average Yamato person, aristocrat though he may be. However, even though the author of Poem 2506 was a court poet, the evidence of Poem 2506 would seem to rule out such a restricted use.

(5) Poem 2506 presents a picture of the supposed working of *kotodama*. The poet went to the crossroads to enquire about a personal problem and was happily convinced with the answer he received. It was a very personal encounter. It is clearly understood that words have spiritual power, and one might derive the implication (not spelled out in the poem) that this power operates only at certain times and in certain places. There is nothing here about spiritual power conferring status (though the poet himself probably had some status). The important point emphasized in Poem 2506 is that the spiritual power is linked to what will actually happen: *kotodama* words have power because what the words state turns out to be true.

5. General Conclusions to Part I
It will suffice here to relate *kotodama* to Shingon seed sylla-

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bles. I have presented the available evidence in great detail, so that readers can judge for themselves whether there is a connection and, if so, how strong it is. In my opinion, this connection is nowhere evident in the *Man'yoshu*. Of course, the *Man'yoshu* does present the belief that words have a strong spiritual power and that this power has had very beneficial consequences for the country of Yamato, but there is nothing in the *Man'yoshu* resembling the complex cosmology / theogony / theology that we find in Kukai's doctrine of seed syllables, or we will later find in Onisaburo Deguchi's *Reikai Monogatari*. The *Man'yoshu* is also silent on the question whether *kotodama* arose independently of Japan's relations with other regions of Asia. Of course, like the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, the *Man'yoshu* is a 'propaganda' text, designed to show the virtues of the country of Yamato and was used by Konishi to suggest a belief that the Japanese language was unique. In my opinion, it does not suggest this. The additional question, of whether kotodama was or is uniquely Japanese, of course, is one that will occur again and again, with the nativists, Onisaburo Deguchi, and also Morihei Ueshiba.

Reading

George A Kennedy's book on comparative rhetoric is a pioneering work: *Comparative Rhetoric: An Historical and Cross-Cultural Introduction*, 1998, Oxford U P.

John Stevens has produced an interesting book on Sanskrit seed syllables, together with explanations on how to write them (John Stevens, *Sacred Calligraphy of the East*, 1995, Shambala). Yoshito S Hakeda has published a selection of Kukai's works in English (*Kukai: Major Works. Translated, with an Account of his Life and a Study of his Thought*, by Yoshito S Hakeda, 1972, Colombia U P). Also published by the same press is a detailed discussion of the role of words and syllables in Kukai's thinking by Ryuichi Abe (Ruichi Abe, *The Weaving of Mantra: Kukai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse*, 1999, Columbia U P). Abe's approach is highly revisionist and needs to be seen in the more general context of research on Japanese Buddhism and Japanese religion in general. Here the research of Toshio Kuroda is of great importance. The scholarly work of Abe, Kuroda and Hakeda can be appreciated best when placed in a general context. This general context can be understood well from his introduction to Shingon Buddhism: Taiko Yamasaki, *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism*, 1988, Shambala. I have also read with much profit a collection of essays on Tantric Buddhism: Richard K Payne, Ed, *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia*, 2006, Wisdom Publications. A recent introduction to Buddhism (which, actually assumes quite a deep knowledge) is: Bernard Faure, *Unmasking Buddhism*, 2009, Wiley-Blackwell.

With respect to early Shinto, the essay of Eiji Matsumae mentioned in this column can be found in the multi-volume *Cambridge History of Japan*: Eiji Matsumae, "Early Kami Worship", in Delmer M Brown, Ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan, Vol. 1: Ancient Japan*, 1993, Cambridge U P, pp. 317-358. Covering the same ground are, Mizue Mori, "Ancient and Classical Japan: The Dawn of Shinto", and Satoshi Ito, "The Medieval Period: The kami merge with Buddhism", in Nobutaka Inoue Ed., *Shinto -- A Short History*, 2003, Routledge-Curzon, pp. 12 -- 107. This book is a translation of a Japanese work: 『神道日本生まれた宗教システム』, 1998, 新曜社.

The translations of the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* by Basil Hall Chamberlain and W. G Aston, respectively, add much color to the careful, but rather dry, work of Donald Philippi (Basil Hall Chamberlain, Tr., *The Kojiki: Records of Ancient Matters*, 1882 / 1981, Tuttle; W. G. Aston, Tr., *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697*, 1896 / 1924 / 1972, Tuttle; Donald L Philippi, Tr., *Kojiki*, 1968, Tokyo U P; Tr., *Norito: A Translation of Ancient Japanese Ritual Prayers*, 1990, Princeton U P.

Honji Suijaku is the subject of a collection of essays, of which the Introduction (which also discusses the research of Toshio Kuroda) and one or two essays are of particular relevance: Fabio Rabelli, "*Honji suijaku* at work: religion, economics and ideology"; Irit Averbuch, "Dancing the doctrine: *honji suijaku* thought in *kagura* performances", in Mark Teeuwen and Fabio Rambelli, Eds, *Buddhas and Kami in Japan: Honkji Suijaku as a combinatory paradigm*, 2003, Routledge Curzon. I think that Averbuch's research is of great importance, for it is my own private belief that *kagura* offers a fruitful way of looking at the analogous role of Morihei Ueshiba's *waza* in aikido. Terry Dobson wrote a book on aikido, entitled, *It's a Lot like Dancing*, and I think the title implied much more than Dobson realized.

Haruo Shirane has edited an anthology of Japanese literature (in translation) that contains lengthy extracts from the *Man'yoshu* (though not the poems that mention *kotodama*): Haruo Shirane, Ed, *Traditional Japanese Literature: An Anthology, Beginnings to 1600*, Colombia U P, 2007. There is a 'companion' to such literature, which is indispensable: Earl Miner, Hiroko Odagiri, Robert E Morrell, Eds, *The Princeton Companion to Classical Literature*, Princeton U P, 1985. A book that is indispensable for a reasoned Japanese view of *kotodama* in Japanese literature is the first volume of Konishi's history: Jin'ichi Konishi, *A History of Japanese Literature: Volume One: The Archaic and Ancient Ages*, 1984, Princeton U P. The *Man'yoshu* is also discussed in some detail by Edwin A Cranston: "Asuka and Nara Culture: literacy, literature, and music", in Delmer M Brown, Ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan, Vol. 1: Ancient Japan*, 1993, Cambridge U P, pp. 453-

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503.
In addition, I have used the following Japanese works in writing this column.
佐竹昭広，山田英雄，工藤力男，大谷雅夫，山崎福之，『萬葉集』，1999, 岩波書店：新日本古典文学大系.
小島憲之，木下正俊，東野治之，『万葉集』，1994, 小学館：日本古典文学全集.
青木生子，井手至，伊藤博，清水克彦，橋本四郎，『萬葉集』，1980, 新潮書店：新潮日本古典集成.
多田一臣，『万葉集ハンドブック』三省堂 1999.
豊田国夫，『日本人の言霊思想』，1980, 講談社学術分庫483.
川村湊，『言霊と他界』，2002, 講談社学術分庫 1575.

Peter Goldsbury (b. 28 April 1944). Aikido 6th dan Aikikai, Professor at Hiroshima University, teaching philosophy and comparative culture. B. in UK. Began aikido as a student and practiced at various dojo. Became a student of Mitsunari Kanai at the New England Aikikai in 1973. After moving back to the UK in 1975, trained in the Ryushinkan Dojo under Minoru Kanetsuka. Also trained with K Chiba on his frequent visits to the UK. Moved to Hiroshima, Japan, in 1980 and continued training with the resident Shihan, Mazakazu Kitahira, 7th dan Also trained regularly with Seigo Yamaguchi, Hiroshi Tada, Sadateru Arikawa and Masatake Fujita, both in Hiroshima and at the Aikikai Hombu. Was elected Chairman of the IAF in 1998. With two German colleagues, opened a small dojo in Higashi-Hiroshima City in 2001. Instructed at Aiki Expo 2002 in Las Vegas, Nevada.

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