

冷 *REI*

暖 *DAN*

THE GREATER MEANING OF KENDO

白 *JI*

知 *CHI*

## REIDAN-JICHI PART 5 ABOUT 'KI'

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The objective of kendo is to forge the body and mind, which essentially means to cultivate *ki*. The refinement of *ki* energy encourages the completion of your growth as a human being.

### 'Ki' Terms

We often use the word '*ki*' in Japan in regards to many things, including natural phenomena, the condition of body and mind, and even human relationships. However, '*ki*' itself is not a physical entity *per se*. Broadly speaking, it can be described in the following terms:

- The source of all things.
- Life force; spirit; vitality.
- Describing the movement and condition of the mind. The word portrays various mental conditions depending on the context in which it is used.
- Even though it cannot be seen, it can be felt or sensed.
- Related to breathing.

In the *Nihon Budō Jiten*, *ki* is defined as being "formless in shape but used to describe an array of different psychological states. *Ki* in budo, although used in the sense of space and time, it is often utilised to elucidate the state of mind. Although the heart and mind are not of distinct form, you are able to interpret signs of intention expressed through attitude, and ambient signs manifest in the surroundings. A warrior is able to intuitively understand what his adversary is thinking upon contact. Murderous intent is manifest as *ki* and transmitted to a warrior with honed senses."

Based on this definition, *ki* is difficult to fathom in

concrete terms, but could be basically described as an "invisible and shapeless source of life energy or vitality that is comprehensively revealed in the state and motion of the mind."

### Mencius

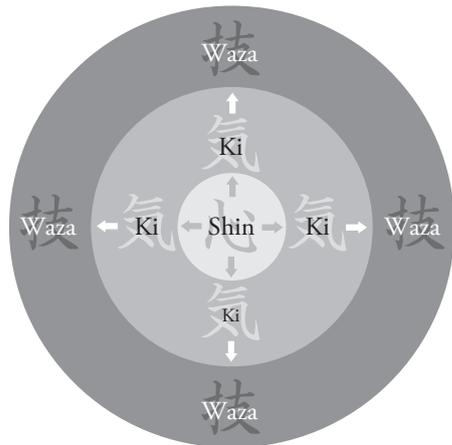
There is a saying in a treatise by Mencius, "Willpower is the master of *ki*. *Ki* is what charges the body." In other words, it is your will that controls the use of *ki*, and *ki* controls the movement of your body. If your will is unfettered, your *ki* will follow in accordance. Furthermore, concerning the profundity of *ki* and its social relevance, "the nurturing of expansive *ki* comes from virtuous bearing." It is difficult to explain the meaning of "expansive *ki*", but implies a large and pure source of energy emanating from behaviour that is honest and morally correct. If this is nurtured well in the individual it will benefit society as a whole by bolstering justice and humanity.

From the perspective of kendo, by training diligently in mastering techniques and perfecting the mind, *ki* that is nurtured through the process of developing one's confidence and aptitude becomes unwavering and untiring. It remains steadfast in all situations; it is pure and it is strong.

### Shin-ki-ryoku (心気力)

*Shin* (心) refers to the heart or mind, and it is generally considered to be focused inwards. *Ki* on the other hand, is focused outwards and is a kind of invisible force that can reach out and emanates from around the mind. The

mind is able to touch others through the 'wavelength' of *ki*. Therefore, the heart constitutes the inner consciousness, senses and judgement of the individual. These become the basis of our activity, and when the inertia of *ki* is applied this gives rise to the physical techniques that the individual chooses to execute. That is to say, *ki* falls between the mind and technique, and is the impetus behind the transformation of one's will or judgement into a tangible technique. It provides the power to implement *waza* (*ryoku*). *Ki* draws techniques from the mind and enacts them. By continuously practising techniques, you are in effect building your *ki* by drawing on it, and when you have developed a strong *ki*, your mind is able to settle.



Tanaka Hideo explains *ki* in his book *Budō no shinri* (The psychology of budo) in the following way: “*Ki* forms the inertial core for mind and technique, and is the driving force that facilitates action. *Ki* is not an emotion or willpower. It is the power that is evoked from emotion and will, and should be referred to as the ‘life force’ of all things.” The early stage of developing *ki* is “tense *ki*”; the latter stage is “settled *ki*”; and completion results in “lucid *ki*”.

### 'Life-force' and 'Signs'

In the *Heihō Kadensho*, a classic treatise on swordsmanship written in the Edo period, Yagyū Munenori analyses the significance of *ki* (気), and the homophone *ki* meaning manifestation or signs (機).

“*Ki* (機) is also the “door of the mind” (気). The meaning of the term *ki* depends on where it is situated. The mind is the innermost quarter and *ki* (気) is the entrance door. *Ki* (機) is the door lock. Or, think that the mind is the master of the body and therefore lives in its innermost quarter. The *ki* (気) puts itself at the door and works outside for the master, the mind. The mind may be good or evil, depending on whether the *ki* (機), after leaving the door and going outside, does something good or something evil. The *ki* (気), when guarding the door and holding itself well, is the same as the *ki* (機). Whether someone, after unlocking the door and going

outside, does good or evil, or does something divinely spectacular, depends on the decision made before the door is unlocked. So the *ki* (機) is of vital importance.” (English translation based on Hiroaki Sato's *The Sword and the Mind*, The Overlook Press, 1985, p. 103.)

Thus, although difficult to comprehend, Munenori is using the homophones of *ki* to express similar concepts that become different depending on usage. There is mind (*shin*), and the life force of *ki* (気), but just as that is about to manifest it becomes the other *ki* (機) or the sign as the energy is unleashed. When you can sense your opponent is forming a notion, you can nip it in the bud by grasping their *ki* (機), which stymies their flow of energy (気) or vigour, thereby enabling you to maintain the initiative. In kendo, the ability to perceive *ki* (機), is the difference between victory and defeat. It is the very instant that time and space is about to transform, and is thus the crucial moment in any encounter. It is said that somebody who has powerful *ki* (気) is able to effectively seize any opportunity (機) to attack instantaneously.

### Ki in Keiko

If the practitioner merely seeks to improve their technical dexterity in *keiko*, kendo will be relegated to a simple physical activity. The significance of kendo is rendered through the idea that the power or *ki* can be nurtured through technical training. All aspects of kendo training must be imbued with *ki*. Without *ki*, there is a danger that *keiko* will degenerate into an activity where practitioners treat each other rudely or with contempt. In *keiko*, practitioners aim to coordinate their *ki*. This is called *aiki* (合気), or the meeting of *ki*. The beauty of kendo is found in *ki* permeating through the central core of the *shinai* and piercing your opponent's body.

*Aiki* is achieved when both practitioners agree to confront each other fairly and squarely. The true method for *keiko* is two people meeting head-on, trying to overcome or punch holes in each other's *ki* to make an opening, and then executing techniques to 'fill the hole'. This is the very action that makes it true kendo, or not. Thus, *waza* that are executed without *ki* are not true *waza*. *Ki* is the vital component that makes a technique real. You offer greetings to your partner at the 'front entrance', and then move through to the back rooms, or the inner reaches of their being. This is the correct way for *keiko*. Conversely, attempting to enter the 'inner room' of your opponent's mind by passing surreptitiously through a side door without offering a greeting is deceitful, and contradicts the true way of kendo. Even in a match, the 'correct' way to engage your opponent is from the front. If you fall into the trap of trying to win at all costs i.e. by sneaking through a side door, then you will lose sight of the goodness and potential kendo has for one's continued self-development.