

Kamae (Posture)

Where to begin...

Shioda Sensei once said that "...Aikido begins and ends with kamae".

The truth and importance of these words is often ignored or misunderstood. Simply put, without kamae you do not have Aikido and your technique will lack any power.

So what is kamae? Kamae is translated from Japanese as posture or stance. It is one of the first things you are taught, i.e. the triangular stance, in every Aikido dojo irrespective of style. Kamae can vary between different styles, with an emphasis on different aspects, putting aside the variations between styles the reason for kamae is that it puts you in a position to defend yourself effectively.

Kamae is a principle. Build your Aikido upon sound principles - not the accumulation of techniques. If your kamae is sound then your technique will be sound. It is the simplest and yet paradoxically the hardest principle of Aikido to master, hence why Aikido is so difficult to master!

The following assumes a basic knowledge of kamae. The advice offered is style-independent: in other words if you apply the following and get the right 'feel' then it doesn't matter what style of Aikido you practice. The emphasis on kamae at the Meikyokai Dojo is the generation of power.

We emphasise the following points about kamae:

- Your kamae should feel natural and be based upon your natural stance and your gait cycle (i.e. not too wide and not too narrow).
- You should always have a feeling of power in the hips and legs - real power in Aikido comes from the hips - not from the arms.
- Your kamae should project forwards at all times - if you have the feeling of weight on your heel when in Kamae you need to talk to your instructor for advice.
- You should feel grounded and relaxed.
- Power should come from the rear leg - have the feeling that power flows down the outside of the rear leg and focused on the outside blade of the foot (from the little toe along the outside edge of foot). This will have the added benefit of straightening your rear leg.
- Relax
- The arms and shoulders must be relaxed.
- Grip the mat with your big toes (allegedly the secret of Aikido is in the big toe!).
- Your basic upper body position should change very little during the execution of techniques.

Avoid the following:

- Kamae stance should not be too wide - you won't be able to move properly, neither should it be too narrow - you will be easy to throw and move off balance.

- You should not be rigid in the legs. Have the feeling that your front knee is flexible and relaxed.
- Avoid the feeling of 'floating' whilst in kamae - this probably means that you are tense in the hips, arms and shoulders.
- Don't let your arms and shoulders become rigid and don't let the elbows 'fly' - think of the 'unbendable arm principle'.
- Don't let your upper body become rigid - you won't be able to react or do any meaningful Aikido.
- Don't 'sit on your hips'. Your training partner will be able to advise you - they should be looking for a straight line all the way down your back and along your rear leg. This fault will rob you of a lot of power. Effective weight transference during the execution of effective techniques will be almost impossible. (Note the emphasis on 'effective').

These are just some basics to a more effective kamae. As previously mentioned it is both the simplest and yet most difficult aspect of Aikido to master.

Kamae just is. It is impossible to overstate the importance of relaxation. Robert Mustard Sensei (7th Dan Yoshinkan Aikido) once said that he'd be about 10 years further on if he'd learned to relax earlier - a phenomenal statement if you have had the privilege of training with him. When you train with Sensei Mustard it is his overriding message - Relax!

The fundamental principles of Aikido branch from the kamae and the aim is to explore some of these principles in the future.