

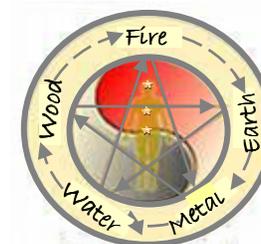


The Aikido-Yoga *Dojo* and the Seven Elements

The five elements, as depicted in Chinese philosophy, are represented in objects that make up the **Aikido-Yoga *dojo shrine*** (*kamiza*) - which is located on the front (northern) wall of the *dojo*. They represent tangible symbols of dynamic forces that are at play within the *dojo*, and serve as a constant reminder of how we interact and inter-relate within this dynamic experiential learning environment we call a *dojo*.

In traditional Chinese philosophy, five elements: **wood** (*mù*), **fire** (*huǒ*), **earth** (*tǔ*), **metal** (*jīn*), and **water** (*shuǐ*) represent a sequence of events that dynamically interact with each other in the never-ending cycle of birth and destruction. Two other subtle elements are also depicted in Japanese philosophy: **void/sky/ether/power** (*Kū*) and **wind/air** (*Fū*).

- The element of **wood** represents matter's growing stage. *Wood* attributes are considered to be strength and flexibility. It is also associated with qualities of warmth, generosity, co-operation and idealism.
- The element of **fire** represents the energetic, forceful, moving things in the world. Bodily, it represents our metabolism and body heat, and in the mental and emotional realms, it represents drive and passion.
- The **earth** element represents the hard, solid objects of the world. In the mind, it represents confidence; and emotionally it is a sustained intention to have things remain as they are; a resistance to change. The earth element represents **the centre** of this dynamic process of the five elements and the four seasons.
- The element of **metal** represents matter's decline stage. The qualities associated with metal are unyieldingness, rigidity, persistence, strength and determination.
- The element of **water** represents the fluid, flowing and formless things that adapt to their environment, growing and changing according events and circumstances. Bodily, it represents our blood and other body fluids. In the mental and emotional realms, it represents adaptability, flexibility, suppleness to change.
- **Wind/air/space** (*Fū*) represents things that grow, expand, and enjoy freedom of movement. *Fū* represents the human mind. *Fū* also represents breathing, and the internal processes associated with respiration.
- **Void/sky/ether/power** (*Kū*) represents those things beyond our everyday experience (ie. Pure energy). *Kū* represents spirit, thought or consciousness. It represents our ability to think and to communicate, as well as creativity.



“Every human has four endowments - self awareness, conscience, independent will and creative imagination. These give us the ultimate human freedom... The power to choose, to respond, to change.” -- Stephen R. Covey



The Aikido-Yoga *Dojo* – North, South, East & West

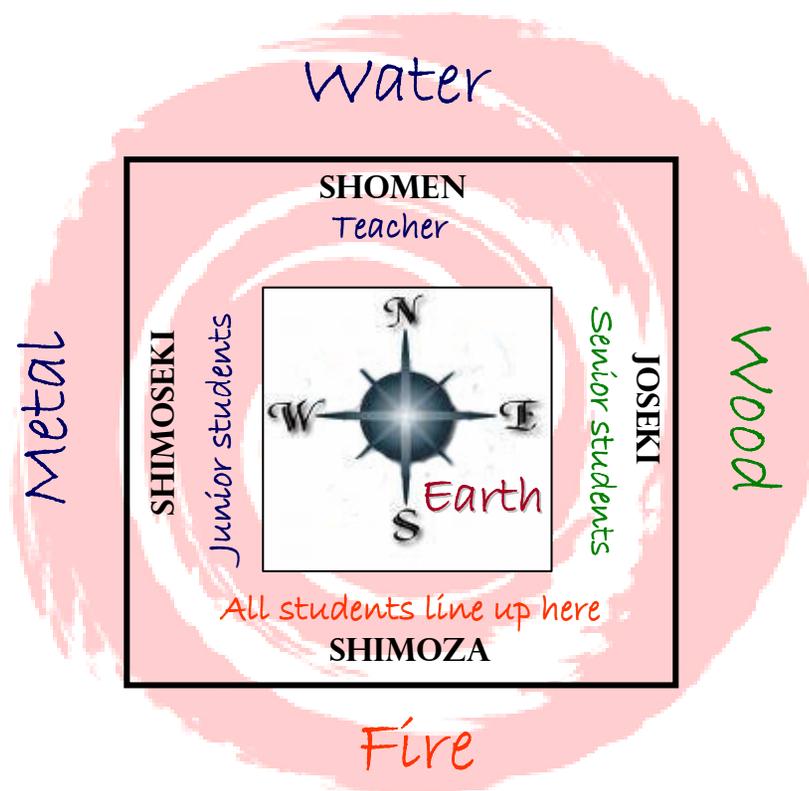
The northern side of the *dojo* represents the teacher's emotionally intelligent, enlightened leadership, learning through teaching, and self-less service. The teacher understands that respect, empathy and compassion are required for effective dissemination of the art. He/she therefore not only instructs, but also takes *ukemi* and sweats right alongside the students in order to facilitate not only their progress but his/her own progress as well.

The southern side of the *dojo*, where all students line up at the start of training, represents every individual's sincerity and respectful intent to enter the *dojo* with a "*beginner's mind*" – eager to learn and full of drive, passion, positive intention and intelligence – exhibiting respect and etiquette.

The eastern side of the *dojo* represents the senior students responsibility and growing accountability as role models and mentors to the more junior students. This area of the *dojo* is placed under the utmost scrutiny by anyone entering the *dojo* because it is a direct indicator of the culture and attitude of the *dojo*.

The western side of the *dojo* can therefore be interpreted as containing an intense concentration of the collective enthusiastic, optimistic and positive attitude of **all the beginners**.

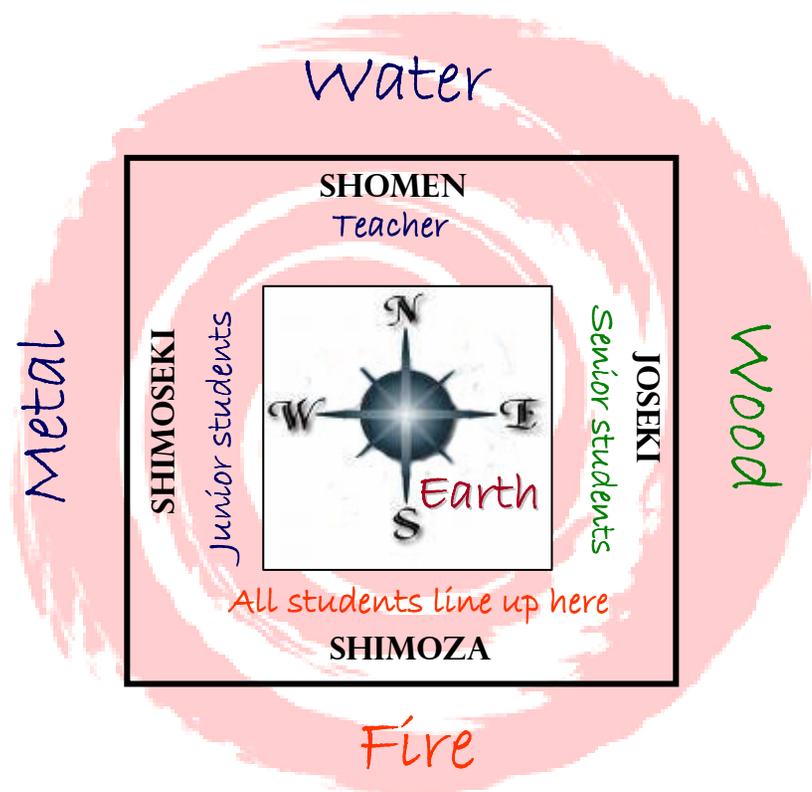
This brings us to the very center of the *dojo* – the actual matted training area, where all talking stops, and earnest, hard training begins. It is the living, beating, pulsating energy of the training that sustains the *dojo*. Fragile egos, intellectualisation, rationalisation, excuses, debate, discussion and negative emotions have no place here. In this central area, any interpretation or discussion of the more esoteric aspects of the art are fruitless. What is required by student and teacher alike is earnest training.





The Aikido-Yoga *Dojo* Dynamic

1. **The front (northern wall or *Shomen*) represents water element.**
 - The *yang* characteristics required of the **teacher**.
 - Wisdom, level-headedness, knowledge and experience as opposed to ego, arrogance, power or leadership by virtue of title or position.
2. **The back (southern wall or *Shimoza*) represents fire element.**
 - The *yang* characteristics required of the **all students** who line up, ready for training.
 - Open / beginner's mind, drive, passion, desire, intention, outgoing spirit, intellect, etiquette, respect etc.
3. **The right (eastern wall or *Joseki*) represents wood element.**
 - The *yang* characteristics required of all **senior students**:
 - Virtue, compassion, benevolence, understanding, generosity, kindness etc.
4. **The left (western wall or *Shimoseki*) represents metal element.**
 - The *yang* characteristics required of all **junior students**.
 - Righteousness, morality, goodness, correctness, correctness, integrity etc.
5. **The central training area (or *Embujo*) represents earth element.**
 - The *yang* characteristics required for effective training.
 - Honesty, integrity, thoughtfulness etc.
6. The *dojo's* vaulted ceilings signify the embodiment of **wind/air/space (*Fū*)**, with its apex representing **void/sky/ether/power (*Kū*)**. These elements represent room for the expansion of mind, and the growth of emotional intelligence, knowledge and character – all leading to a higher state of consciousness, spiritual insight, creativity, and a capacity to think for ourselves and effectively interact with others in a truly inter-dependent way.





The Aikido-Yoga *Dojo* and the *Tao*

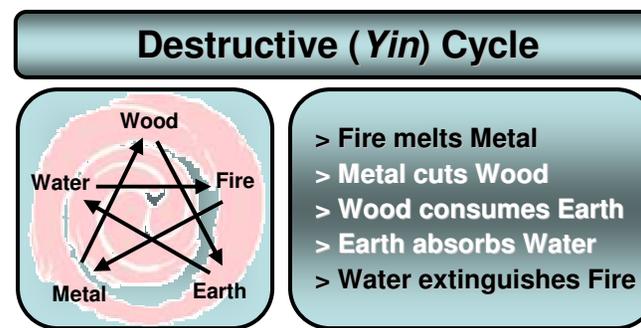


The **yin / yang** symbol represents the **Tao**, the fundamental law or principle of nature that keeps things in the universe balanced and in order. The concept of **Tao** is based upon the understanding that the only constant within the universe is change. To follow the **Tao** means to become one with the natural flow of the vital *life-force* of nature which animates all existence. The Aikido-Yoga **do-jo** is a place (**jo**) where we adhere to the *Way* (**do** or **Tao**).

Throughout the cosmos, the forces of **yin** and **yang** are in a perpetual state of dynamic flux as they try to reach a balance point. As one changes, the other automatically responds to accommodate the shift in equilibrium. This dynamic interaction of **yin** and **yang** forces in the cosmos is therefore what literally sustains everything in balance. In reality, literally everything is inter connected. Therefore, with an understanding of how these elements inter-relate, great insight can be obtained into the natural sequence of events that contribute to either growth or decline.

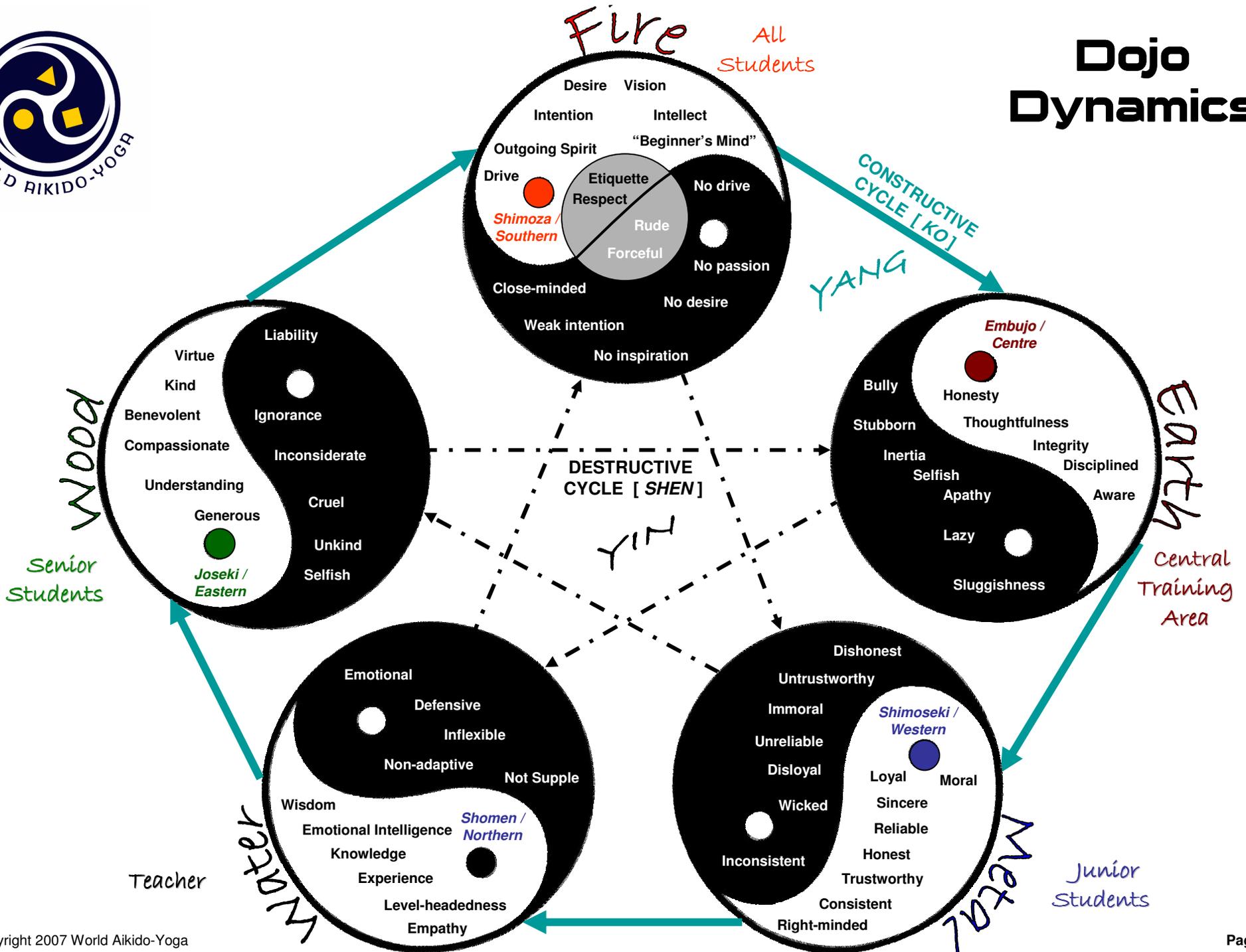
- The first sequence is that of the **creative (Yang) process** of birth / creation / production (ie. wood empowers fire, which in turn empowers earth, which in turn empowers metal, which in turn empowers water, which in turn empowers wood.)
- The second sequence is that of the **destructive (Yin) process** of death / destruction / transformation (ie. fire melts metal, which in turn cuts wood, which in turn consumes earth, which in turn absorbs water, which in turn extinguishes fire.)

The teacher and the students are underpinned by their respective qualities as defined by the elements with which they are associated. A harmony, a balance, an equilibrium is therefore set in motion within the *dojo*. The realisation of this harmonious training requires the collective, unified, inter-dependent interaction of all the participants of the *dojo*.





Dojo Dynamics



Aikido Rei Meditation

Within this sanctified space - I acknowledge all the qualities that surround me.

I bring my hands together, gathering all the elements, becoming one with myself, and connecting all parts of myself as one unified whole.

In bowing - I lower my head towards the ground as can only be done in humility and gratitude. I acknowledge the wisdom and teachings embodied in the founder of Aikido, his students and their students' students, and in so doing include our own teacher. This lineage represents the time tested qualities I would like to measure myself against.

I bring my busy, doing hands together, resting gently into a state of simply being. I settle and quieten further.

In bowing I lower my forehead in acknowledgement of myself and the goodness within myself. I understand that the 'way is not in the sky, the way is in the heart'.

My hands come together in gratitude, in front of my heart, closing the circuit, generating warmth and connection.

I clap my hands - creating a dynamic dimension to signify intention, to alert myself to my purpose, to share the sound of budo. This resounds around the dojo as our ai, our ki and our do are given voice.

My hands come together, pointing to the heavens as my legs connect with the earth...

I bow - may this be so.

We turn to face each other - moving from solitary reflection to blending our ai, our ki, our do. We bow together in mirrored respect and gratitude, for teachers that learn and learners that teach - a final acknowledgement... domo arigato gozaimashita

[hajime / onegai shimasu / domo arigato gozaimashita]

["Prayer"/affirmation to accompany formal bow on prior to commencing training - Written by Irene Metter for winter school 2009]