

## KOTODAMA

Japanese **Kotodama** or **Kototama** (言霊 ?, lit. "word spirit/soul") refers to the belief that mystical powers dwell in words and names. English translations include "soul of language", "spirit of language", "power of language", "power word", "magic word", and "sacred sound". The notion of *kotodama* presupposes that sounds can magically affect objects, and that ritual word usages can influence our environment, body, mind, and soul.

This Japanese compound *kotodama* combines *koto* 言 "word; speech" and *tama* 霊 "spirit; soul" (or 魂 "soul; spirit; ghost") voiced as *dama* in *rendaku*. In contrast, the unvoiced *kototama* pronunciation especially refers to *kototamagaku* 言霊学 "study of *kotodama*", which was popularized by Onisaburo Deguchi in the Oomoto religion. This field takes the Japanese *gojūon* phonology as the mystical basis of words and meanings, in rough analogy to Hebrew Kabbalah.

*Kototama* or *kotodama* is fundamental to Japanese martial arts, for instance, in the use of *kiai*. Morihei Ueshiba, the founder of aikido, used *kototama* as a spiritual basis for his teachings. William Gleason says Ueshiba "created aikido based on the *kototama* principle," and quotes him that "Aikido is the superlative way to practice the *kototama*. It is the means by which one realizes his true nature as a god and finds ultimate freedom." [2] Mutsuro Nakazono, a disciple of Ueshiba, wrote books on the importance of *kototama* in aikido. [3]

While other cultures have animistic parallels to *kotodama*, such as mantra, mana, and logos, some Japanese people believe the "word spirit" is unique to the Japanese language. One of the classical names of Japan is *kotodama no sagiwau kuni* 言霊の幸う国 "the land where the mysterious workings of language bring bliss", [4] a phrase that originated in the *Man'yōshū*.

The etymology of *kotodama* is uncertain, but one explanation correlating words

and events links two Japanese words pronounced *koto*: this 言 "word; words; speech" and 事 "situation; circumstances; state of affairs; occurrence; event; incident". Note that these two *kanji* were used interchangeably in the name Kotoshironushi 事代主 or 言代主, an oracular *kami* mentioned in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. *Kotodama* is related with Japanese words such as *kotoage* 言挙 "words raised up; invoke the magical power of words", *kotomuke* 言向 "directed words; cause submission through the power of words", and *jumon* 呪文 "magic spell; magic words; incantation".

*Kotodama* is a central concept in Japanese mythology, Shinto, and Kokugaku. For example, the *Kojiki* describes an *ukei* (or *seiyaku*) 誓約 "covenant; trial by pledge" between the sibling gods Susanoo and Amaterasu, "Let each of us swear, and produce children".[1] Uttering the divine words of an *ukehi* supposedly determines results, and in this case, Amaterasu giving birth to five male deities proved that Susanoo's intentions were pure.

**Sekai Jinrui Ga Heywa De Arimasu Yoni (Japanese Translation)  
May Peace Prevail On Earth**