

Seiyo-no Shorin-Ryu Karate

Shinza/Kamidana Meaning

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Shinza - if there is one single item that marks the difference between a dojo and other martial arts schools, is that a dojo will have a shrine. The **shinza** is a monument to ones that went before us. We bow out of respect to ourselves upon entering the dojo. We also bow to clear our minds - to get the proper attitude. And, we bow to honor those who have come before us, the Masters & black belts.

A. Shinza - separates dojo from school - not a religious object. Sometimes it is called a Kamidana, especially in Japanese homes. Kami (kam me)- Indian word is karma - spirit - essence of ones character. The Japanese believe everything has kami - people, animals, rocks. There can be good and bad kami.

The dojo is a place for common goals and beliefs. Schools foster the individual. Dojos focus on mutual goals. Kami is part of the dojo. Kami can be seen by the energy felt when you walk into a building. The dojo has a certain feel when you walk in. The traditional dojo - kami means unity of ideals for a collective goal.

Shinza is:

- a. The focal point of our kami - keeps energy that is being created from being lost.*
- b. Monument to those who trained before us.*
- c. A beacon for those who will come after us.*

The shinza “focal point” of the dojo holds the highest position in the dojo. It absorbs and contains “Kami” from all that is taught and practiced within the walls of the dojo.

Articles of the dojo:

The flags:

- American - proud of the country we live in
- Japanese - represents country our system comes from
 - *Japanese - symbolizes the roots of our style*
 - *American - symbolizes the country in which we train*

Here are the articles I chose to put on my own Shinza in the dojo and what they mean to me.

- 1. **White cloth** - symbolizes purity of body, soul, and mind.*
- 2. **Cherry Blossom branch** (silk flowers) - Symbolizes the process of natural growth. Also symbolizes flexibility. Just like you can't control when or how long a cherry blossom will bloom or fall, you can't control events, people or things in your life with an iron fist. In letting things happen in their own time it brings serenity.*
- 3. **Bowl of Rice** (cherry blossom branch is in it) - The rice symbolizes "reaping what you sow." What you put into practice will produce fruit or benefit you later on in your life. (Not just in Karate but all of life.)*

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4. **Incense burner and incense cones** - *The smoke from the incense represents the spirit, the true spirit of the martial way. Used primarily in special ceremonies.*
 5. **Candle** - *The flame represents enlightenment. We strive to reach an enlightened stage in our life through the practice of our art.*
 6. **Mirror** (in center of shinza) - *Represents the humility of self reflection. Look to yourself first for self improvement, rather than trying to change others.*
 7. **Unopened Bottle of Sake** (rice wine) - *Represents honor and self discipline. It is a symbol of no matter what one achieves in life, maintain your values and honor. It is unopened as it takes self discipline to not open it and celebrate your success. Keep a cap on ego!*
 8. **Four Pictures** - *Photos of masters whom are my teachers or whom I deeply respect. Kaicho Harold Mead, Master Ronald Leach, Master Funakoshi and Dr. Usui.*
 9. **Swords** - *Represents the Way of the Warrior or Samurai code (Budo Code). The short sword, Tanto, represents Honor. The medium sword (side arm), Wakizashi, represents Duty. The long sword, Katana, represents Perseverance. (I realize there are actually 8 tenets of Bushido, but these three are the most important to me.)*
- A. **Nintai** is perseverance - to persevere under pressure - determination to strive for continuous improvement and excellence.
- a. *Perseverance - makes a person stronger - survival - forges the spirit - persistence to strive for continuous improvement.*
- B. **Shingi** - Honor - code of honor - ensures that we have the courage - still train even if master passes away - train because of what you are taught in the system - not because of the instructor. There is a commitment to honesty.
- a. *Honor - Shingi - Code of honor. The courage and moral strength to act with integrity.*
- C. **Giri** - Duty - a strong sense of duty – for what is given to you - strongest sense of duty is to your parents. After your parents you have a sense of duty to God and your country.
- a. *Duty - Giri - by being born we have a duty that can never be repaid to our parents. Strong sense of duty to God, parents, teachers, country(community/family/neighbors). Develop selflessness without expectation of reward. Loyalty, warriors. Instructor gives student more than the student could ever repay. Student carries great “On” - must give teacher great respect and loyalty.*

We need to stand for all three: perseverance, honor, and duty. Karate is for everyone – young, old, male, female, handicapped, etc. It is not just for the strong.

Dojo is used for basic training and means “training hall” – It should only be used for katas, self defenses, martial arts classes, basic karate training, lectures and special ceremonies. Using it in another way is thought to change the ‘energy’ of the space.

Origin of the dojo. Indian - place of enlightenment. Visitors must treat dojo with respect.

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A Note from Kaicho Mead on Kamidana or Shinza. Written on July 5, 2011.

Vashon,

My dojo does not have a "kamidana" as I believe I know what you are talking about. As close as mine would come would be the two flags and the word "HARMONY" in the middle of those two flags.

Now, you know more about this subject than I do. Here is the way I feel about the subject. You put up what you want, and whatever you do with the kamidana is your choice. It depends upon how involved you are in the oriental way of life. You make sure that your students understand the significance of the kamidana, history etc. Kamidana, literally "spirit (kami) altar", is a miniature Shinto shrine found in many Japanese homes. The kamidana is typically placed high on a wall and contains a wide variety of items (kamizane) related to Shinto-style ceremonies, the most prominent of which is theshintai, most commonly in the form of a small circular mirror, though it may also take the form of a stone (magatama), jewel, or some other object with largely symbolic value. A similar shrine, when placed at ground-level upon a platform possessing three or four steps, is referred to as a kamidoko. Worship at the kamidana typically consists of the offering of simple prayers, food (e.g., rice, fruit, water) and flowers. Before worshipping at the kamidana it is ritually important for family members to cleanse their hands.

Kamidana can also be found in some traditional Japanese martial art dojo. The word is frequently confused with Kamiza, the seat of a honor in a room or dojo, but without any connection to Shinto.

Harold