

The report of Adam Radecki - scholarship student at Meiji Jingu Budojo Shiseikan

02 July - 11 August 2011

I am almost 41 years old Pole. I began my aikido practice in Warsaw in 1989, but it was in 2003, when, due to Mr. Jerzy Pomianowski - former Polish ambassador to Japan and President of Polish Federation of Aikido - I visited Meiji Jingu and Shiseikan Budojo for the first time, getting in touch impressively with genuine tradition of Japan. I have continued my practice under Pomianowski sensei, visiting Japan as often as possible (6 times so far, including current time) and taking part in seminars in Europe given primarily by Inaba Sensei. Inaba Sensei was the first teacher I ever met on tatami, who wanted to explain Budo and Shinto. Inaba Sensei strongly introduced the cultural and spiritual context of Budo practice, and gave me a grasp of shinken attitude. I realized, that my understanding was very poor and superficial. In 2009 I was approved for Budo seminar for overseas instructors, taking place at Meiji Jingu Kenshukaikan and Shiseikan. During the seminar we had a lecture on Shinto given by Ito-san. By the end of the lecture we received a "Meaning of Shinto" book written in English by J.W.T. Mason. The text was written almost a century ago but I have found it still very up-to-date. However, I can benefit from the intellectual analysis of the subject much more, if I have a corresponding experience. I wanted to understand not only by thinking, but also to understand by senses. So I decided to apply for the extended stay on special conditions.

With the initiative supportive request from ISBA my scholarship candidacy was kindly approved by Meiji Jingu authorities and the Director of Shiseikan. The scholarship programme started on Saturday 2nd of July 2011, with completion in the first half of August (almost 6 weeks altogether). I was generously offered the accommodation at Trainee Dormitory (Kenshūryō), stipend to cover travel, living and meal expenses, and personal assist.

On the day of arrival I was accepted to meet Amitani Gon Guji and to give Sampai at Meiji Jingū Honden. On afternoon that day I attended my first practice on tatami, and was invited to a welcome dinner with Araya Kancho and Kuroki Jimucho, accompanied by Shiseikan Officers: Mr. Endo and Ms. Ashida. On following days my schedule consisted mainly of regular trainings at Shiseikan and participating (at turn of July and August) in summer camps, intensive lectures by Mr.Ito, Mr.Daimaru and Mr.Uchikoshi introducing to me the various aspects valued by Meiji Jingu, and time for self-study (by kind permission by Mr. Shishime, I could use the studying room and office equipment at kyudōjō). Additionally, I was allowed to take part at classes given by Tanaka MeiyoKancho, approved for special practice by Inaba MeiyoShihan and got permission from Araya Kancho to attend the training for Shiseikan instructors.

It was also the first time indeed, when I visited Polish Embassy in Tokyo, meeting informally with Rodowicz Taishi.

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Unexpectedly I was invited once to Tea Ceremony in Tea House of Meiji Jingū. I deeply appreciated explanation given by sensei about the meaning and elements of the ceremony, which was leading me more aware and peaceful through the whole process. Finally, I was given opportunity to prepare one cup of tea and the result was acceptable.

I experienced Mitama Matsuri at Yasukuni Jinja, and enjoyed Nyoryosai at Kenshūryō. By courtesy of Mr. Uchikoshi I had a guided-tour to Kaigakan. Accompanied by Kuroki Jimucho I visited Yushukan.

Last but not least, encouraged by Endo sensei, I started to translate (into English) Kashima no Tachi Mokuroku. Fukutoku sensei and Hashimoto sensei has kindly explained to me some of the concepts, Ms.Matsuda, Ms.Ashida and Mr.Okuda supported me with finding best possible meaning of Japanese expressions.

All the time I was supported by friendly advices and presence of Shiseikan instructors and members, as well as the Meiji Jingū staff of various level (position, status). Attempt to name everyone would be a challenging task, so let me say only about Mr. Okuda especially, who was teaching me the rhythm of common day at Meiji Jingū: greeting Kamidama upon leaving and arriving dormitory, chōhai (morning ceremony), traditional breakfast (prepared and served wholeheartedly by cheerful Ms. Ogasawara), sampai at O'Mae, sweeping the leaves in front of the building, morning practice, work or study, lunch at Shamusho, afternoon practice, laundry and rest etc. Already mentioned Ms. Matsuda voluntarily gave me a few lessons on Japanese language. Ms. Ashida thoroughly was helping me in and with translations.

The whole stay is like acting at the edge: hot and humid weather, intensive physical and mental practice in the dojo, apart from the family, living daily life inside of Meiji Jingu. Very demanding and very rich. I studied forms and principles within/behind the forms. I feel I didn't learn the form only (the outer shape) but through the form as well (to discover the content, which is packed in the form and expressed by the form). Speaking metaphorically, I hope I didn't focus on the nut-shell, but through the shell I got a bit to the nut, cherished and protected by a shell. And I also tried to fulfill the shell with the nut. By focusing on feelings and sensations, switching off thinking. Being aware of the background. Realizing importance of prudence and responsibility. Taking crucial decisions. Maintaining relationships and discovering myself. And I am simply grateful for all of that. Now I am facing a challenge to utilize this experience in my daily life at work and home and find a balance for sometimes opposite states, feelings and actions in order to be able to evoke simultaneous cooperation.

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At the end of my stay I gave a speech, which I titled “A Pole in Japan - subjective reflections upon personal quest for harmony”. Below is the content of my presentation.

Let me at first introduce myself briefly:

My name is Adam Radecki. I was born in 1970, baptized and brought up as Christian Catholic. I graduated from psychology in 1994 on Christian Philosophy Department of Academy for Catholic Theology in Warsaw (now: Wszechni Uniwersity). I started education in martial arts as late teenager, discovered Budo in 2003. Currently I hold the rank of 3 dan in Aikido, and was awarded Kashima no Tachi shoden. I am instructor at Warsaw Budojo. I work as psychologist at metropolitan Counseling and Therapy Center, which I am a vice-director as well. I am married and have one daughter. I live and work in Warsaw, Poland.

I come from the land, where knights/warriors of various kinds existed, who were experts in fighting and obeyed some codes (usually unwritten). Wonderful codes (see appendix 1). But the knights are dead already. And their tradition either. We have so called “historical reconstruction groups” (various kinds, also non-Christian warriors), which for obvious reason (broken continuity of transmission) focus primarily on clothes, weapons, fighting scenes and playing open air performances. This is very interesting, occupying and satisfying, but rather theater like. So why people from different country like Poland come to Japan to learn from warriors tradition of this country? Well, one of the answer may be like that: it’s a childish dream. When I was a child, on TV we had just 2 channels, broadcasting for just about 16 hours a day. There were 2 kinds of movies played: American westerns with John Wayne and Japanese movies with Toshiro Mifune. So as children we (at least boys) wanted to become a brave cowboy/Indian or a brave samurai. I preferred a sword more than a gun. Another reason: we live and we are moved by our experience. We meet someone or find something, somehow, somewhere. By conscious goal-oriented activity or by accident. I was about to quit my aikido practice when in 2003 I decided to join Jerzy Pomianowski for his “sentimental journey” after finishing his duties as Ambassador to Japan. It was supposed to be my ‘farewell trip’, but became the way to the new life. Why? Because Budo as taught in Meiji Jingu Budojo Shiseikan is congruent with deeper context and indicates importance of every day life. And gives tools to that. Let me quote a few statements, I have heard from Shiseikan teachers through these years (I hope I remember them correctly):

“We practice martial art in order not to use it (like directly in a sword fight) anytime ever. So what for, then?”

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“The most important battles we run not in the dojo, but in daily life”

“I don’t regret, that students disappear from dojo after some time, because I taught them most important things: breathing and focusing in the lower abdomen”

“I don’t have ambition, that my students must become great martial art masters. I am proud, that they become good engineers, good doctors, lawyers, teachers, parents...”

„Do it naturally. But how can we know what is natural? Isn’t that so, that a habit may become a second nature? That’s why we go to the nature”

A few weeks ago Inaba Sensei gave a lecture about dramatic events in Sendai and Fukushima and how the attitude of the Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko is helpful for the nation. My thoughts went to last year lethal crash of Polish President’s plane, when all 96 people, including president couple, top level army officials, parliament members died. Until today, after over 1 year after the catastrophe, we still loudly and violently argue about how and whom to commemorate instead of bowing in silence, crying with tears and praying for the peace to the souls of those who so dramatically passed away.

Why is it so different?

Let’s take a look at the national flags of Japan and Poland.

What can we see? What is similar and what is different?

Both are very simple and are in white and red colors.

But Japanese flag has a center, which is a point of reference and a place to focus attention.

Polish flag is divided horizontally, with no center.

What is possible meaning of colors? White color symbolizes purity, spirituality and freedom.

Red - courage, bravery and determination (discipline).

With this meaning, considering composition of both flags, I could say, that Japan (red in the center of white) has a courage to struggle everyday issues in spiritual context. But also everyday determination develops and purifies freedom. Using other words, we can observe a codependence of Budo (red) and Shinto (white).

In Poland I can see, that spirituality and every day struggle seem separated. Neither direct connection nor codependence is observed. Lack of true harmony is a negative result. Problems are evoked by separation, disconnection and polarity (opposition, contradiction).

In 16th and 17th century Poland was the biggest country in Europe, but due to lack of balance between freedom and discipline, in 18th century we lost our independence, and disappeared from the maps for 123 years (1795-1918).

(please refer to Andrzej Bazytko speech “Polish Ways to Freedom” given in June 2009).

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Let's take yet another possible meaning of colors: white = water, red = fire.

Are water and fire opposite? Do they necessarily have to fight?

Fire heats water and helps to cook a meal, water evaporates and turns into the air, coming back as rain... and sometimes you need water to calm down the fire.

So we need balance to maintain life.

How a problem of separation, disconnection and polarity could be solved?

By settling the center and connecting both separated sides.

We need a center. Without a center we have no point of reference and can get lost.

What could be such center, landmark, foothold, point of reference, a fulcrum for balance? Old beliefs? Yes, we had such. Pre-Christian, pagan beliefs in Poland and Slavonic areas were related to nature (trees, stones, forest, hills, mountains, wind, earth, water, fire etc), connected to four seasons and the rhythm of the year, balanced male and female like characters. We had various gods and goddesses (see appendix 2). Unfortunately, these are mostly fantasies. The past is difficult (indeed impossible) to restore, because before Christianity came, there was only spoken language, so we have no written remaining. Also, the original cult was destroyed (shrines were burned down, monuments and ceremonial items were crashed or thrown to the rivers, priests were killed, holy days were renamed and festivals were forbidden), so material traces disappeared. Most of descriptions are late subjective interpretations of monks or alien court writers, who didn't understand the local culture. And only some customs remained, disguised in rural folklore (like wayside shrines for example).

So, mostly old belief have gone away.

Well, then maybe Christianity could be such a center? But Christianity is divided and polarized, consists of over 100 churches and denominations (see appendix 3). In the history, a lot of violence and injustice was done in the name of God (like crusades and inquisition), aside from bringing education, compassion and humanitarian aid. Quite contradictory, and we don't need unbalanced, disconnected extremes, and words opposite to behaviors. We need a true harmony and genuine authority. Authority may become a good point of reference. Such authority could be Pope John Paul II (Jan Paweł II). Known worldwide. He was born 1920, chosen as Pope in 1978, until his death in 2005. He was extraordinary person. He was first non-Italian Pope of Catholic Church since XVI century. He had 3rd longest pontificate in whole history of Vaticane (26 years). He did 104 travels all over the world, including Japan in February 1981. First thing he did after landing in Poland, he kneeled down and kissed the ground of ancestors. He was first Pope since almost 500 year who visited Anglican England, first Pope, who kissed Koran – holly book of Muslims, and he reconciled with his assassin,

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Ahmed Ali Agca. Over 1,800 people were announced as blessed or saint during his cadency, and finally John Paul II was announced in 2011 as blessed, proceeded to be announced as saint as soon as possible. John Paul II was broadly respected, because he was congruent – he lived his words, he visited people and talked to them in their language. He smiled and joked. And he loved nature, especially mountains. But for many Poles he was important just because he was Polish – Pope the Pole. Before and after him, a Pope is not an authority – being a pope is just not enough.

There is not one clear image in Christian Church instead of discrepancy. Another example: Christianity is said to be a monotheistic (one god) religion and far from superstitions. But is it really so? Refraining from sophisticated intellectual deliberations, in Catholic Church we have Trinity Dogma - meaning that One God exists in Three Divine Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And there are many other divine subjects like angels, guardian angels, also saints and blessed people, who are patrons of the land, places, objects, persons, enterprises, professions or virtues. Sometimes I think, that maybe new religion has not killed old gods, but old gods put new clothes on and act in disguise? Like Divine Mother Maria. She seems to be more close and connected to people than distant Father God. She is not a goddess but is worshipped thoroughly in Poland. Peak of celebrations occurs on 15th of August - a holiday popularly called as Holiday of Divine Mother of Herbs, and is associated with blessing harvest and plants. Her cult may refer to an archetype of mother nature and/or mother earth. The Sanctuary of Divine Mother Maria at Jasna Góra (Luminous Mount) Monastery, is occupied by thousands of visitors throughout the whole year.

Now, let me briefly compare religion in Poland and Japan:

Poland	Japan
1. Original Slavonic belief system was destroyed hundreds years ago, does not exist and is impossible to be reconstructed	1. Shinto has immemorial continuous tradition, never was lost, broken, and is still alive
2. Christianity was born in Near East (joint of Europe, Africa and Asia), far from Poland	2. Shinto was born in Japan, and Buddhism was born in central Asia
3. Christianity was invited for political reasons	3. Buddhism was invited for development of culture and science
4. Christianity was implemented by force	4. Buddhism was implemented by peace
5. Christianity was resisted by local pagan beliefs until 13-14th century	5. Buddhism and Shinto coexisted, without mutual rejection
6. Churches were built on ashes of former pagan cult places	6. Buddhist temples were built in new or nearby places, sometimes having small shrine on the area
7. Religious holidays were set on similar dates as pre-Christian festivals	7. New religion and old beliefs have its own festivals
8. Until half of 20th century, Latin was used as ceremonial language	8. Japanese language has always been used in Shinto
9. Church and Pope teach and instruct	9. Shinto and Emperor exist and give a model for attitudes
10. There is no common authority. Nor Church, even Pope himself is not. John Paul II was an exception, but only because he was an exceptional person and he was Polish	10. The Emperor is a common authority for Japanese people both as a nation and shintoists

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We Poles are unbalanced, polarized, and don't have such obvious center. We don't have a king or emperor. We don't respect president, prime minister or parliament. We don't trust Church. We often disregard and abuse nature, we question and forget our heroes. We blame others. As a nation we can temporarily unite and establish some center only when we are endangered by enemy from outside. If there is no enemy outside, we find it inside and start to fight against each other.

We need a harmony. But it seems, that we have to find it by ourselves, searching deep into our own culture, sometimes getting through illusions, looking behind the facade, and learning from other traditions and other people. As meeting other cultures may help to understand better and discover more truly our own culture, may help to find potentials and dangers of our background, may help to enrich and develop our tradition, and may help to make opposites not contradictory but complementary, thus built a harmony... We need a natural harmony: our head keeping high and mind reaching up to the sky, our feet rooted firmly to the ground, a straight body, sensitive trunk, connecting head (sky) with feet (ground). To build a bridge at the river of live.

I have found in Shiseikan Budō a concrete physical and mental training to find and strengthen the center, a natural rhythm and breath, a connection between body and mind, an importance of mutual codependence, respectful relationships, a courageous but prudent attitude to act at the edge of life and death.

I have learned from Shintō, that we are a part of nature, spirituality is a normal element of daily activity, it is important to be aware and take care of a common background (religious, historical, cultural, social, economical etc.), sacred places and customs help to purify sincere hearts and recall gratefulness, when we behave responsibly and respectfully we may become good ancestors for further generations.

I am inspired by Meiji Tenno to value the land and the nation, to be loyal and honest leader, to solve difficult situations in a possibly peaceful way, to be truly involved in life.

And I dare to say: Japan, you are lucky! You've got unique treasures! Please keep cherishing them up! We, Polish people, must individually read our world in a mature way, verify our maps and guide-books and look for good compass, oriented towards common pole. Each of us has to start from oneself and act within one's own circle of influence, behave responsibly and congruently, reflecting one's every action's impact on oneself and nearest surrounding. Please, wish us good luck!

The End

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APPENDIX 1.

Medieval Knights Code (a compilation):

01. Always be devoted to God, your Land and your Lord
02. Never flinch away (escape caused by fear)
03. Be ambitious and achieve your goals
04. Lost battles withstand with honor
05. Hold yourself up as a model to others
06. Respect people around you
07. Protect welfare and righteousness from injustice
08. Be generous for those in need
09. Don't harm those weaker than you
10. Stand by your principles, be loyal to your values

APPENDIX 2.

Probable Slavonic pagan (pre-Christian) gods:

Trzygłów (Three Head) or Świątowit (Powerful Lord),

Porewit and Porenut – twin brothers representing probably 2 complementary aspects: good (strong) condition and bad (weak) condition of a human,

Rugiewit – local god, with the nest for swallow birds under his chin (swallows represent spring = new life but also souls of the dead),

Jarowit (god of military),

Jaryło (god or goddess of youth and fertility),

Swaróg and Dadźbóg (gods of fire, sun and wealth),

Perun (god of storm),

Chors (god of the moon),

Rod (god of birth) and Rodzanice (goddesses of fate),

Siem (god of family) and Rgieł (god of agriculture),

Mokosz (goddess of soil and household),

Strzybóg (god of the wind),

Pereplut (god of waters),

Marzanna (goddess of wintertime),

Dziewanna (goddess of forest),

Weles (god of underground world).

APPENDIX 3.

Short story of Christianity (chosen facts):

1st century:

Christianity is born and begins to spread through countries of Mediterranean Sea Basin

3rd century:

Christians are persecuted

4th century:

Christianity was established as the only acceptable religion in Roman Empire and starts to persecute others

11th century :

The Great Schism (split) to Catholic (West) and Orthodox (East: Greece, Russia, Syria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Bulgaria, Serbia)

16th century:

next split: Catholic (Southern Europe) and Protestant (Northern Europe: Germany, England, Scandinavia) - Evangelic, Lutheran, Calvinism, Baptist, Unitarian, Methodist, Anglican etc.

19/20th century:

new churches and denominations arise, mostly in USA, like Mormons, for example.