

Japanese Budo as seen through the Great East Japan Earthquake

Shiseikan Director
Araya Takashi

On March 11, 2011, the day on which the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred, Tokyo also observed tremors with a seismic intensity of level 5 (on the Japanese earthquake scale, which ranges from level 1: weak to level 7: devastation). Since trains and other traffic had come to a standstill, more than 3,000 persons took refuge at Meiji Jingu. One hundred and several tens of them could not return home and therefore stayed the night at the Shiseikan. That was the situation.

Thereafter, the dreadful state of the area struck by the disaster became clear; and it was recognisable that it was the greatest national state of emergency since the war.

From His Majesty the Emperor, we received the words "I believe it extremely important for us all to share with the victims as much as possible, in whatever way we can, their hardship in the coming days". Moreover, from March 15 onwards, the Emperor himself has continued to observe "voluntary power outages" by not using the electricity of the Imperial Palace for a fixed number of hours every day: Word leaked from the palace that he has been enduring the cold and has been eating dinner in the dark. Later, without considering his own health, the Emperor visited the shelters of each disaster-stricken area and spoke to the victims one by one. He also offered a prayer for the repose of the souls of the dead at the actual site of the disaster.

On the very day of the earthquake, the Japanese people's original heroic attitude became naturally visible in the disaster areas. It is the attitude of mutually helping each other, still more when hit by a great earthquake or giant tsunami, and of supporting the weak even sacrificing oneself. Moreover, I feel that since the outbreak of the disaster, the moral social standards of "family-like sense of community" and "altruistic virtues", which had been historically established by the Japanese people nationwide, have had a revival not only in the places hit by the disaster, but all over the country.

Indeed this "moral standard of giving priority to other persons or to the community rather than to oneself", can be called the crystallisation of the Japanese culture, which the Japanese people, with the emperor in the centre, have been nurturing since the founding of the nation by Emperor Jinmu.

When Emperor Jinmu, the first emperor, founded Japan, he aimed at building a family-like nation which gives top priority to the well-being of the people. He announced in imperial decrees to pay respect to the divine spirits, giving up the self and praying for the well-being of the people. The successive emperors over 125 generations inherited this intention of Emperor Jinmu and put it into practice. Furthermore, the people took this as an example and established a system of living based on cooperation and solidarity in small settlements centred around Shinto shrines. These are the social standards in the form of the Japanese traditional culture of sympathising with others and making efforts for the community, which could be observed in the Great East Japan Earthquake.

In Japanese mythology, the age of the deities leads without interruption into the age of man and is thus connected to the present age. Emperor Jinmu represents precisely the link between this divine age and the human age. His name as a divinity is "*Kamu-yamato-ihare-biko-no-mikoto*" (or *Kamu-yamato-iware-biko-no-mikoto*, "divine prince of Iware in Yamato"). His posthumous name, which was bestowed upon him later, is Jinmu Tenno. The "Jin" of Jinmu represents divine virtue ("sacred virtue

connected with divine spirits"), the "Mu" is also the "Bu" of Budo and represents tenacity, courage, and wisdom.

What is meant by divine virtue? In Japanese mythology, the divine spirit of the centre of the universe is called "*Ame-no-mi-naka-nushi-no-kami*" ("divine spirit of the centre of heaven"). As the respiration of this divine spirit of the centre, there is a tremendous power which "expands as *Taka-mi-musu-hi* (or *Taka-mi-musu-bi*, 'high producing spirit'), and then contracts as *Kamu-mi-musu-hi* (or *Kamu-mi-musu-bi*, 'divine producing spirit')". In other words, this is a tremendous power that releases explosive energy from the centre like the whole universe in the big bang, and then completely absorbs it again into the centre like a black hole. It absorbs and absorbs; and as soon as it finishes absorbing, it explodes again.

It is said that thus all things in the universe continue the process of creation in this all-embracing power: they absorb and swell, expand and contract, taking the centre as their reference point. This power, which, following the laws of the universe, creates all things in nature, is called divine virtue.

Furthermore, since all things which are generated in this process, inherently possess divine virtue, this is called *Naho-hi* (or *Nao-bi*, "the spirit that rectifies wrong"). The idea of mythology that such correcting spirit is present in each person, and that by undergoing purification anybody can revert to this rectifying spirit, is the core of Japanese culture.

As one of their characteristics, the Budo ("the martial ways") of Japan attach great importance to the point below the navel in the lower abdomen as the centre of mind and body. Accumulate and store the power in this point, which is the centre of the body; and then eject this power as if expanding it. So to speak, this is the description of a microcosmos inside the body. Therefore, first concentrate the power in the centre, then, when it overflows, it rises as externally effective power.

At the same time, depending on what you place into the core of your soul, the character of the power changes. The right or wrong of the core of mind and body at the time of concentrating the power in the centre gives the out-going energy the character of right or wrong. It can be said that if there is the character of rectifying spirit in the core of the mind, this power will be righteous power.

In other words, if you want to develop righteous power, first of all make sure to place the power of the rectifying spirit into your centre.

However, every day we attract impurities. Misfortune, sins, and impurities stick to mind and body. If there is no intention to purify this state by oneself, the impurities finally become irremovable.

In order to cleanse away these impurities, we personally perform purification. This thought of personally conducting purification is very important. The purification is not depending on the deities. It is necessary to make an effort to purify oneself with the sacredness which is contained within oneself.

Moreover, even in the individual purification, the idea that it is sufficient to purify only oneself, is no good. It is important to make an effort to purify the society by purifying oneself. In other words, this means to correct oneself and to put this correction into practice in society.

Budo surely is purification. I think that the practice of Budo is a purification which is done by focusing again on one's rectifying spirit to the utmost extreme. First of all, this

means thoroughly purifying yourself. Second, it also means accumulating Bu (tenacity, courage, wisdom) as a power which purifies an opponent in case a person has appeared who is penetrated by malice.

In other words, training Budo means training day after day, constantly keeping in mind one's own purification and at the same time also the opponent's purification.

In Japan we have suffered natural disasters due to major earthquakes or giant seismic sea waves frequently in history. However, at all such times, with the emperor of the respective era in the centre we have overcome the catastrophe and strengthened the social unity of the people. The basic reason for this is that each time the emperor has personally exposed himself directly to the same hardships as the people suffering from the disaster, and with complete devotion has conducted relief efforts for the victims. This is the power of the emperor's sincere heart, praying: "May the country be in peace, may the people be in peace."

I think that, through such central force of the emperor, it was possible to establish a strongly-united family-like society and a national morality which rejects "self-interest" and regards "altruism" as a virtue.

Under the influence of precisely such traditional culture, Japan's Budo has inherited the cultivation of the spirit of devoting oneself to "altruism".

It is not a military power which destroys others for the sake of selfish desires. It is the power of courage and wisdom, which is capable of sharing an altruistic moral sense and acts for the protection of the society. The martial techniques, which were developed from this power, prepared people for overcoming the fear of death, which accompanies "self-sacrificing selflessness". It is not a way of thinking which aims at self-salvation, saying for example that one would become happy in the other world (the afterlife). It is the readiness to sacrifice one's life for the sake of others in this world (the present life).

The spirit of regarding the service to the Whole as more important than one's own well-being is the spirit which comes from the rectifying spirit. In other words, this should be the same as the spirit of the deities.

I personally believe that a society in which each person serves others and the whole community is a better society than a society based on competition for individual profit. And I am convinced that for the realisation of such a society, the way of thinking and training of Budo is definitely useful.