



TAKEMUSU AIKIDO ASSOCIATION  
ITALY

# BUDO AND SYMBOLISM

In the Far East everything has a deep connection with symbolism. Ancient traditions and customs still co-exist with the most advanced technological progress and modernity. Even in these contemporary days, when man seems to be more and more projected towards esotericism, survives an unaffected world where the most noble and knightly virtues can still inspire us: it is *Budo*.

*Budo* means "the way of peace through the practice of Martial Arts". This word comes from *BUSHI* (referring to the nobleman, the knight, protector and guardian of the established order, guarantor of justice and the holder of the highest ethics and morals: he is the keeper of the Temple) and *DO* (which denotes the Way, the search for spirituality). *Budo*, then, is the way followed by the knight, as the man that embodies the noblest virtues and applies these virtues to the service of society.

This subject is extensive and would require a long essay to be analysed carefully, so I will only describe the symbolic language of three important aspects of the initiation to *Budo*: the *dojo* (the place where the Way is practised), the *dogi* (the uniform for the Way) and the *reigi* (the Ceremony or Ritual).

The *dojo* is symbolically oriented in a way that Earth, Man and Universe can be harmoniously integrated. In its inner space there are some particular areas symbolically connected with special energies, entities and numbers.

In the middle of the northern wall there is the *Shinza*, that literally means "place where resides the Heart-Spirit", or "residence of Gods". In this area there is an altar (*Tokonoma*), above which a holy calligraphy is posted and where the swords (*katana*) and other holy objects used in the rituals are placed. The *Shinza* has to be deeply respected by the initiated, because it spiritually represents the existence of the Original Spirit: it is the *Sancta Sanctorum* ("Holy of Holies") of the *dojo*. The *Shinza* is the place where the subtle energies deriving from the Original Heart-Spirit communicate with those of the Individual

Heart-Spirit of each practitioner. This flowing together of energies forms the *eggogore* (or "group energy") of *Budo*.

The *Shinza* is the anti-chaos, because it represents the Cosmic Order emanated by the Creator. To the right of the *Shinza* is the *Kamiza*, literally "the place where reside the spirits of fire and water". The *Kamiza* symbolizes the elements of nature: in the eastern tradition the element Fire-Creativity is placed southwards and it is related to summer; the Metal-Intuition is sited westwards and is associated to autumn; the element Water-Wisdom is located northwards and is linked to winter; the element Wood-Imagination is placed eastwards and is connected to spring; the Earth-Will is positioned in the center. The *Kamiza*, in addition to the mythical union of fire, water and the other elements, represents the blending of the male and female, of love and spirit.

To the left of the *Shinza* is the *Shimoza*, the place where the spirits of the ancestors are preserved. It symbolizes the power of the past, the basic experience of the evolution of all human beings, animals and vegetables. The union of *Shinza-Kamiza-Shimoza* is a trinity that should be compared to that of the universal esoteric discipline.

To the south, there is the *Hikae Seki* that literally means "place where notes are taken": it is the place reserved for the students, the apprentices, and novices, those who wish to be initiated. It is the place connected with the female, to the receptive and, in fact, it is reserved for those students that need the teaching of the Master (*Sensei*), who instead stays north, in front of the *Shinza*, the area linked to the male and the emission.

A central line symbolically cuts the dojo into two parts, right and left, east and west. It is called *Seitchu Sen*. It represents the axis of the visible world, the horizontal, the plane of the manifestation of humanity on earth. It is the symbol of the interaction between heaven and earth. To the right of this line seat the most skilled practitioners, to the left those who are inexperienced. Traditionally the dojo is not heated in order to perceive the climatic variations and scents of the seasons.

The dojo is blessed by purification (*misogi*) and exorcism (*hara*) rites, to invite beneficial spirits (*kami*) and drive out hostile entities. A ritually consecrated dojo is a protected place, with its own soul, a place where the practice can be safe, far from indiscreet glances, unfavourable influences from the profane world and the sulphur emanations from the invisible and evil worlds. The dojo is a holy enclosure, a magic protecting circle, which allows spirited people to carry on their own personal research and improvement.

Altruism, or respect for others and gratefulness for the teacher, should reign in the dojo. These feelings, called *kansha*, should also express thankfulness to all the other practitioners. The *deshi* (apprentices) listen to the Master in silence and are receptive. He must be as transmitting as possible, open his heart with joy and compassion and give without any reservation. The only enemy to be killed is selfishness, a feeling that divides, a true and scary demon. Only he who gives can receive: this is what distinguishes a true Master.

The word *dogi* is composed of *DO*, which means "way", and *GI*, which means "dress" or "uniform". It is, then, the uniform for the practice of the Way. This clothing consists of the *keikogi* (white cotton pants and jacket), the *obi* (black or white belt) and *hakama* (black, blue or white large divided skirt).

Before wearing the *dogi* you are required to remove your street clothes in silence. This, symbolically, means to remove the negative aspects and influences of the profane world. You then change into the uniform for the practice of the Way with the right attitude, looking for any qualities that are lacking.

The *keikogi* is white, to symbolize integrity, honesty and morality. White also represents the light, knowledge, intelligibility and virginity. Physically, it is related to the sunlight, which can be separated into all the colours of the Way by a prism. White is the symbol of the origin. Balancing the three faces of the human prism (the intellectual one, which leads to the truth; the emotional one, which leads to love; the physical one, which leads to wisdom), it is possible to display the colours or virtues included in the white light.

The jacket should be worn by first putting on the right sleeve; the correct procedure is also the same for the pants and the *hakama*, putting the right leg in first. The right side indicates justice, sincerity and reason ("moral uprightness" refers, in fact, to good people). Conversely, the left side is connected to intuition, love, sensibility, but also to darkness, insincerity and simulation (a bad person is often said to be a "sinister" man).

The *obi* (belt) is wound around the stomach clockwise or from left to right. It should be noted that clockwise movements are used in the rituals of natural magic, while anticlockwise movements are used in the rituals of black magic.

The wrapping motion of the belt blends the solar and lunar aspects of the individual. The OBI also indicates the center (*hara*), which is about two centimeters below the navel, where the charka of the source of the holy fire (*seika tanden*) is located. The knot of the belt is a true-love knot and symbolizes the figure of a horizontal "8" ( $\infty$ ), the sign of infinity. This symbol represents the evolution of human beings and the renewing of energies, moving in all directions, the infinite wandering of the human spirit looking for the alchemical wedding with the universal soul. The knot also stands for the passive mind receptiveness in front of the creating activity of the Divine. The knot of the OBI reminds us of the love-knots of the Masonic temple, symbols of brotherhood, the keeping and preservation of mysteries.

The *hakama* is traditional clothing: it is the first distinctive sign of being a member of the *Bushi* (knight) category. It may be worn from the *shodan* (black belt) rank onwards. At the same time, whoever is allowed to wear the *hakama* is invested with great responsibilities and duties. First and foremost they are: loyalty, courage, respect, compassion and honesty. These are virtues that distinguish the true knight. The highest ranks (from 6<sup>th</sup> *dan* onwards), if awarded with the title of *Shihan* (meaning "person to be

imitated"), may wear a white *hakama* - the symbol of having attained integrity. The knot of the front ties of the *hakama* is in the shape of a cross - the symbol of activity and hard study. It is the union of horizontality and verticality, passive and active, male and female. It is the symbol of the unification of opposites. This cross-shaped knot is in front of the *seika tanden* - the charka where the source of the holy fire is.

The *reigi* (ceremony or ritual) includes all attitudes, behaviours and salutations practiced in the dojo. Rituality is the most important aspect of all initiation schools. As stated above, the dojo is a place consecrated to looking for the Way, but this consecration is of no use if not protected and granted by a traditional rituality, that aims to make the moral implications survive and be implemented. The rituals are different in relation to each level of work and study and they should be lived and meticulously respected.

Each traditional martial art has its own specific etiquette, but there are some common points: bowing in a standing position (*ritsurei*) or sitting on knees (*zareii*) to the dojo, to your partner and to the weapons. When entering the dojo and the area dedicated to practice, you should always step in with the right foot. In addition to the already explained meanings of the right side, it is to be added that advancing with the right foot signifies a voluntary action that is inspired by noble feelings that emphasize virtues such as loyalty, courage, justice and integrity.

To sit properly in *seiza*, first bring the left knee down to the mat to symbolize your intention to sacrifice the qualities related to the material world and resign yourself from all negative influences.

Another common point in all BUDO is distance, or *maai*. This word is composed of *MAA*, which means "space-time", and *AI*, which means "harmony". It represents the necessary ideal space to achieve complete harmony with one's partner. It is the supreme place where conflicts can be peacefully resolved respecting the Divine Order.

The more skilled the practitioner (Master), the greater the distance, because the skilled practitioner can bridge the distance with his spiritual lightning, and it is because of this that direct contact in respect of conflict is useless. The potential enemy will be radiated by a whirlpool of love and compassion that transforms him into a better being, to develop a society based on tolerance and cooperation with each other.

A true ritual cannot be kept if it is not based on a trusting mood. An ideal environment allows the development of a mutual sincerity and paranormal faculties related to extra sensory and intuitive perceptions (*haragei*). Thanks to these powers, the intentions, feelings, thoughts and the very being of one's partner can be understood and, finally, an agreement - which is the reflection of the universal harmony on earth - can be found.

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