



TAKEMUSU AIKIDO ASSOCIATION
ITALY

SAKURA



The blooming of the cherry blossom (*sakura*) is one of the most breathtaking and amusing natural spectacles to be observed in Japan and is considered the most moving phenomenon of beauty. Falling on the Vernal Equinox (or Spring Equinox, occurring on or about March 21st), it becomes the symbol of renaissance, beauty and regenerating power. Moreover, in Japan the blooming of the cherry blossom precedes the time for rice planting, which is so vital for this country, and so it provides important information about the future harvest, also becoming in this way a symbol of prosperity and magnificence for Japan itself. During the wedding ceremony an infusion of cherry tree blossoms is served to wish a never-ending happiness. This sense of prosperity and happiness of the earthly existence refigures the blessedness out of time.

The peculiarities of *sakura* are deeply connected with the Japanese knighthood tradition. Being the symbol of innocence and integrity, the *sakura* represents the knighthood ideal and the *Bushi* (knight) himself. Because it is broken off from the branch and dies when at its utmost splendour, *sakura* is the emblem of the Samurai for excellence. In a similar way, in fact, the Samurai - an uncorrupted man who embodies such noble virtues as innocence, honesty, loyalty, devotion, courage, and faithfulness in one ideal - leaves his life falling on the battlefield in the flower of his youth.

In Japan the following saying is very famous: "*Hana wa sakura gi, hito wa Bushi*" - "the (best) flower the *sakura*, the (best) man the Samurai". The *sakura*, such an ephemeral and fragile flower, swept away early by the wind, but whose beauty remains untouched, represents the symbol of a highest death, distant from the earthly richness and the precariousness of existence.

The cherry fruit is the symbol of the warrior vocation of the Samurai and of the destiny he should be prepared for: to open the red pulp of the cherry to reach its

hard stone or, in other words, to sacrifice his own blood and flesh to work up to the corner stone of the human being.

The emblem of the Samurai was the cherry flower orientated toward the rising sun, as symbol of the devotion of their lives. The *saya* (scabbard) of their *katana* (sword) were often decorated with cherries, symbol of the searching for the invisible following of the inner path.



The flower of cherry, as the classic symbolic rose, has five petals. A great deal could be written about the symbolic meaning of the number 5, but I would like to touch upon only a few points concerning this topic.

The number 5 represents the total of an even number 2, and an odd number 3. The number 2 represents the earthly principle and the number 3 the divine principle, so their sum lends unity, entirety, wholeness, harmony and balance to the resultant number. The numbers 2 and 3 not only represent the worldly and spiritual principles, but also bad and good, death and life, female and male, chaos and order, materiality and spirituality, the occult and the manifest world. Because the number 5 is the total of 2 and 3, consequently it is the sum of those opposite qualities that are linked and integrated in the universe. The number 5 brings to mind the joyful Mysteries of Rosary (Annunciation, Visitation, Incarnation, Presentation and Disputation), the sorrowful Mysteries (Agony, Scourging, Crown of thorns, Sentence and Death) and the glorified Mysteries (Resurrection, Ascension, Descending of the Holy Spirit, Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin Mary).

Furthermore, the flower with five petals reminds us of the five-pointed star, the man inside the pentagram, symbol of microcosm. In the Chinese tradition the Earth is seen as the centre of four cardinal regions. Japanese esoteric Buddhism make out five orients, that is to say four cardinal points and the centre. Five are the elements of Japanese cosmology: earth, water, fire, wind and space. Five are the levels of knowledge.

As a final point, the number 5 is the symbol of man and of the divine, in which the earthly and spiritual dimensions blend together becoming one.

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