

Centre, Circulation and Musubi(産霊) - the spiritual force of generating and raising everything Connection between Shinto(神道) and Budo(武道)

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1 The universe according to Shinto(神道) - as a premise of Budo(武道)

As in Judaism and Christianity, Japanese Mythology also begins with the creation of the world. In the centre of this creative energy field sits the first Kami called “Ame-no-minaka-nushi-no-kami” (天之御中主神(あめのみなかぬしのかみ)) whose name means “Heavenly Ancestral God of the Originating Heart of the Universe”. What’s really interesting about this genderless God is that it did not “create” the world from the outer space as such but rather, it became the universe itself. And the central energy of Ame-no-minaka-nushi-no-kami(天之御中主神) kept expanding exponentially. This Big-Bang-esque exploding energy itself was another Kami called “Takami-musubi-no-kami” (高御産巢日神(たかみむすびのかみ)), a deity of productivity. There was another powerful force that centralized and sucked all the energy in, just like a Black Hole. This force was the third Kami named “Kami-musubi-no-kami” (神御産巢日神(かみむすびのかみ)). The creative activities of the universe began with these three Kami of the creation.

According to “Kojiki” (古事記), the oldest extant chronicle in Japan, this continual activity of creating all matter through the circulation and restoration of expanding energy and contracting energy is described plainly as “And the next Kami was…”, “and the next Kami was”…

It implies that you and I exist as a part of this ever-lasting and continuing birth and rebirth of countless Kami, deities. In other words, the creation of the world triggered by those three Kami still continues today. And it could be thought that you and I are taking over the divine task right here, as I speak.

If we carry out properly this activity of creating the universe, which has been passed on to us from generation to generation, our children shall take it over from us. Through the continuation of this process, human society lives on eternally in the universe. Such is the universe, mankind and human society according to Japanese Mythology.

Among those three Kami of the creation of the universe, Takami-musubi-no-kami and Kami-musubi-no-kami are called using the word Musubi(産巢日=産霊(むすび)), which means “the spiritual force of generating and raising everything”. Musubi(産霊) is a pure non-material energy responsible for creative activities.

Here is one simple example; our act of reproduction and the consequent birth of a new life is quite literally an act of Musubi(産霊). Incidentally or perhaps not so incidentally, “Musubu” (むす(産霊)ぶ) is a verb “to tie” in Japanese language. So, when a man’s heart and a woman’s heart are “tied”, a new life is born. The birth is thought to be the Hi(霊(ひ)), which means “the life force”, given a physical vehicle to manifest in this world. Therefore, a male body that has been bestowed Hi(霊(ひ)) is named “Hiko” (霊子(ひこ)=彦) which means “a life-force-child” and a female body with Hi(霊(ひ)) is “Hime” (霊女(ひめ)=姫) - “a life-force-princess”.

In Far-East Asia, including Japan, we do not see a human as a mere physical being but as a spiritual entity that inherits the very energy that created and continues to create the whole universe. Traditionally, our age at birth is said to be one, as opposed to zero, because we consider the moment of birth as the moment of conception, rather than the moment of delivery.

Most of you must have heard the word “Genki” (元気). Now, Genki(元気) is a very powerful original energy that was bestowed upon us when we were born. So long as we maintain our Genki-ness, we will keep growing. Losing our Genki-ness means our original energy is exhausted and it will arrest our mental and spiritual growth. The latter, a state of powerlessness, a non-constructive state, leads to Kegare(穢れ), where the spirit is tarnished.

In Shintoism, the supreme virtue is to take part in constructive activities for the whole, and to keep producing something. When we ceases to engage in constructive activities and become lethargic, we are in the state of Kegare(穢れ), or our spirit is tarnished.

On the other hand, even if our original energy is intact, when that energy is undisciplined and, consequently, arrests other people’s development and interferes with the creativity of the whole, the act itself is named “Toga” (罪・咎 (とが)), a sin, and the mental state of such an individual is called “Magatsuku” (禍 (まが) つく), loosely translated as “catastrophe”. Such actions and mental state are condemned by the whole universe.

A human is born, lives and perishes in the universe. Death, however, merely implies our physical vehicle is finishing its role. Our soul will live on. Hence, in the Shinto funeral, the deceased returns to a pure energy called “Mikoto”(命 (みこと)), the literal translation of which is “life”. For instance, when I die, I will just convert to Araya-takashi-nomikoto(荒谷卓命 (あらやたかしのみこと)) and continue to exist in the same world. In Shinto, there is no other world or heaven. The living and the dead coexist in the same world - this world. When one dies, one ceases to be a physical being. However, one’s soul, which is a non-material energy, turns into “Mikoto” (命 (みこと))and exists forever in the cosmic field.

To mankind, the act of “Musubi” (産霊 (むすび)), the consummation of a man and a woman, means taking the crucial role of cosmic activity resulting in creating a new life. Such an act is absolutely correct. When a man and a woman become one, and she gives birth to a child who will continue the eternal process of creation, it is to be celebrated by society, the whole world and the whole universe.

That being said, giving birth to a child is not the only creative activity one can engage in. Today’s social complexity means circumstances sometimes do not allow some people to be blessed with a child.

However, one can still be engaged in creative activities anywhere, and in many ways. Creative activities are everywhere in abundance - for example, any self-motivated activities, teaching and supporting others, nature conservation and vitalization, agricultural production, volunteer activities, sharing knowledge with other people to improve their lives, and so forth.

When each and every one of us produces not just physical goods but also share skills to produce them, we produce an energy called hope. That is how we ought to live - making the most out of our lives.

When our physical bodies reach the end of their journey, we shall all return to Mikoto(命 (みこと)), pure life. However normal and eventless our life may appear, so long as we practice the act of “Musubi” (産霊 (むすび)) as much as the circumstances allow, we have duly performed our duty.

The idea of “Musubi” (産霊 (むすび)) is present in Budo(武道). For instance, in Kenjutsu(剣術), pressing each other’s sword or Katana(刀) is dubbed as “Kiri-musubi” (斬りむすび). Although we are engaged in a life-threatening duel, the prime spiritual objectives of Kiri-musubi is not to slay the opponent. This may sound paradoxical, but, to perform Kiri-musubi is to tie up the opponent’s weapon and turn each other’s vast destructive energy to slay one another into something creative and constructive.

The ideology behind it is, beyond the extreme kill-or-be-killed circumstances, to let there be a constructive force that seeks coexistence.

Nature has a healing and embracing tranquility. At the same time, it has an overwhelmingly violent side as we witnessed in the earthquake and tsunami on the 11th of March 2011 in Japan. The repetition of harmony and conflict is unavoidable even in a relationship between humans as we cannot escape from being a part of nature.

It is, therefore, pointless to argue whether one likes or hates war and peace. Arguing whether one likes or hates a tsunami is not going to prevent it.

What is important is when we are left with absolutely no alternative but to pick up a weapon and fight, we must always remember, even during the bloody duel, that, above all, we are here to pave the way to mutual prosperity and coexistence. That is the philosophy of Budo(武道).

Budo is different from martial arts which merely teach technical skills to fight effectively. It is different because of the aforementioned ideals behind it. If all there is to your duel is to kill and destroy, sooner or later, our society will be devastated and annihilated.

Seeking constructive actions is not only for times of peace but also for times of war and conflict is the true essence of Budo. That is the reason the Japanese chose to use the word “Musubi” (むすび) in Budo.

In other words, let there be “Wa” (和), “harmony” in times of peace as well as in times of war. Our ideal, our aim, is to embrace our enemy and find solidarity which will lead us to the way to coexist.

This is all based on Shinto(神道) which preaches that the universe was born as one. Hence, we, the whole world, can and must come together as one. According to Shinto, we are designed, as well as designated, to create a better world.

2 Our centre and circulation of energy - Budo's significance

As I have been telling you, the theory of the creation of the universe according to Shintoism is thus; first, the energy's core was formed, then the circulation and restoration of the energy based around the centre commenced, and it has been continuing since then, and will continue eternally.

The structure of a planet, as well as the structure of an atom, is an energy system with a core or a nucleus. One could say every matter in this universe, from macro to micro, shares a rather similar, nearly identical, basic structure. Therefore, it is natural to assume that humans are also made of a similar energy system. Budo's view on physics and spirituality are based on this energy system in our core.

The centre of our body and mind in Budo is considered to be in a place called the “Seika Tanden” (臍下丹田). The “Seika Tanden” is located in the centre of our body, between the bellybutton and the pubic bones, perhaps slightly below, on the line that connects the sacrum and the pubic area, in the lower part of the spinal cord. It is at the bottom of our upper body. “Tanden” (丹田) means an agricultural field (den(田)) with soil made of “Ki” (気) energy (tan(丹)). This is where our “Ki” (気) or spiritual energy is generated.

Therefore, non-decaying force is called “Tanryoku” (た ん 力). In the spiritual context, “Seika Tanden” is often referred to as “Hara” (肚 (はら)). For example, when we make a big decision, we say “Hara o kimeru” (肚を決める) - “Hara” chooses its way - , and when we discuss openly and honestly, we say “Hara o watte hanasu” (肚を割って話す) - open up our “Hara” and speak.

When we say “bring your force from your Hara” or “advance with your Hara” during Budo(武道) practice, we mean both the “Seika Tanden”, the physical centre of your body, as well as “Hara” (肚 (はら)) the centre of your spiritual force. The important point is to think of the centre of body and mind as one.

There is no organ called the “Seika Tanden” (臍下丹田), as you may know. What is referred to as the “Seika Tanden” is the strong energy field created in the centre of our body by concentrating our energy called consciousness.

I chose the word “consciousness” but perhaps it should be called “mind”. The word “centre” in Japanese is “Chu-shin” (中心) - the direct translation of which is “centre of heart and mind”. So, any centre is the concentrated point of conscious energy created by and in our mind.

How do we create “Chu-shin” (中心), our centre? First, apply abdominal breathing, breath in and pressurise the inside by inflating your stomach. Next, while maintaining the pressure from within, breath out as you put pressure on your stomach from the outside. When an adequate pressure is applied from the inside and the outside, your lower abdomen becomes extremely tense, and starts to generate incredible force. If you experience and master this, by repeating it, you will become aware of the movement of your own Tanden(丹田). Gradually, you will be able to breath by inflating and deflating your “Tanden” - this is called “Tanden breathing”.

Meditation or Zen(禪) meditation is an act of concentrating one’s consciousness. However, they do not usually entail any physical movements.

A difficult aspect of Budo is that we have to fight physically whilst maintaining the centre of our mind and body. How do we produce our force while maintaining the centre of our mind and body? How does this work?

First of all, it should be emphasized that these two issues are inseparable. The force we concentrate in our centre is to be applied to the outer world. One could say it’s the unity of Yin and Yang. It may be helpful to imagine the flow of torus-shaped energy - like the shape of a half-cut apple. The energy released from the core of the apple flows out from the end, yang, and flows back to the core through the stem, yin. It is a circular energy. When one sees the flow from above, the energy concentrates in the centre endlessly, like a black hole. When one sees the flow from below, the spring of energy flows out endlessly from the core, like the Big Bang. This circulating energy produced in the centre flows, restores and revitalises itself endlessly. If an opponent enters your torus-shaped field of circulating energy, it works as a force against him or her.

The force that circulates and restores itself and the force that goes inwards - those are the forces mostly used in Japanese Budo. They are beyond words and the only way is to experience them.

That said, there is one example which is visually self-explanatory. It is Kenjutsu(剣術). In Kashima-no-tachi(鹿島の太刀), using the long sword, the sword moves in a circle.

This is the circulation of the self-restoring-and-revitalizing torus energy generated by the Ki(気) from our core represented by the sword. The circulation and restoration/revitalisation continue. There is no end. All movements are the continual circulation of the energy coming from the centre.

When the energy is trapped in one place and stagnates, it naturally decays. The universe and non-material matters such as air are themselves an energy-circulation field. Even a piece of mineral maintains its solidity due to some kind of circulation on the elementary particle level. Water goes bad when it stops circulating or flowing.

Therefore, the only way for any energy to avoid decay is to circulate continuously. Humans also generate new energy by circulating the energy within, and letting the external energy in by being in contact with nature, engaged in society or communicating with other people.

Another important point here is to always maintain an intact core. Your core is where your energy is produced as well as the driving force of the energy circulation and restoration. When your core collapses, your energy stagnates, dissipates and starts to decay rapidly. In order to keep generating force, you must exchange energy with nature and society, again, while keeping your core intact.

In Bujutsu(武術) terms, we maintain “Seika Tanden” (臍下丹田) firmly, and harness the opponent’s aggressive

energy while being attacked.

Let's apply this to Budo. Whilst firmly establishing our objectives in life, we also accept different views and values and embrace assimilation. It is the basis of every aspect of life.

It reflects Japanese' tendencies to epitomise the principle of the creation of the universe and the nature's unifying circulation within ourselves. These traditional views on universe, nature and human are deeply rooted in Budo. Paradoxically, by nurturing our mind and body through Budo training, we learn the fundamental truth of nature, the earth and the universe.

Allow me to speak a little more about Budo training.

When training "Waza" (技) or technique in Bujutsu(武術), always be aware that our central force is constantly working downwards in order to improve the stability of our body. That is why we always say, "drop your hip" or "lower your centre of gravity".

However, having your hip or centre of gravity lower than the opponent is not everything. It must feel as though the earth is constantly pulling your core. In other words, no tension in your legs, and your knees and ankles should be totally relaxed.

When we get nervous or excited, our centre of gravity tends to move upwards without us realizing it, and our stability is lost. When our stability is lost, our "Waza" (技) are no longer effective and we may eventually be thrown down by the opponent. Our physical stability, therefore, is closely correlated with our mental stability.

No matter how strong our core is, if our muscles are over-strained, our movements become stiff which renders us vulnerable. When our body is over-strained, our force is dispersed to various body parts such as neck, shoulders, elbows, wrists, knees or ankles when instead the force should be centralized in the "Tanden" (丹田). This interferes with the circulation of our central energy.

Hence, it is crucial to relax every part of our body, save for the centre, in order to attain a supple body. Legs must be relaxed and no unnecessary force or tension held in our shoulders, arms or any part of our upper body. That way, we can absorb the attacker's force. And centralized and concentrated force can be utilized much more effectively. When our mind and body attain such state, by just moving our abdomen a little, the force is immediately transmitted to the extremities of our body and we can floor the attacker very easily.

This principle can be applied to the realm of the mind. By maintaining our mental centre firmly whilst adopting different ideas flexibly, we can attain the mental strength needed to make the right decision under an extreme condition or tremendous pressure.

The reason we emphasize the importance of mental strength in Budo is because, only through the mental training, can our central force be shaped. When energy is accumulated through evil or negative thoughts, the nature of the energy becomes evil and negative. The energy formed thus divides people and interferes with the growth of people, society and nature. Therefore, it is our duty as well as our main reason for training Budo to create energy that is sane, that assists the growth of the whole, that helps our society and people.

3 Being in the centre of time - to create is to act now

There is a concept of time named "Naka-ima" (- literally "in the middle of now" or "being in the present- " 中今 (なかいま)) in Shinto. "Naka-ima" (中今 (なかいま)) implies that the present is the consolidation of the past, since the creation of the universe, and also the eternal future. Time is the dimensional axis that indicates the growth of the universe and the trace of the creative energy. The past becomes the present and the future is born from the present.

The present is the moment in which every creative activity which has occurred in the universe has been

aggregated.

The present is the moment when we engage in an activity that shapes the future universe.

For the present to aggregate all the activities we engage in and form a total, unified force, we require time.

As we all know, many of the stars we see in the sky at night exist no longer. What we are gazing at is the trace, the proof that those stars once existed and lived. The energy that those ancient stars radiated is still affecting us after billions of years. This leads to the conclusion that the energy of the past still exists in the present.

Energies that were born in different places, in different times, encounter each other and unite, somewhere, sometime. Time integrates the distant individual energies as the single history of the universe.

When we look at everything we see in that way, we realize that the wishes of the people who lived in the past are present alongside us as a force, and our own wishes, even though they may not produce any effects or result in our life time, may shine even brighter than ever in the future. Time, therefore, transcends space and ages and unites our individual constructive activities.

To value and honour the present is to give meaning to everything that occurred in the past, and to build a foundation for better future.

To waste the present is to waste not only our own activities, but also those of the whole human race and mother nature, as well as destroying the future of our children and their children. Doing our utmost for others in each given moment constitutes an important reason we were born into this universe.

Physically, it is impossible for every one of us to be united as one. However, our spirits, hearts, and souls can. Our collective wish to take part in the growing of the human race and of nature may resonate not only in the heart of our contemporaries but also those who live in different ages and will eventually unite all the people as one.

I, therefore, trust that if every one of us should unite our mental force which we are here to train, we shall bring a ray of light to the history of mankind.

Thank you.