

Bushido (Chivalry) and the Traditional Japanese Moral Education

Nozomu Sonda
Yamaguchi, Independent Scholar

Abstract

"Bushido" was written in 1900, in response to questions often asked by his Western wife and colleagues. In this work he eloquently explains the very heart of traditional Japanese moral education inculcated to samurais and their families, referring to some major "virtues" of Japanese. Incidentally, the late Hand of the Cause of God Ruhíyih Khanum lavished her praise on Japanese listing many wonderful qualities and virtues she observed on her visit to the country back in the 1970's. This study will explore the Japanese virtues explained by Nitobe in contrast and comparison with the Baha'i perspective on moral education.

Introduction

“Chivalry is a flower no less indigenous to the soil of Japan than its emblem, the cherry blossom.”

In 2003 a Hollywood movie *The Last Samurai* was released and became a big hit. It featured a superstar like Tom Cruise and also introduced a Japanese star Ken Watanabe to the international film scene, attracting a great deal of attention from media. However, the most salient feature of the movie was actually the spirit and thought that underlay it, namely, Bushido.

The timing of the appearance of such a movie seemed to be no coincidence to the present author. It was a time when Japanese people were enjoying the sentiment of traditional thought and spirit, recollecting the heroic times of the end of Edo Era when young samurais fought fearlessly for the sake of the country, preservation of old values and acceptance of new values. The time was apparently contrasted with the contemporary age when there are so many political scandals, deception, corruption and cowardice. The author recalls one commercial where a famous samurai (Sakamoto Ryoma) from the same period “appears” and makes a bitter comment on the current situation in Japanese society, implying that he would do things in a different way (and thus appealing to the company's service being advertised).. Around at the same time the author met a Japanese gentleman, who had just retired and said that he just started reading “Bushido,” thinking about what it meant and how he could make use of it. There was a need and craving for the revival of such traditional values and thoughts; Bushido seemed to be an epitome of this phenomenon.

In brief, as Captain Algren (Tom Cruise) learns in *The Last Samurai*, Bushido is not just a code of ethics for samurai warriors but rather a moral system and even a way of life for people in general, which influenced Japanese for centuries. It inculcates the importance of cultivating and practicing “virtues.”

Speaking of “virtues,” the author makes another recollection when the late Hand of Cause of God Ruhyyih Khanum made a visit to Japan in 1978 and made a comment that of all the peoples she had encountered the Japanese manifest the most of the virtues which Baha’u’llah exhorts us to acquire. As a member of the same ethnic group, the author feels a great honor to receive such a comment but at the same time regards it as a compliment for the purpose of encouraging the Japanese people to arise and serve the Cause of Baha’u’llah. Other peoples in the rest of the world must surely manifest as many virtues as the Japanese do, if not less. Having said this, there must be still something more or less special in the Japanese people that compelled her to make such a comment.

It is this point that motivated the present author to explore Bushido as a moral system and a source of Japanese virtues and to compare and contrast it with teachings of our beloved Faith. In this study, the background of Bushido will be first explained and then virtues which Bushido inculcates will be examined. Then we education and training based on Bushido will be described, including those of women. Finally, Bushido will be compared and contrasted with ideals, goals and objectives of the Baha’i Faith and implications to moral education in contemporary Japan will be discussed. .

What is Bushido?

Bushido was spontaneously developed over hundreds of years as a way of life for samurais. Thus we cannot categorically determine its origin. But we can roughly say that its origin somewhat coincides with the Kamakura Era (12th century), which was the beginning of the feudal system which was obviously the bedrock of Japanese swordsmanship. In order to further explore the origin, sources and background of Bushido, we will mainly rely on the masterpiece written by Inazo Nitobe, a Christian educationalist from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Inazo Nitobe

Nitobe was born in Morioka, Iwate in 1862. In his youth, he studied at Tokyo Foreign Language College and Sapporo Agricultural College and later at Johns Hopkins University in the U.S. and the University of Bonn in Germany. In 1891, he married Mary Elkinton, a fellow Quaker Church member, when he was 29 years old. After returning to Japan, he took up professorship at Sapporo Agricultural College. Then he published *Bushido* in 1900, later teaching at various major universities in Japan and also

-serving as Vice-Secretary General of the League of Nations and member of the House of Lords. In 1933 when he was attending the 5th Pacific Conference in Vancouver, Canada, he fell ill and passed away.

In his late teens, Nitobe was baptized as a Christian; then he determined to become “a bridge over the Pacific Ocean” which connects Japan and the West. In his mid-20’s he attended Quaker church while studying at Johns Hopkins University. There he met his future wife Mary.

Nitobe made great contributions in the educational field during the Meiji and Taisho Eras. He was also a champion in the international field while working for the League of Nations and an agency which was to later become UNESCO. In contrast, Japan was heading towards a military empire; the militia did not like such “a global-minded” person s Nitobe those days. His achievements were only recently acknowledged, symbolized by the fact that his iconography appeared in the new 5,000-yen bills.

The Book *Bushido*

His book *Bushido* was first published in English, whose first Japanese edition was prepared by Sakurai. Later Tadao Yanaibara revised the translation. Yanaibara was actually one of Nitobe’s students when the latter was principal of Daiichi High School in Tokyo. He was also a disciple of Kanzo Uchimura’s. Uchimura was in turn a classmate of Nitobe when both were students at Sapporo Agricultural College. Both signed “the covenant of those who believe in Jesus” introduced by W. Clark of the same college. These three, Nitobe, Uchimura and Yanaibara, are leaders of thought in the early 1900’s in Japan who had the Christian background.

The book was written essentially in response to countless questions about Japanese culture and society posed by his Western wife and colleagues. One time a Westerner commented, “Do you mean to say that you have no religious instruction in your schools? No religion! How do you impart moral education?”¹ At that time, Nitobe could give no answer, but later he gave much thought and concluded that all basic moral notions he had received came from *Bushido*. Thus he came to write this book.

Sources of *Bushido*

Buddhism

One of the main sources of bushido is Buddhism. Buddhism was introduced to Japan from India and via China and Korea. It taught a sense of calm trust in fate, a quiet submission to the inevitable, stoic composure in sight of danger or calamity and disdain of life and friendliness with death. One of its

¹ Nitobe, Inazo: *Bushido*, Tuttle Publishing, Tokyo, 2001. Preface, xi.

schools, Zen, had an especial impact on Bushido. According to Lafcadio Hearn², Zen can be defined as that “which represents human effort to reach through meditation zones of thought beyond the range of verbal expression”³

Shinto

Another source was Shinto, which is a Japanese indigenous religion. It stressed patriotism, loyalty, and obedience, teaching loyalty to the sovereign, reverence for ancestors and filial piety. Unlike the Christian thought, there is a lack of the dogma of “original sin.” In other words, Shinto teaches that a human heart is originally pure and good like a god and that it is a sanctified place where a god’s words are uttered. Thus the human heart must be revered. A mirror which is placed in the shrine’s penetralia symbolizes a human heart, which is believed to reflect the very image of Deity when calm and serene.

Confucianism

Yet another source is Confucianism which is a prolific source of ethics. It taught five moral relations between “master and servant,” “father and son,” “husband and wife,” “older and younger brother,” and “friend and friend.” It comprised politico-ethical precepts in an aristocratic and conservative tone. The writings of Confucius and Mencius were the principal textbooks for youths and the highest authority for the old. It also taught one to avoid being a book-smelling sot, as shown in a saying “To know and to act are one and the same” and words from the Bible “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”

Virtues of Bushido

Confucius says, “Let but a prince cultivate virtue, people will flock to him; with people will come to him lands; lands will bring forth for him wealth; wealth will give him the benefit of right uses. Virtue is the root, and wealth an outcome”⁴ Thus, virtue is the foundation of all things. In this section, we will analyze some virtues extolled and emphasized in bushido; namely, rectitude/justice, courage, benevolence, politeness, veracity/sincerity, honor, loyalty, and self-control.

Rectitude/justice

Rectitude is the most severe lesson and it “is the power of deciding upon a certain course of conduct in accordance with reason, without wavering;--to

² Lafcadio Hearn is a Greek writer of English, who moved to Japan in 1889, married to a Japanese woman and died in Japan in 1904.

³ Lafcadio Hearn. *Exotics and Retrospectives*. Tokyo: ICG Muse Publications, 2001 p. 84.

⁴ Nitobe, *Bushido*, 36-37.

die when it is right to die, to strike when to strike is right”⁵ Nitobe explains the significance of rectitude or sense of justice while contrasting it with the Christian concept of love: “...though love should be the only motive, lacking that, there must be some other authority to enforce filial piety; and they formulated this authority in Giri”⁶ He also warns, “Starting as Right Reason, Giri has...often stooped to casuistry. It has even degenerated into cowardly fear of censure”⁷. Thus for Nitobe, love is the highest form of virtue, without which one’s action can only be motivated by sense of justice, which is understandable judging from his Christian background. He then explains the role of courage which helps one to manifest rectitude in its highest potential: “It would have been easily turned into a nest of cowardice, if Bushido had not a keen and correct sense of courage, the spirit of daring and bearing”⁸

Courage: Spirit of Daring

Nitobe explains that “Courage was scarcely deemed worthy to be counted among virtues, unless it was exercised in the cause of Righteousness”⁹ pointing out the complementary functions of justice and courage. . He also states that “...valour and honour alike required that we should own as enemies in war only such as prove worthy of being friends in peace” and “When valour attains this height, it becomes akin to Benevolence”¹⁰, illustrating which point with the examples of Uesugi Kenshin and Takeda Shingen or Brutus and Antonius/Octavius. As it is said, “We Romans do not fight with gold, but with iron,” fight is not for greed for money but for a great cause, justice. Thus enemies are not what are to be hated but to be fought with respect. In this sense, they can become one’s true friends, as Nietzsche says, “You are to be proud of your enemy; then the success of your enemy is your success also.” During the samurai days, “Valour, Fortitude, Bravery, Fearlessness, Courage” were among the most popular qualities for the youths, giving great impact on character formation of the young.

Benevolence: The Feeling of Distress

Benevolence was considered “a princely virtue” as shown in the following words: “Love, magnanimity, affection for others, sympathy and pity, were ever recognized to be supreme virtues, the highest of all the attributes of the human soul”¹¹ This virtue posed a great contrast with justice and courage because “...benevolence was a tender virtue and mother-like. If upright Rectitude and stern Justice were peculiarly masculine, Mercy had the

⁵ Ibid 23.

⁶ Ibid 26

⁷ Ibid 27

⁸ Ibid 28

⁹ Ibid 29

¹⁰ Ibid 35

¹¹ Ibid 36

gentleness and the persuasiveness of a feminine nature”¹². The balance of these two virtues was very important to make the character whole. Thus, verse writing was encouraged to cultivate more subtle sentiments of soul.

Politeness

“Modesty and complaisance, actuated by respect for others’ feelings, are at the root of politeness”¹³. Politeness is yet another typical Japanese virtue; however, Nitobe makes sure that it is not a superficial display of adulation but a sincere expression of care and concern for others: “Politeness is a poor virtue, if it is actuated only by a fear of offending good taste, whereas it should be the outward manifestation of a sympathetic regard for the feelings of others. It also implies a due regard for the fitness of things, therefore due respect to social positions”¹⁴. He also gives an excellent explanation for the seemingly different practice of gift-giving between the Japanese and Western customs. That is, whereas Westerners present their gifts as wonderful and excellent items, Japanese give theirs saying they are poor and useless ones. Nitobe expounds that these two contrasting practices actually convey the same feeling and thought; they are just two ways of saying the same thing. In other words, Westerners focus on the great merit which their guest deserves; thus, they would say, “This is a nice gift: if it were not nice I would not dare give it to you; for it will be an insult to give you anything but what is nice.” On the other hand, Japanese would focus on the inadequacy of the gift they are presenting because the guest is just too great and wonderful for any gift we might come up with: “You are a nice person, and no gift is nice enough for you. You will not accept anything I can lay at your feet except as a token of my good will; so accept this, not for its intrinsic value, but as a token...”¹⁵. Both expressions stem from the feelings of respect for the guest; they manifest the same spirit of politeness. Only the cultural expressions differ.

Veracity and Sincerity

What makes the above virtue of politeness true and real, is sincerity. Nitobe warns, “Without veracity and sincerity, politeness is a farce and a show”¹⁶. This is reinforced by Date Masamune saying, “Propriety carried beyond right bounds becomes a lie” and Confucius saying, “Sincerity is the end and the beginning of all things; without Sincerity there would be nothing.” Words and deeds clothed with sincerity capture and move human hearts. This spirit is alive in modern Japanese society especially in the service industry. Stores that provide sincere service attract customers and thus prosper.

¹² Nitobe, *Bushido*, p.41

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.49

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.50

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.59

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.61

Honor

The sense of honor implies “a vivid consciousness of personal dignity and worth...”and it is “the immortal part of one’s self, what remains being bestial”¹⁷ (p.72, *Bushido*). The sense of shame was one of the earliest to be cherished in juvenile education. The following expressions were often used (and in fact are still used today) to appeal to the minds and hearts of the youths for their behavioral rectification: “You will be laughed at,” “It will disgrace you,” and “Are you not ashamed?” Samurais, in defense of this honor (or avoiding shame), would even go so far as to take their own lives (i.e., seppuku, disembowelment). Even in today’s society, leaders often resign from their posts if there are any disgraceful happenings in their jurisdiction. Some even commit suicide. In today’s world, such acts are not necessarily constructive. They may save their honor for the time being but not their companies and their employees. It may be even more honorable to remain in their posts and carry out necessary duties.

Loyalty

Homage and fealty to a superior is the distinctive feature of feudal morality. Personal fidelity is a moral cohesion existing among all sorts and conditions of men. “...it is only in the code of chivalrous honour that loyalty assumes paramount importance”¹⁸ (p.82, *Bushido*) and “Life being regarded as the means whereby to serve his master, and its ideal being set upon honour, the whole education and training of a samurai were conducted accordingly”¹⁹ (p.93, *Bushido*).

Self-Control

Showing “no sign of joy or anger” was considered a sign of a great character. Thus a samurai would show no emotion. This is also apparent in average family life today. A father would not hug his son because he considers it harmful to dignity and a husband would not kiss his wife in public. On the other hand, there is this “strange” phenomenon of “a Japanese smile.” That is, when in most severe trials, there is a tendency for Japanese to form a smile. The point in all these behaviors is not to show true emotion. Thus, self-control tends to exceed moderation. Self-control is in itself a wonderful quality. However, excess of this practice might result in confusion and frustration; it is not conducive to more humane interaction with others. Children also need to express themselves more freely in order to grow and develop in healthy manners.

Education and Training of a Samurai

¹⁷ Nitobe, *Bushido*, p.72

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.82

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.93

The foremost point in samurai educations was to build up character, leaving other subtler faculties of prudence, intelligence and dialectics in minor position. This point is fully expounded in the earlier sections of this paper. Having said this, philosophy and literature constitute the mainstay of intellectual training. Literature was pursued as a pastime and philosophy as a practical aid in the formation of character, if not for the exposition of some military or political problem. Other courses of training included fencing, archery, jujutsu/yawara²⁰, horsemanship, the use of spear, tactics, calligraphy, ethics, literature, and history.

Moreover, “The mental discipline which would nowadays be chiefly aided by the study of mathematics, was supplied by literary exegesis and deontological discussions”²¹ Francis Bacon listed three services of studies: delight, ornament, and ability. Bushido emphasized the ability purpose where the use of studies was in judgment and the disposition of business because “Learning without thought is labour lost; thought without learning is perilous.”

Since the most important goal of samurai education was character building, his teacher’s duty was basically spiritual: “When character and not intelligence, when the soul and not the head, is chosen by a teacher for the material to work upon and to develop, his [teacher’s] vocation partakes of a sacred character”²². In this respect, Nitobe makes a quite bitter and yet exact point, criticizing as follows:

The present system of paying for every sort of service was not in vogue among the adherents of Bushido. It believed in a service which can be rendered only without money and without price. Spiritual service, be it of priest or teacher, was not to be repaid in gold or silver, not because it was valueless but because it was invaluable.”²³

He believes that “the best service done in education,--namely, in soul development (and this includes the services of a pastor), is not definite, tangible, or measurable” and that “Being immeasurable, money, the ostensible measure of value, is of inadequate use”²⁴ This is a profound statement, giving much insight to today’s educational world. In today’s society, the teaching profession is often taken up by those who “had no where else to go” and teachers are often poorly paid. Thus, teachers are often poorly trained and less motivated. School teachers have the most difficult times these days as classrooms break down and children

²⁰ Jūjutsu meaning "gentle/yielding/compliant art") is a Japanese martial art whose central ethos is to yield to the force provided by an opponent's attack in order to apply counter techniques from the resultant ensuing situation see Wikipedia, “[Jujitsu](#)”,

²¹ Nitobe, *Bushido*, p.99

²² *Ibid*, p.100

²³ *Ibid*, p.101

²⁴ *Ibid*

misbehave. Teachers are at loss and often do not know what to do with the situation.

On the other hand, there is still that feeling of sacredness in the teaching profession. There is sense of respect. Students do look up to teachers to a certain degree. They do trust teachers. In turn there are teachers who are devoted to their profession and sacrifice themselves for the sake of students' growth and development. The difference between now and then is that there is much lack of sacredness in the profession. Teaching is taken up for more utilitarian purposes. Schools focus mostly on intellectual achievement. Teachers are thus regarded and treated as mere workers in the factory producing high-mark scores of students.

For Nitobe, teachers "were grave personifications of high spirits undaunted by adversity" and "an embodiment of what was considered as an end of all learning, and were thus a living example of that discipline of disciplines, self-control, which was universally required of samurai"²⁵. In other words, teachers were supposed to be moral leaders for their students. Because they were relatively free from monetary care, "Bushido itself could long remain free from a thousand and one evils of which money is the root"²⁶.

The Training and Position of Women

Since Bushido was basically intended for males, its training was masculine and the virtues extolled therein were also more or less masculine. It is quite interesting and helpful that Nitobe talks about education of women in relation to Bushido. The Bushido ideal of womanhood was pre-eminently domestic, though not confined to the so-called traditional Western view of female domain of activity: kitchen, church and children. Women in the samurai family were also taught to be Amazonian, that is, to make domestic usage of Bushido for child education and to protect their family from enemies. Women thus took up naginata (wooden swords) and learned to fight. At the same time, in order to purify their minds and hearts, women appreciated music and dance.

Women were also taught self-denial from childhood and learned to sacrifice themselves for their fathers, husbands, and children. This became the keynote of their domesticity. To them, service meant "to serve something higher than self." Just as their husbands served their lords, women served the needs of their fathers, husbands and children.

To samurais and their wives, marriage meant unity of man and woman; thus they would not insult or degrade each other. In this regard, Nitobe explain why Japanese husbands introduce their wives as lowly beings and never

²⁵ Nitobe, *Bushido*, p.102

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.99

praise them. He says that in Japan self-praise is considered poor taste and thus they do not praise their wives in public because they consider them as the same as themselves. Today, the concept of sexual equality is viewed differently in Japan in contrast with that of the West. What Western women might see as sexual inequality or even abuse is not necessarily felt as such by Japanese women themselves. They might even feel perfectly equal. It may be explained by the same one as posed by Nitobe.

Bushido and the Baha'i Faith

In comparing and contrasting Bushido and the Baha'i Faith, there are great similarities and distinct differences. In terms of the former, the strong emphasis on spiritual virtues, even over intellectual capacities and skills, is a common foundation. In terms of the latter, these virtues of Bushido are clearly confined to the Japanese culture and especially in the context of samurai swordsmanship whereas the Baha'i virtues are more universal and global, encompassing both women and men, young and old and peoples of all national and cultural backgrounds.

Acquiring virtues

One definite common factor to both Bushido and the Baha'i Faith is acquisition of virtues. In fact, acquiring virtues has always been the most important aspect of all religions. In the Koran, there are 99 names (or divine virtues) of God mentioned. Likewise, in the Baha'i Writings, there are numerous divine virtues and qualities mentioned throughout its Writings. A Baha'i virtue educator Linda Popov easily mentions more than 50 virtues for children and families to develop in her books whereas in fact she has identified a few hundred virtues in the process. The following are among such virtues mentioned in the Baha'i Faith:

Assertiveness, care, cleanliness, compassion, confidence, consideration, consultation, courage, courtesy, creativity, detachment, eloquence, enthusiasm, excellence, faithfulness, flexibility, forgiveness, friendliness, generosity, gentleness, helpfulness, honesty, honor, humility, idealism, joyfulness, justice, kindness, knowledge, loftiness, love, loyalty, mercy, might, moderation, modesty, obedience, orderliness, patience, peacefulness, prayerfulness, purposefulness, question, reliability, respect, responsibility, reverence, search, self-discipline, service, steadfastness, tact, thankfulness, tolerance, trust, trustworthiness, truthfulness, unity, utterance, will, wisdom,

Justice

Baha'u'llah says:

O SON OF SPIRIT! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice..... By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not

through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness.²⁷

Justice is definitely one of the most important virtues in the Baha'i teachings. With its aid one will see things as they are, not influenced by others' opinions. But the balance of weighing things comes from God Himself, as Baha'u'llah explains, "The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye."²⁸ In Bushido, the cause of justice is done in relation to loyalty to the lord whereas in the Baha'i Faith it is in relation to God Himself.

Courage

Just as explained under "Justice," the virtue of "courage" is also manifested in relation to God's teachings. Baha'u'llah says, "The source of courage and power is the promotion of the Word of God, and steadfastness in His Love"²⁹ In Bushido, justice and courage are in complementary relations, which is also confirmed in the Baha'i Faith; however, the most distinctive difference is that both virtues are directly founded upon Word of God and His teachings.

Benevolence

Just as love and affection are highly valued in Bushido, so are they in the Baha'i teachings. The Baha'i Faith emphasizes, once again the foundation of love coming from God:

The essence of love is for man to turn his heart to the Beloved One, and sever himself from all else but Him, and desire naught save that which is the desire of his Lord.³⁰

The essence of charity is for the servant to recount the blessings of his Lord, and to render thanks unto Him at all times and under all conditions.³¹

Similarly, the following virtues of Bushido are equally emphasized and extolled in the Baha'i Writings:

²⁷ Baha'u'llah: *Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah*. Trans. and arranged by Shoghi Effendi. Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982. Arabic Hidden Word, No. 3

²⁸ Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas*. Comp. The Research Department of the Universal House of Justice and trans. by Habib Taherzadeh with the assistance of a Committee Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1978, Words of Wisdom, 157.

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid p. 156

³¹ Ibid p.157

Politeness

O people of God! I admonish you to observe courtesy, for above all else it is the prince of virtues. Well is it with him who is illumined with the light of courtesy and is attired with the vesture of uprightness. Whoso is endued with courtesy hath indeed attained a sublime station. It is hoped that this Wronged One and everyone else may be enabled to acquire it, hold fast unto it, observe it, and fix our gaze upon it.³²

Sincerity

In these days truthfulness and sincerity are sorely afflicted in the clutches of falsehood, and justice is tormented by the scourge of injustice. The smoke of corruption hath enveloped the whole world in such wise that naught can be seen in any direction save regiments of soldiers and nothing is heard from any land but the clashing of swords. We beseech God, the True One, to strengthen the wielders of His power in that which will rehabilitate the world and bring tranquility to the nations.³³

Honor

The source of all glory is acceptance of whatsoever the Lord hath bestowed, and contentment with that which God hath ordained³⁴.

..... man's glory lieth in his knowledge, his upright conduct, his praiseworthy character, his wisdom, and not in his nationality or rank. O people of the earth! Appreciate the value of this heavenly word. Indeed it may be likened unto a ship for the ocean of knowledge and a shining luminary for the realm of perception.³⁵

Feminine Virtues

Although Bushido influenced and trained all people including women and civilians, it was essentially designed for male warriors who were ready to fight in the battle field. In contrast, Abdu'l-Baha states that humankind will acquire more feminine qualities in this new age:

The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is

³² Baha'u'llah, *Tablets*, Tablet of the World, p.88

³³ Baha'u'llah, *Tablets*, Tarazat, p.39

³⁴ Baha'u'llah, *Tablets*, Words of Wisdom, p.155

³⁵ Baha'u'llah, *Tablets*, Words of Paradise, p.68

already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals, or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced³⁶.

What is more important here is that Abdu'l-Baha talks about the balance of masculine and feminine qualities to be manifested in the civilization. In the Baha'i Faith, such qualities as utterance, eloquence, assertiveness and consultative attitude are also emphasized; these are relatively lacking in Bushido. Thus, humankind at large is expected to acquire more virtues in a harmonious manner. In other words, we need to be more "round" in virtues.

Universality of Virtues

Another major difficulty of Bushido, especially in contemporary society, is that its values are limited to the Japanese culture and in military context. If we simply talk about cultural values and norms, conflicts are inevitable. One culture says silence is gold and another says eloquence is gold. How do we reconcile the difference? After all, what we need most in this global age is the common foundation of values from which to work together in peace and harmony. The Baha'i Faith presents the very foundation we need; it is the new value system from God intended for this modern age. Although the Baha'i Faith emphasizes preservation and respect for cultural and individual diversity, it is so in the context of essential unity.

This "unity in diversity" is the ultimate goal of the Baha'i Faith. Some people worry that this idea of "unification" might lead to extinction of freedom and self-expression. On the contrary, the Baha'i Faith affirms that there will still be room for an infinite number of individual, local and national differences even they are all based on the common foundation. No, it is the very lack of common foundation that will eventually dissipate and destroy the beauty and greatness of diversity as its sings are apparent in today's chaotic society. The virtues extolled in the Baha'i faith are universal and applicable to all peoples.

Sources of Virtues

According to the Baha'i teachings, what determines right and wrong is the teachings of God. In contrast, according to Bushido, the balance of right and wrong comes from the lord samurais serve though the very foundation of values is based on the teachings of Buddhism, Shinto and Confucianism.

³⁶ Abdu'l-Baha, cited John Esselmont., *Baha'u'llah and New Era* by, Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1980. p.149 Originally in Star of the West, viii, No. 3,p. 4 [from report of remarks made aboard the S.S. Cedric on arrival in New York].

Nevertheless, the values are not necessarily clear-cut in Bushido. As depicted in *The Last Samurai*, the conflict was essentially in loyalty to the emperor or the merits of the Western civilization, not necessarily in the values and ideas themselves.

Thus, according to the Baha'i Faith, the source of all virtues is God. In fact, Baha'u'llah states that when God created humanity He bestowed divine virtues potentially into their souls:

O SON OF MAN! I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life.³⁷

Thus, the Biblical expression that God has created man in His image means that God has infused divine qualities into our souls potentially so that in accordance with our own volition and effort we may develop and cultivate these qualities. That is our duty. Abdu'l-Baha also confirms that our purpose of life is to acquire virtues³⁸

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Influence of Bushido on Japanese Society

Bushido was the root and flower of people; gifts from heaven flowed through samurais. They established the moral standard and guided people through their examples. Thus themes of performing arts were often taken from warriors' stories.

Bushido was originally initiated as an elite course for those soldiers to be; however, it also inspired the mass over time. Although the commons did not reach the same high standard of the warriors, the concept of "Japanese soul" permeated among the people, representing the entire ethnicity.

Bushido was often likened to cherry blossoms, the indigenous flower to Japan. Cherry blossoms possess grace and beauty and yet they are simple. Below the beauty, no blade or poison is hidden. Their color is no glamorous. Their odor is sweet, which floats and ascends to heaven. When the morning

³⁷ Baha'u'llah, *Hidden Words*, Arabic No. 4

³⁸ Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks*,. Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1978, p.177

sun rises, their odor spreads and freshens our senses. Similarly, Bushido is simple, beautiful and graceful and yet not glamorous but diffuses refreshing atmosphere to those around.

Future of Bushido

Bushido, which blossomed and guided the people for so long, however, had to eventually succumb to the trend of the times. When chivalry departed from the European feudalism, church protected warriors and chivalry thus prolonged its longevity. Japan, however, lacked in major religion to play the same role; Shinto which had sustained Bushido simply aged and Confucianism was replaced by Western philosophies. Plus, the modern war utilized completely different methods and weapons from those of Bushido. The life of Bushido was thus terminated rather quickly after the end of feudalism in the late 1800's.

Nevertheless, Nitobe claims that it was Bushido that acted as a moving force in the transformation witnessed during the Meiji Restoration. He explains that Japan did not simply look for material development and wealth accumulation, imitating the Western nations. It was the sense of pride which Bushido had cultivated among the masses that drove them to work hard and demonstrate what they could do once they put their mind to it. Industrial developments were simply results of their hard work.

Abdu'l-Baha also seems to acknowledge the Japanese virtue of hard working ethics and expects the Japanese to do the same for spiritual development as they did for material development:

Japan has made wonderful progress in material civilization, but she will become perfect when she will also make spiritual developments and the Power of the Kingdom become manifest in her.³⁹

The form of Bushido, however, reached an end after the Meiji Era started as shown in the recent movie *Last Samurai*. The underlying spirit nevertheless remained, which drove Nitobe to quote a prophecy uttered by his contemporary:

It has been predicted...that the moral system of Feudal Japan, like its castles and its armouries, will crumble into dust, and new ethics rise phoenix-like to lead New Japan in her path of progress.⁴⁰

Nitobe thus expected coming of a new moral system which will take over the outdated Bushido and guide Japan to a new path. But what might that be?

³⁹ Abdu'l-Baha, A Tablet written to Saichiro Fujita on May 29, 1907, in Barbara Sims (ed.) *Japan Will Turn Ablaze! Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha, Letters of Shoghi Effendi and Historical Notes about Japan*. Tokyo: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974., p.189

⁴⁰ Nitobe, *Bushido*, p.189

Christianity

As Bushido disappeared in its form, a possible ethical system that could have replaced it was Christianity. In fact, Nitobe himself was a Christian and so were his friend Uchimura Kanzo and his student Yauchibara Tadao, who were all great educators and thinkers representing the Meiji, Taisho and early Showa Eras. Nitobe said, "Christianity and materialism...will divide the world between them. Lesser systems of morals will ally themselves to either side for their preservation. On which side will Bushido enlist?"⁴¹

Thus, Nitobe apparently hoped that Christianity would take the place of Bushido. Yet, contrary to his wish, Christianity failed to spread among the Japanese masses. He gives the following analyses of the causes of this failure:

One cause of the failure of mission work is that most of the missionaries are entirely ignorant of our history.⁴²if presented in intelligible words...if expressed in the vocabulary familiar in the moral development of a people...[Christianity] will find easy lodgment in their hearts, irrespective of race or nationality."⁴³

Should a propagator of the new faith uproot the entire stock, root, and branches, and plant the seeds of the Gospel on the ravaged soil?.....it is a process which Jesus Himself would never have adopted in founding His kingdom on earth."⁴⁴

In the Baha'i Faith, there are certain conditions that teachers of the Faith must meet before undertaking pioneering work in foreign lands. One is to learn about the history, culture, language and customs of the land. They must also use terminology which the people are used to. They must also think about the true happiness of the people they are coming into contact with, not caring about themselves.

Coercive proselytizing is also prohibited in the Baha'i Faith. Rather, we are told to search for truth together with those we intend to share the teachings with:

In accordance with the divine teachings in this glorious Dispensation we should not belittle anyone and call him ignorant, saying: 'You know not but I know.' Rather we should look upon others with respect, and when attempting to explain and demonstrate, we should speak as if we are

⁴¹ Nitobe, *Bushido*, p.191

⁴² Ibid, p.179

⁴³ Ibid, p.180

⁴⁴ Ibid.

investigating the truth, saying: 'Here these things are before us. Let us investigate to determine where and in what form the truth can be found.'

The teacher should not consider himself as learned and others ignorant. Such a thought breeds pride and pride is uncondusive to influence. The teacher should not see in himself any superiority; he should speak with the utmost kindness, lowliness and humility, for such speech exerts influence and educates the souls.⁴⁵

Naturally, argumentative attitude is not conducive to influencing souls:

Do not argue with anyone, and be wary of disputation. Speak out the truth. If your hearer accepteth, the aim is achieved. If he is obdurate, you should leave him to himself, and place your trust in God. Such is the quality of those who are firm in the Covenant.⁴⁶

Thus, we need to be understanding, loving and kind to those we teach the Faith.

Militarism and Materialism

As Christian missionary work failed, Japan dashed towards militarism. She withdrew from the League of Nations, which Nitobe served so faithfully, isolated herself from the world, betrayed allied nations and eventually got caught in the quagmire of the Pacific War until the tragic events in Hiroshima and Nagasaki put an end to it. In this war, Shinto as state religion was abused and misused, which caused the nation to shun religion away after the war.

After the war ensued intensive economic activity propelled by strong materialism. There was no more war using weaponry. Instead, the nation ran itself into economic war using money and goods. It started during the economic miracle of the 1960's and reached the peak with the bubble economy in the 1980's. The Japanese products were rated only the third-class during the 1970's. But the Japanese people worked themselves so hard that they were even called "economic animals" and now their goods are regarded as among the world's best.

These activities and hard labor can be recognized as positive qualities in themselves. However, as Nitobe had alarmed, Japan had neglected the development of a large portion of spiritual civilization. As a counter-reaction to this, there have been several religious booms during the last 50 years to fill the gaps made in society through all this material development. Many new religious organizations have appeared, some of which possess millions

⁴⁵ Nozomu Sonda (comp.) *Asu e no Tobira*. Tokyo: Baha'i Publishing Trust Japan, 2002, p. 342, No. 78

⁴⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Ibid*, p.344, No. 87)

of followers. However, some of them have caused scandals and even committed crimes, bringing harm to society and its people. People became even more skeptical of religion.

Revival of Bushido?

The economic miracle of Japan reached its prime stage in the 1990's and now Japan is going through some hard times. People are starting to understand that material prosperity cannot satisfy their need completely, seeking for spiritual sustenance. This trend is represented and symbolized by nostalgia for "the good old days." Even among the youth generations can this phenomenon be observed. Many enjoy appreciating the old art works, literature, tea ceremony and flower arrangement. Some seek comfort and healing by living in traditional wooden structure homes. As commented in the introduction of this paper, the recently released Hollywood movie *The Last Samurai* has also stimulated this trend. Many people are now showing greater interest in the spirit of samurais and Bushido. Japanese baseball players join the Major League Baseball and talk about playing baseball with the samurai spirit.

Just as Nitobe mentioned, the contemporary Japanese society is now searching for a new system of morals. Especially the educational world is at loss currently, not knowing where to turn to for guidance. When we review the historical trends and changes described in previous sections, namely, the crumbling of feudalism and the subsequent decline of Bushido, the quoted prophecy of the appearance of new moral ethics, Nitobe's hope for Christianity to take over Bushido's role, yet its failure to spread, will the Faith of Baha'u'llah not clearly stand out as the new ethics prophesied and the new moral system which Nitobe hoped would appear and guide Japan? For the Baha'i Faith was revealed by Baha'u'llah for this new age where old values would be tested for the contemporary need and diverse cultural values would come into conflict with each other.

The teachings of Baha'u'llah renewed and revived virtues clothed in new attire fit for the modern world. Baha'u'llah spoke the same truth which Buddhism, Shintoism and Confucianism had taught centuries and thousands of years before, yet in new language understandable to modern humanity. Baha'u'llah talked about virtues that are universally applicable to all humanity including women and men, young and old, and diverse ethnic groups of the world. He also talks about the end of adolescent years of humankind when wars and fighting were the "norms." Baha'u'llah now talks about the coming of age of humanity where humankind is to approach various issues and problems with mature attitude and consultative manner. Swords must be returned to the sheath and words must be used instead.

According to Baha'u'llah, even religions of God must be renewed and updated. Buddhism and Shintoism have served their times, exerting great

influences on formation and development of Bushido. But the time must come to be replaced by a new religion of God. Even Christianity had to face the same destiny. Thus, religions of God must be periodically renewed in order to meet needs of each age and place. The same exact medicine cannot cure various diseases that afflict humanity. Humanity and its society also grow and develop. Thus teachings of God must also change. This concept of change of religious teachings according to growth and development of humanity is called "progressive revelation." The historical conditions of the 19th and 20th centuries clearly indicate that the time was very ripe for a new revelation from God. According to Baha'u'llah, the Baha'i Faith was the new revelation for this modern age.

Conclusion

"Japan will turn ablaze! Japan is endowed with a most remarkable capacity for the spread of the Cause of God! Japan, with (another country)....will take the lead in the spiritual reawakening of the peoples and nations that the world shall soon witness!" On another occasion,--how vividly I recall it!--as He reclined on His chair, with eyes closed with bodily fatigue, He waved His hand and uttered vigorously and cheerfully these words in the presence of His friends:--"Here we are seated calm, quiet and inactive, but the Hand of the Unseen is ever active and triumphant in lands, even as distant as Japan."⁴⁷

The form of Bushido has disappeared. There are no more samurai swords or feudal system. However, the spirit of Bushido still seems to remain in minds and hearts of Japanese people. The basis of Abdu'l-Baha's prophecy that Japan will turn ablaze may lie in this spirit of Bushido. Just as Nitobe said:

Bushido as an independent code of ethics may vanish, but its power will not perish from the earth...Like its symbolic flower, after it is blown to the four winds, it will still bless mankind with the perfume with which it will enrich life.⁴⁸

In conclusion, the present author would like to pose questions to the readers by borrowing the words and style of Nitobe's own question quoted earlier: The Faith of God revealed for this age and materialism will continue to divide the world between them. Lesser systems of morals will ally themselves to either side for their preservation. On which side will Japan enlist? And on which side will the spirit of Bushido find its revival?

⁴⁷ Shoghi Effendi, *Turn Ablaze*, p.73 from a letter written to early believers in Japan, January 26, 1922, *Japan Will Turn Ablaze!*)

⁴⁸ Nitobe, *Bushido*, p.192

However, Japanese moral education currently implementing can give meaningful suggestions to American education facing moral confusion. Several educational research dealing with Japanese moral education have been done by both Western and Japanese researchers so far. Their moral is called Bushido, the code of the samurai. Based on the ideas of Confucianism and the Zen sect, which is one of the denominations of Buddhism, originated in the Kamakura period (1192 - 1333) and reached perfection in the Edo period. It puts emphasis on loyalty, self-sacrifice, justice, sense of shame, refined manners, purity, modesty, frugality, martial spirit, honor, affection, and other such values. Japanese virtues explained by Nitobe in 1900 in comparison with the Baha'i perspective on moral education. About this document (click for more). Abstract: Japanese virtues explained by Nitobe in 1900 in comparison with the Baha'i perspective on moral education. Notes: Originally posted at ojbs.org, archived at archive.org. Bushido (Chivalry) and the Traditional Japanese Moral Education.