

The Dojo guide; the Kamiza and its meaning

In this part I would like to talk a little for the **Kamiza** (lit. Deity's Seat), since, as we have seen, it comprises the spiritual center of the dojo. The *Kamiza*, like most things Japanese, seems to be alien to both Western society and thought. The reason to that are, potentially, some obvious spiritual difficulties to overcome, mainly due to its religious significance in Shinto religion. However similar features are certainly found in every religion.

The **Kamiza** or **Kami Dana** is found also in people's homes; is considered as a way of connecting or maintaining 'the spiritual connectedness' in every day life. Of course, something similar, although to a lesser extent, happens in Western homes as well.

It would not be unrealistic to say that almost every dojo in Japan has a *kamiza*. Some are quite elaborate whilst others are simple. Shinto is a simple way, thus its *Jinja* or shrines, although elaborate in design, are not overly ornate in content. The dojo *kamiza* is a reflection of its life size counterpart.

The *Kamiza* houses **the focal point of Shinto** or more accurately the **Shin Kyo (sacred object)**, which in the majority of cases, is **the mirror or Kagami**. It is worthy to notice that the *Kagami* (mirror), the *Ken* (sword) and the *Hoseki* (jewellery) comprise, according to Japanese mythology, the three treasures of Japan. The significance of *Kagami* (mirror) is very important. Its first reference may be found in the *Nihon Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters). The main point for us to understand is that the mirror reflects 'everything as it is'. It cuts through all thoughts and labels that have been placed upon us, by us and others, to show us as how we truly are. Equally, if not more importantly, it represents the 'pure heart and mind of that which we call God'. In essence "you may fool yourself, but you cannot fool God".

Apart from the *Shin Kyo* other things, connected with human life are found in the *Kamiza*. On a lower shelf *daily offering of rice, salt & water* are placed. **Salt** is a natural purifier and should retain its natural energy, thus the kind of typical daily table salt is not used. **Rice** is the largest, naturally grown, food product in Japan, carrying people through the Autumn, Winter and Spring months. *Rice represents strength and forms the central part of the Kanji for Ki*. In many cases, rice was given as payment for work or service. A Samurai for example, received measurements called *Koku* depending upon his status, at the ending of each year. **Water**, a natural, powerful element is used not only to preserve life, but to purify it. Many Shinto ceremonies involve purification in cold water, called *Misogi*. Other foods and fruits are also offered seasonally.

The presence of greenery in the form of evergreen sprigs, called **Sakaki**, is common in the *Kamiza*. The *Sakaki* coming from nature reminds us that life is an on going process, always evolving, ever new. Pine is another acceptable form of green. The *Sakaki* is placed on the shelf, in bottles, below the main part of the altar which houses the *Shin Kyo*. *Sakaki* are sold in prepared bunches in Japan. Only the best are chosen and any dead leaves or parts are removed.

Another part of *Kamiza* regalia, would be in the form of **weapon**, especially in a budo dojo. Either a **sword**, a sacred gift from the Kami, or a **spear**, with which Izanagi O'Mikoto stirred the waters below the Floating Bridge of Heaven (the Milky Way), the droplets from which formed the islands of Japan. Or in some cases a **bow and humming arrow**. The bow (Floating Bridge) - the humming arrow dispelling negative

energies - Yaaaaaa!!!

Additionally in the Kamiza you may see carved wooden statues or effigies of the Deity patron of the dojo or the ryu.

A further important characteristic in Shinto are the **Gohei** or **jagged strips of white paper**. The Gohei, originally made of white silk, mark or show the entrances to sacred places or objects and may be found either placed on the *Sakaki* or on the **straw rope (Shimenawa)** marking the entrance to a Jinja.

It is obvious that Kamiza has a strong relationship with Shinto and as that may become the source of many misunderstandings; therefore its absence from dojo found in Western countries is quite understandable. However its presence in such a dojo, in a much simpler built, may remind us of the origin of our practiced art and become the link to tradition; after all *“to understand the new, you must know and always remember the past”*.

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