

Bushido: Doryō

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Magnanimity

by: Aaron Kromer

Take a moment to look back on your life and recognize all people that you have seen, read about, or maybe even met, that were great people. Did you notice any trends in size, shape, color, and gender? Probably not, I know I couldn't see any trends in those categories. Now think back to their attitude towards life and the way they acted to other people. When I did this I could clearly see magnanimity in them all. Of course there are always exceptions to every trend, but for the most part when I looked at the people I considered to be great, not just the martial artists, their demeanor was magnanimous. Thinking further I came to the conclusion that there are two broad groups within those who were magnanimous, the ones who were martial artists, and the ones who were not.

Having said this, I believe that there are two sides to magnanimity. First, magnanimity in relationship to the everyday person, and second, magnanimity for the martial artist. Let us now take a look how I define magnanimity: 1) showing a courageous spirit, 2) loftiness of spirit enabling one to bear trouble calmly, 3) generous in forgiving an insult or injury, and 4) revealing generosity or nobility of mind. All of these definitions are the same, yet at the same time they are completely different.

What does magnanimity mean in relationship to the every day person? How can one be magnanimous every day? In my study of Budoshin Jujitsu I have been taught to be a gentle-

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man. By today's standards this seems to be not much more than opening the door for a lady, being courteous to others, and having a refined-elegant look. These things are all superficial in nature.

To me a real gentleman is not just a surface appearance. He is also a total human being that is true to himself and others. What does being true to others mean? This statement means that a human acts kindly to others not because he wants to keep up appearances but because he truly enjoys what he does. It is in his heart and soul that his actions originate from.

From all that I have read and learned about the martial arts I find a reoccurring principle: openness. In it's purest form I believe this to be opening your heart and soul. Not so that you are vulnerable but so that you may accept things as they come and properly adapt and flow. It seems to me that this allows you to be completely sincere and honest in your actions. Coming back to the true gentleman, I believe since his actions originate from within his soul, it is easy for him to forgive an insult or injury and move beyond petty resentment or vindictiveness. That, I believe, is the mark of a true gentleman. I have met few true gentlemen, but I am still young. Of the few gentlemen that I have met, I must say they all had a magnanimous quality that seemed to radiate from them.

The gentleman receives the greatest rewards for his actions. Think about this. Have you ever cared for someone so much that any little help you can give them brings you a feeling of extreme pleasure and happiness. Now imagine this feeling every time you help someone. This comes from your use of your inner soul and heart. The feelings/rewards that the gentleman receives are priceless. As for the recipients they seem to often gain large amounts

of happiness as well. Think about the person you helped that by opening yourself up and letting your heart do the work. Did they respond by sneering, yelling, or getting angry? In my experiences their response has been the exact opposite. Even if they do not love you, they often seem to express a deep gratitude for your efforts and appreciate all that you do for them. These are the prices that you pay. To me, these prices are well worth it.

A martial artist is much more than a gentleman. A true warrior studying Budo cannot just perform his skill, he must become the skill. This means that he devotes himself selflessly to his practice until he can act from his heart. I believe Japan's greatest swordsman, Miyamoto Musashi, put it best when he said, "When I fight another man, I look through him and think only of making the hit. I have no preconceived notions of which target is the one to aim for. I let nature take its course and permit the 'spirit of the thing itself' to express 'itself' through me and make me the victor."

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One of the skills a martial artist needs to learn is how to deal with danger. To better understand danger we must look at what happens when a person is in danger. The natural human reaction is fear. Fear is a valuable emotion, saying "Pay Attention!!" When a person becomes afraid their body tends to tighten up and their mind freezes. In a life or death situation this will mean certain death. A warrior cannot let this happen, to do so would be his own demise. Therefore, a true warrior is not afraid of what lies ahead. He is confident in his abilities and skills. He has learned to control his emotions and does not let things affect his sharpened mind.

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This does not mean he is overconfident and expresses his “superiority” by boasting, picking fights, or acting “tough.” To do any of these things would be inconsiderate to other people. Boasting only encourages anger and rage in those who are being — or think they are being — taunted. Picking a fight when you know you can win and seriously injure another human being shows complete lack of respect and regard for life. The Budo practitioner does all that he can to prevent a physical altercation. This may mean that he has to turn the other cheek to prevent violence. If one is not generous in forgiving an insult or injury to their ego then he has not learned to control his emotions and is reckless, endangering himself and those around him. A true warrior is quiet and has no outward expression of his true power until he wishes to use it, and use it only as a last resort. It is this refinement and humility that is the mark of a true practitioner of Budo.

Now what does this have to do with magnanimity? When one is calm and collected because he knows his true power, limitations, and abilities, one does not delude himself into thinking he is invincible. Therefore, he does not feel the corruption that often comes with power. He does not need to prove to others that his is invincible by fighting or jumping to challenge someone at the slightest hint of insult. If an insult does arise, he is able to let go and not give in to vindictiveness. The practitioner knows not to get himself into a situation that he cannot get out of, to do so would be self-destructive, and if he is in a situation that arises above his ability, he is not afraid to retreat. So when an altercation does arrive, the practitioner is able to

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stay calm because of his faith in his abilities and skills. He is able to do this because he has the ability to adapt and flow with the situation as it arises, never being caught off guard or with his preverbal “pants down.” It is his lofty spirit that enables him to stay calm and be courageous in the face of danger. It is this spirit that makes him magnanimous.

There is real value in being able to forgive and let go and to be able to stand up for what you believe in even in the face of danger, granted the danger is not overwhelming. Magnanimity plays a large part in personal refinement and growth. Not just for the martial artists but for the everyday person as well.

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