

One winter day, I was deep in the Aizu forest together with my teacher and friends. We all held guns, waiting in ambush. Suddenly, out of nowhere, enemy soldiers began shooting. In the next moment, I was hit and fell down on the cold ground. My teacher shouted, "Better to die fighting for justice!"

This is part of an episode of a Taiga drama in which I took part three years ago. The scene was based on a true story that took place a hundred and fifty years ago. It was the Battle of Aizu, in which samurai soldiers as young as 13 years old lost their lives. This event got me thinking about my own Japanese heritage.

I was born in Italy, but when I was three years old, my family moved to Japan. I remember asking my mother, "Why did we move to Japan?" She replied, "I wanted to bring you up as a Japanese person." I thought to myself, "As a Japanese person? What does that mean?" In the meantime, my mother made me learn sado, the art of the tea ceremony, shodo, Japanese calligraphy, and kendo, one of the Japanese martial arts.

When I turned 15, I came across a book, "Bushido" or "The Road of Samurai," by Inazo Nitobe. The book explained the five virtues of Bushido: righteousness, courage, benevolence, respect, and sincerity.

Righteousness is the ability to do justice. Courage means bravery. Benevolence is the act of showing compassion to others. Respect means to treat others how you would like to be treated. Sincerity means to act with your whole heart. Reading this book made me realize what my mother wanted me to learn. I believe its ideals are still in the soul of many Japanese people including me.

Some of you may say the spirit of Bushido is dying. However, I disagree. During the Great Earthquake in 2011, looking back, I could witness the Bushido spirits. I could see righteousness when many people volunteered to help in the city. I could see courage when workers at the Fukushima nuclear power plant struggled to stop the radiation leak. I could see benevolence when many people participated in fund raising. I could see respect for others when they lined up orderly for their food rations and supplies. I could see sincerity when even those in the disaster area extended helping hands to those in greater need.

The young samurai of Aizu who I played fought a losing battle probably because it was his only means to prove his Bushido spirit. Today Japan faces a turning point after the big earthquake. I am standing here, because I strongly believe that each and every one of us can become a better person if we put these five virtues into practice more.

We need to reflect on ourselves, build a bond, rise up, and face difficulties together. We can all make Japan a better place with the spirit of Japanese people.

Thank you for listening.