

Reiki: Secrets of the Usui 'moon-star' crest

by

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**MYŌKEN BOSATSU:
SECRETS OF THE USUI 'MOON-STAR' CREST**

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The Usui family tomb is erected on a small plot in the *Saiho-ji* (Buddhist Temple) graveyard in Tokyo.

In front of the tombstone itself is a low plinth on which sits a carved stone bearing a small emblem - a crescent moon with a 'star':



This symbol is commonly understood to be the Usui family *mon* – the family emblem or crest.

Now, on the famous memorial stone which stands to one side of the Usui tomb, it states that Usui-sensei's ancestors were from the noble samurai clan: the Chiba's.

This 'moon-star' symbol is well-known in Japan as being one of the emblems associated with Chiba clan, and, it seems, for the majority of non-Japanese Reiki folk who have heard this piece of information, the presence of the 'moon-star' at the Usui grave-site is normally understood to be simply a reference to the family's Chiba ancestry.

And thus, most Reiki folk place no further significance on it.

However, the 'moon-star' is not *just* a family / clan crest.

It is an important symbol of power and protection.

It is, in fact, the spiritual emblem of the bodhisattva *Myōken*.

More than that, it can be considered to be a *spiritual conduit* for the *power* of *Myōken*.

It was sometime during the Heian period (8th-12th Century A.D.) that the Chiba's adopted the 'moon-star' emblem as a potent statement of the clan's allegiance / devotion to this Buddhist deity.



Image: *Chibajinja* (Chiba Shrine)

The 'moon-star' emblem together with the main Chiba clan emblem: the *kyuo(-boshi) mon*, in the Hall of Worship for Myōken at the Chiba Shrine, Chiba City

Myōken 妙見 is perhaps (at least for most Westerners,) one of the lesser-known Japanese Buddhist deities.

While commonly considered a *bosatsu* (i.e. bodhisattva), Myōken is technically a Heavenly Being or “*ten*” - essentially, a deity of non-Buddhist Indian origin.

Myōken Bosatsu (sometimes referred to as Myōken *Dai*-Bosatsu – 'great bodhisattva' 妙見大菩薩) is a multifaceted being, with many different aspects & manifestations.¹

The deity can appear in several different forms – sometimes male, sometimes female; sometimes wrathful in nature, sometimes compassionate; sometimes two-armed, sometimes four-armed.

Sometimes Myōken is depicted standing on the back of a dragon; other manifestations see the deity standing on the back of a composite mythical creature with a horses tail, a horses or dragons head, and the body of a turtle. Alternatively, the deity may be depicted seated on a cloud.

Throughout history, Myōken has been worshipped across the various strata of Japanese society.

Envisaged as an armour-clad warrior wielding a sword, the deity has been venerated by various samurai clans (including the Chiba, and the No-se) as a powerful protector – of both men and horses.

Myōken is strongly associated with Polaris - the North Star, and the 'Big Dipper'/'Great Bear' constellation, both of which (star and constellation) have been essential for ships navigators.

For this reason, Myōken has been worshipped by sailors, merchants and others who rely on the sea for their livelihood - as the *bosatsu* of safe voyage, offering the promise of protection from shipwreck and drowning.

And as "ruler of the Venerable Star" (ie. the North Star), Myōken was venerated in the Imperial court as a protector of the Emperor, and the Nation.

For others, Myōken has been envisaged in feminine form - sometimes venerated as a deity of the home and domestic harmony - sometimes as a deity of beauty, fertility,

fortune and prosperity.

In yet another manifestation, Myōken is considered to be a healing deity - often sharing many of the attributes of Yakushi Nyorai: the primary Buddha of Healing.

The name Myōken can translate as "keen-sighted" or "wondrous seeing" and the deity is specifically associated with the prevention/healing of diseases of the eyes.

Myōken is also said to have the power to increase ones lifespan, to afford protection from fires, ward off disasters, and generally combat evil.



The deity has long been associated with the traditions of *Shugendo* (a blend of Buddhist and Shinto mysticism) and *Onmyōdō* (a Japanese form of Taoist magical and divinatory practice), and in many images, such as the one shown above, Myōken is depicted with right leg raised behind the left, performing a form of ritual 'stepping dance', associated with these traditions.

In further reference to *Shugendo* and its blending of Buddhist and Shinto traditions, Myōken forms Buddhist mudras with each hand holding a staff, while on the deity's

other two upraised palms, rest two orbs - the 'sun orb' (in the right hand), the 'moon orb' (in the left).

Within the sun orb is the image of a three-legged crow – a symbol of the Shinto sun-goddess *Amaterasu*, while within the moon orb is an image of a hare (pounding rice or grain in a mortar) – a symbol of the Shinto moon-god *Tsuki-yomi*.

An antlered deer's head adorns Myōken's headdress, This is a reference to the shamanic elements of *Shugendo* tradition. (It is said that Myōken can assume the form of a deer).

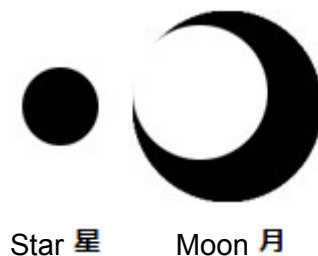
Directly above Myōken is the deity's spiritual emblem - the Crescent Moon and the North Star., and within the disc of the 'North Star,' is the bosatsu's "seed syllable" (a character from the *siddham* form of the Sanskrit alphabet,) considered to hold the very essence of the deity's inner nature.

This particular symbol (*sho* in sanskrit) is pronounced "so" in Japanese.

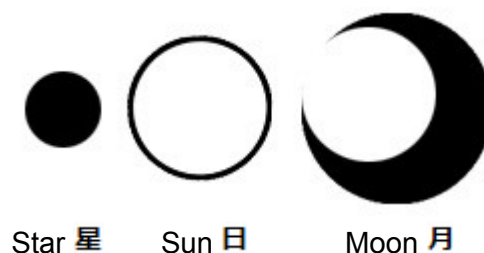
SECRETS OF THE 'MOON-STAR' EMBLEM

Commonly referred to as *tsuki ni hoshi* 月に星 or *tsuki boshi* 月星 (both terms simply slightly different ways of saying 'moon-star'), the emblem is also known as the *sankō* 三光

This latter term translates as 'three lights' and refers to the understanding that the symbol is not just comprised of the moon and star:



but actually has *three* elements: the *sun* and moon and star.



This perception of the 'hidden sun' within the symbol reveals a greater depth to the symbol and, on a one level, connects with the art of *kotodama gaku*² (a mystical discipline concerned with the hidden power and meanings of words).

For example:

When the kanji character for sun: 日 is written next to the character for moon: 月, a new kanji character is formed: 明

This new kanji is called: *myō* .

[This is not the kanji *myō* which forms part of the name Myōken, but rather is the *myō* familiar to Reiki practitioners as being the final character of the Reiki 'Master Symbol' - 明]

Myō: 明 means 'bright'.

And when we combine this with the kanji for 'star': 星 we get: 明星 *Myōjō* as yet another alternative name for the symbol.

Myōjō translates as: 'Bright Star' - a synonym for the planet Venus, and also a reference to pre-eminence - indicating a person of (merit-based) importance, or superior status.

Thus, the symbol can be understood to indicate a pre-eminent person, but also, more importantly, in terms of the mystical beliefs of the previously-mentioned *Onmyōdō* and *Shugendo*, the symbol can be viewed as having actual 'talismanic' properties - holding the power to enable one to *rise* to pre-eminence in their chosen field.

Also within the symbol, there is yet a further hidden significance.
If we focus solely on the combined 'Sun and Moon' element



This forms a version of a very important symbol in Japanese mystical belief - the *in-yō*. 陰陽

The *in-yō*, more commonly depicted in its 'upright' form:



is the Japanese equivalent of the Chinese yin-yang symbol.

[in 陰 = yin, yō 陽 = yang]

And just as with its Chinese counterpart, so, the *in-yō* represents Sun & Moon, Heaven & Earth, the Cosmos & Nature, Spirituality & Physicality, Masculinity & Femininity – the *in-yō* essentially expresses the dynamic interplay of all existence - the interplay between heat and cold, hard and soft, tension and relaxation, inhaling and exhaling, activity and rest, waking and sleeping...

In-yō signifies a state of 'creative harmony' - the 'dynamic balance' (- as opposed to balance in a static 'levelling-out' sense) of complementary opposing forces - the power of life itself.

This very important mystical symbol hidden within the 'moon-star' brings yet another level of connection with the disciplines of *Onmyōdō* 陰陽道. In fact, the 'On' and 'myō' are actually alternative readings of the kanji characters used to write *in* and *yō*: 陰陽³

The examples given here show just a few of the hidden levels of meaning and power to be discovered within the 'moon-star' emblem.

There is significantly more to be discussed
- for example in relation to the "North Star" element of the symbol; however this might deserve an article all of its own.

Of course, having become aware of the existence of these layers of hidden meaning and power, we cannot help but ask the question:

Did Usui-sensei view the moon-star emblem simply as 'just' a family crest?
(He would certainly have understood its deeper, esoteric, significance).

For a Usui to have adopted the Bodhisattva's spiritual emblem as their family crest, was to have brought the protective power of Myōken into the family lineage in a very big way. [If we think about it, while the Chiba's have, for more than a thousand years, been the most ardent devotees of the Bodhisattva Myōken, not even they adopted emblem as their *primary* family crest.]

And further, we can wonder, what influence - if any – might the ancestral association with Myōken have had on the development of Usui Reiki Ryoho?

Could thoughts of the veneration of the 'great bodhisattva Myōken':

[*Myōken dai-bosatsu*] : 妙見 大菩薩

and the power of the sankō : 三光 - the sun & moon & North Star,

and the 'hidden' power of the *Myōjō* : 明星

have perhaps been in the back of Usui-sensei's mind when formulating aspects of Usui Reiki Ryoho...

NOTES.

- 1 And, somewhat confusingly, Myōken is also referred to by many different names and titles, depending on the given aspect and manifestation.
- 2 See: www.aetw.org/reiki_mantra_jumon_kotodama.html
- 3 Some might see special significance in the recurrence of the syllable *myō* (in its various different kanji forms) within the different layers of meaning within the emblem

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