

# *Basic Study Course*

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*Class 6*

Appreciation of Art and Beauty

Please write your name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Meishusama's Teachings about Art and Beauty

I have, from my youngest days, been fond of beauty. Even when I was oppressed by great poverty, I would grow flowers in a little plot of ground, I would paint pictures if and when I had time, and I would go to museums and exhibitions as often as possible. In spring I would delight in the flowers, and in autumn I would enjoy the glorious colors of the leaves. Now, thanks to God, I enjoy a life full of the blessings of nature and am able to enjoy beauty to my heart's content. — *Heaven Is a World of Beauty. The Essential Teachings of Meishusama*

The role of art is surely to heighten people's emotions, to enrich their lives, and to give meaning and enjoyment to their existence. For someone who has knowledge of art and literature, to gaze at the flowers of spring, the autumn leaves, or a view of the mountains or sea, is delightful. As our eyes pass over the beauties of nature, an inexpressible joy wells up within us. It would be no exaggeration to call our ideal of heaven on earth "the world of art," for it is the world of truth, virtue, and beauty, and it is in art that beauty finds its true expression. — *Religion and Art. The Essential Teachings of Meishusama*

Through art, human nature can be elevated and the bestial part of it removed. Of course, we can pursue this aim through literature, painting, music, drama, cinema, and other art forms. From all of these types of art, the soul of the artist calls out to the souls of others. To put it simply, the mystical power that springs from the artist's soul passes through the written word, through the picture, the musical instrument, the song or dance, and plucks at the strings of the soul of all humankind. . . . This link between the artist's soul and the souls of others is very strong. Because of this, if an artist's character is bad, then all humanity will be debased. And, of course, if an artist's mind is fine and pure, he will elevate the characters of everyone else as well. This is the noblest aspect of art, and the artist must so employ his art as to become a worthy guide for the rest of humankind. — *The Role of Art. The Essential Teachings of Meishusama*

*Those with hearts that love art are blessed. They are ready for heaven.*

*Heaven is a world of beauty. The hearts of those living there are beautiful as well.*

— *Art. Miakarishu*

Since ancient times, there have been many ways for people to purify their hearts and elevate their spirits. Some experienced purifications through hardships, while others performed good deeds for society. Meishusama opened another door that was unique and innovative.

## 2. Meishusama and Art

When Meishusama was young, he began a long passion for artistic creation. “At age fourteen, he began a preparatory course at what is now the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. . . . But his dream was not to be. . . . Barely six months into his new life, he suddenly encountered eye pains and blariness in his vision. . . . With heavy heart, Meishusama abandoned forever his dream of becoming an artist.” — *Sincerity and Truth (page 12)*

After Meishusama’s father’s death in 1905, he opened a small sundry-goods store in Tokyo. Eventually, “his own handmade lacquer ware began to gain popularity. But once again misfortune struck: an accident, a permanent injury to his right index finger—the very finger he needed to apply the fine gold-dust veneers of his artistic inlays.” — *Sincerity and Truth (page 14)*

- **Studying Art**

Meishusama said **“God guided me to study art so that I could be awakened to a greater sense of beauty.”** From 1947 to 1952, Meishusama intensively studied Asian fine arts. He scanned textbooks and design manuals, went to exhibitions, and quizzed the leading experts. Normally, it takes twenty to thirty years to become an expert in a particular field of art, but for Meishusama, it took only a year for each field. Although, at that time, he had an extremely busy schedule helping people, Meishusama continued his studies of art whenever he got the chance.

Gyoin Hashimoto, who was the chief priest of the Yakushiji temple and an expert of Asian fine arts, said, “When I talked to Meishusama, he was eager to learn many things from me and was taking notes. I was very touched that a person of such high position would have this humble and sincere attitude in the study of art.”

Meishusama said, **“I have purchased so many fine art collections and have never acquired a forgery. I have really enjoyed the study of art from a young age, but when I started to think about building a museum and collecting more works, my studies became diligent. Finally I acquired a keen eye for art, and developed a**

**better sense of the spiritual energy within each piece. In some of the works, I can feel the artist's joy and happiness, while in others that are a fake, I feel something uncomfortable"**

- **Opening a Museum**

One day in the 1940's, Meishusama was taking a walk with his wife near Tamagawa River (in Tokyo). Suddenly, he exclaimed to her, **"Someday, I will build a museum!"** This may have been hard for others to believe because at that time, Meishusama was having great difficulties with police repression for operating his healing clinic. However, about ten years later, his words came true and the museum was built.

On June 15, 1952—barely eight and half months after construction began—the Hakone Art Museum was opened. — *Sincerity and Truth - The Life Story of Meishusama (p.94)*

Meishusama was justly proud. He had designed the museum himself, playing the role of architect and supervising every aspect of the project. **"Until now, none of the museums in Japan have been open to the general public at all times. . . . I keenly believe that wonderful art works should not be secluded, but should instead be shown to as many people as possible. . . . In this way, fine arts contribute greatly to the development of culture, and this is the true purpose of art."** — *Sincerity and Truth (p.94)*

**"When people visit our museum, they will connect to Divine Light and accordingly their spirits will be purified to some extent. I was guided by God to build this museum. It is a very unique and profound way to share our work. There are many ways to advertise it, but showing such wonderful artworks is the best way. This is Divine Guidance."** — Meishusama (*A summary of Japanese Shumei Newsletter No. 264*)

### **3. Kaishusama and Beauty**

From a young age, Kaishusama practiced the art of tea ceremony under the Mushakōji-senke tradition. Meishusama was also interested in the tea ceremony as a pure art form and had a great friendship with Yu Ko Sai, a former tea master of the Mushakōji-senke school. Meishusama occasionally invited Yu Ko Sai to his home in Atami and Kaishusama was often asked to prepare for their tea ceremony. It was a great privilege, also not to mention very thrilling, for Kaishusama to conduct a tea ceremony in front of Meishusama and the prominent tea master. It was another important lesson for her to cultivate a good sense of beauty.

- **The Miho Museum**

After the completion of the Bell Tower in Misono in 1990, Kaishusama, following in Meishusama's footsteps to enhance people's emotions and elevate their spirits through sharing beautiful artworks, decided to build a museum. Kaishusama asked I.M. Pei, who had designed the Bell Tower, to design a museum for Shumei. At that time, however, Shumei's collection was mainly limited to a small collection of Japanese and oriental arts. Regarding the collection for the new museum, I.M. Pei suggested, "The museum as a shell is important, but the contents should be international." Kaishusama and Kaicho-Sensei instantly realized how wonderfully this suggestion coincided with Meishusama's teaching that people need to transcend narrow groups and boundaries in order to become citizens of the world. And thus they began to expand the collection to include Western antiquities. Almost immediately after they decided to follow I.M. Pei's advice, they had the good fortune of acquiring art objects such as the standing Gandhara Buddha statue and the Garden Scene from Pompeii. In 1997, Kaishusama's long dream came true when the Miho Museum held its grand opening.



Mr. Horiuchi, who had worked as an art dealer for Shumei said, "I was very inspired by Kaishusama's and Kaicho-Sensei's passion for their museum project and decided to work for them. I don't know how many times we traveled the world, but it was amazing how great works of art came our way one after another. It was as if the pieces were waiting to be a part of the Shumei collection. I remember how Kaishusama could immediately sense the beauty of the pieces, often exclaiming, 'How beautiful this is!' I was very surprised about Kaishusama's considerable insight into art."

"To acquire fine works, a collector must have finances, connoisseurship, and luck. One person who recognized all three of these in Kaishusama was Shogoro Yabumoto, one of her most valued dealers and closest advisors. Mr. Yabumoto believed in what he called the "mirror of the heart"; the idea that every day each person must polish a mirror residing in their hearts. No matter how much beauty one looks at, if one's "heart-mirror" is

dull, one will never see the true beauty of an object. He believed that Kaishusama had the most polished of heart-mirrors. She was a deeply spiritual person, and thus able to understand all areas of art. All truly beautiful things shine light upon the world. Through their encounters with beauty, people's feelings are illuminated. . . . Shumei's three principal activities are often called the 'three arts.' They are the practice of Jyorei, Natural Agriculture, and the gaining of insight through beauty. One senses the last activity through the Miho Museum. It can be said that nature's great beauty is God's artwork. Moved and inspired by natural beauty, people create art to make this beauty eternally their own. Indeed, art, the greatest of manmade beauty, is inspiration manifested in physical form. While Jyorei, Natural Agriculture, and the experience of beauty are all different endeavors, **they all focus on beauty.** They all have the same source and a single thread links them all. The Miho Museum was designed to be an earthly paradise.” (Akiyoshi Hatanaka, *The Heart in Search of Beauty*. SHUMEI vol.260)

- **Kaishusama's Words from the book entitled “Feel the Beauty”**

*Aren't beautiful things wonderful? They truly soothe the heart.*

*Look at lots of excellent things, and learn from them!*

*In your daily life, find ways to spend time with beautiful things.*

*Through art, make the world a beautiful and enjoyable place.*

*Beautiful things are good for your eyes. Look at beautiful and excellent things. If you keep looking at beautiful things, you will know which ones are not.*

*Seeking beautiful things is seeking God.*

#### **4. Group Discussion**

- What is beauty? How can we define it?
- Does beauty transcend cultural norms? If yes, how so?
- How do you judge what is beautiful and what is not?
- How can you cultivate a good sense of beauty?
- What does Kaishusama's statement, “*Seeking beautiful things is seeking God*,” mean to you?
- What are some of your favorite works of art (i.e. from paintings, music, sculpture, poetry, architecture, etc.)?
- What are some of the benefits of surrounding yourself with beautiful things?
- What are some good ways to enjoy beauty in your daily life?

## **5. Assignment (Essay writing) for Online Course participants**

Please write a short (one page-length) essay on the following questions:

Q1: Please write about a life-changing (or powerful) experience in which you were really inspired by the power of beauty in a particular art form. If you haven't had such an experience, please write about what you learned from the video and text materials.

Q2: What is a good way to cultivate a good sense of beauty?