# 　　**あかひげ**

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# Japanese Cinema 310

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# Akahige

Red Beard or Akahige as it is called in Japan is one of Akira Kurosawa’s most sincere films. Self Centeredness, Compassion, Healing/Hopelessness, Self Control/Spiritual Discipline, and Growth are Themes you will see throughout this movie.

# Self Centeredness

Red Beard opens with a doctor by the name of Yasumoto who is sent to the Koshikawa clinic to assist Red Beard at the clinic. At first he appears to be eager to help the clinic until he finds out that this is his permanent place where he will be practicing medicine. Feeling betrayed by his father for not being fully honest with him about the entire situation, Yasumoto’s selfish side emerges and this is what we see from this character for the first half of the movie. Although his anger is warranted for not being told the truth by his father, his selfish attitude is not appealing. He makes statements throughout the movie that prove he is selfish, but there is one line that struck me to the core: “I studied Dutch medicine, developing my own diagnoses and cures. They are mine and not for others.” I immediately began to dislike this character. I disliked him, because he reminded me of my old self. A person that was quick to look at all the negatives and not what experience could be gained from a particular situation.

# Compassion

Although Red Beard could have practiced medicine at a more elite establishment, he chose to practice his medicine in an area where the “forgotten” lived. I say forgotten because the government based on Red Beard’s statements did not care enough to fix the problem. You could clearly feel his pain when he said: If it weren’t for poverty half of these people wouldn’t be sick. Government has the ability to fix the problem and they weren’t doing anything about it. They even cut some funding to his clinic, which was amazing to hear when so many people still needed care. Compassion is seen in all of the characters. Yasumoto in the beginning displayed traits of child like temper tantrums. Refusing to obey Red Beard’s commands and acting out so he could be released of his duties. His true side begins to emerge after a young girl is rescued from the Geisha world and he is forced to take her as his first patient. He can no longer act out in the manner he was before, he had to show compassion. Through her actions, he could see how damaged she was and therefore knew his attitude had to change if he wanted to really help this young girl. One character that touched my heart was the old man whom continued to work to help feed his friends yet he was dying of his own ailments. This self sacrifice was a form of compassion that bled throughout the film.

# Healing/Hopelessness

Healing the whole person is what Red Beard specialized in. His clinic was also like a Hospice. He did his best to make the person as comfortable as possible when he knew they were about to die. Red Beard also used others to heal each other. The young girl whom Yasumoto was caring for eventually was able to break through mentally and physically, however Yasumoto now was the one that became sick. She was told by Red Beard to care for Yasumoto. I believe Red Beard did this as he was aware that while you are caring for someone else you inturn can heal yourself just by caring for others. He also knew that the young girl still suffered from trust and this was the perfect way to help her build trust and confidence. Although Hopelessness was not a strong theme in the movie, it was there and it would pop up throughout the movie. I felt for Yasumoto and Dr. Niide aka Red Beard. There seemed to be no hope for them. They were over populated with poor sick people, understaffed and many of them lacked sleep. Mori set the tone of the movie when he said: “It’s really terrible here. It makes you wonder why you became a doctor.” This constant reminder of why did I become a doctor is probably something Yasumoto struggled with. Yasumoto a highly skilled doctor who was trained in Dutch medicine was now stuck in a place he was forced to be in. There were even poor patients that seemed to just give up. Comments like: “We’re better off dead” or “When I die, I’d like to die on Tatami.” “Even the poorest have Tatatmi” were signs of Hopelessness.

# Spiritual Discipline

No Matter how hard the situation became, Dr. Niide remained strong. He was Spiritually Disciplined. When you are Spiritually Disciplined, you are able to deal with major situations that can become draining on your spirit. A new doctor who is selfish, wants to leave because his surroundings are not ideal, a government that keeps cutting your funding yet the patients keep growing, and maintaining your clinic which you worked so hard to build. All of these can destroy a person, yet Red Beard remained Spiritually Disciplined.

# Closing

It did take some time for the story to develop. I am sure this is the reason it is 3hours. I rate this film a 5 as Kurosawa did a phenomenal job creating a work of art. The use of strong actors who could play characters that were timid, strong, arrogant and humble helped add to this masterpiece. The reason I love Indie films so much is due to the artist’s ability to be able to create their stories without all the unnecessary, overused Computer Graphics that you see in today’s films. In today’s Blockbuster films, many use poorly trained actors and they hide terrible scripts with massive action scenes that you would never see in true Indie films. Kurosawa stayed true to his Japanese roots. Showing how his culture views Suicide, Adultery, Incest and Poverty. He never glorified these taboo topics. He remained true to who he was as a person, not merely a Director, but a Japanese artist. Artists don’t hold back, they push the limits and stay true to themselves, which Kurosawa did an amazing job in this film.