

To AJKA-International
AJKA-I of PA
Instructor Trainee's Report #36

Subject: "Karate Training and Mind Concentration"

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There are many ways to look at the Martial Arts. You train for health, fitness, self defense, sport and other reasons. There is also a mental aspect to karate. As everyone knows, controlling one's own mind is among the most difficult and challenging of all human endeavors. We may know what we want our mind to do, but often we just can't find the control mechanism.

Zen is one approach to this problem. Utilizing meditation as a way of studying the operation of the mind. *Mushin* and *Zanshin* are two of these Zen-related concepts, important not just in the practice of karate, but in all of the martial arts. Anyone who seeks to become a truly formidable fighter, armed or unarmed, must master them; but doing so is not easy.

Mushin translates into English as "no mind" or "mindless". It is the mental state into which trained martial artists are said to enter prior to and during combat. Besides combat, karate-ka strive to enter this mental state during their everyday training. This is the point when you do not have to think about what you are doing, it just happens. Your punches, kicks and blocks come automatically.

Mushin is the reason we practice the same thing over and over again. The saying goes that it takes 1,000 repetitions to understand a technique. However, to lock it into your mind so you know it and that you can use it automatically might take 10,000 repetitions. This muscle memory or instinct is *Mushin*! As a karate-ka you want your skills to become natural so that they just happen.

There are two beautifully descriptive phrases which appear again and again in Zen literature: *Mizu no kokoro* and *Tsuki no kokoro*. *Mizu no kokoro* is often translated as "mind like water." This phrase means to make the mind calm when facing an emergency or an adversary. The calm mind, like still water, accurately reflects all that comes before it. It is otherwise referred to as *fudoshin* or "immovable mind."

Tsuki no kokoro is usually translated as a mind like the moon. This refers to the necessity of maintaining surveillance over one's surroundings at all times. As the bright illumination produced by the unclouded full moon as it reflects its light earthward, so the mind must be aware of all conditions surrounding it.

This high state of awareness and readiness is called *zanshin*, and is expected to be reflected in a fighter's stance and focus as he steps back from scoring a point; some judges require it for the point to be awarded. *Zanshin* is also sometimes used to describe the perfect transition from one technique to the next in a kata, never losing focus or readiness.

Many martial artists train to achieve this state of mind during kata so that a flawless execution of moves is accomplished — that they may be achieved during combat or at any other time. Once *mushin* is attained through the practice or study of martial arts (although it can be accomplished through other arts or practices that refine the mind and body), the objective is to then attain this same level of complete awareness in other aspects of the practitioner's life.

More important than physical development is utilizing Kata to build spirit as a vehicle to self-development. By doing the moves over and over again until the moves become your reflexes you will master the kata. You develop the ability to use your skills instinctively by creating muscle memory.

When you achieve *Mushin*, you will not know it right away. You may never realize it and that could be a good thing. Hopefully you will never have to use your training to defend your life. But maybe you will feel *Mushin* sometimes when doing kata. If your body takes over and just does the kata without you thinking about it then you have achieved *Mushin*. This has happened to me in the past. I was asked to perform a kata and didn't realize what kata I performed until after I was done. My mind shut off and my body took over and I was just "In the Zone".

To achieve *Mushin*, you must go to every class willing to learn. You must push everything out of your mind and focus on that lesson to achieve the understanding of the skills that the Sensei is passing on to you. Never think that when he/she is making group corrections that it is not aimed at helping you. The minute you think that you are not making mistakes is when you have given up on the art.

You will hear the terms often, "Empty your Mind" or "Empty your Cup". The instructor is trying to tell you to let go of your thoughts, fears, etc. and open yourself up for training. Push everything aside so you can absorb what is being taught right here right now. This is a difficult thing to do but we as instructors give you the opportunity to focus on pushing aside your thoughts and feelings of the day when we have meditation at the beginning of classes. This is not just so we have you down on your knees with your eyes closed! This is an opportunity to prepare yourself for training. Take deep breaths and let everything that happened during the day go... Empty your Cup!

Mushin is probably one of the most important states to achieve in the Martial Arts. Something happens and you instantly react with the correct response. Remember, relax and focus your mind on nothing to achieve everything.

AJKA-I of PA
Instructor Trainee #E027
Andrew Spivack