

JUDO RON-35. Cultivation of the mind - Heijoshin kore Michi

Heijoshin-平常心

If your mind is already full of yourself, how can there be room for you to learn new things?

I was in my teens when my Sensei told me *to be cool, be natural* as he took his place on the side of the tatamis and I proceeded alone to face various challengers in Shiai. Taking such advice seriously, I tried to be myself and walk my own path with a high level of readiness and confidence. In those early days, I did not fully understand the mystical union between physical and mental readiness and its strategic importance in judo. Several decades have gone by, and I have had the time to reflect upon those words of wisdom. In a previous writing about the discovery of Judo's arsenal, I devoted some time to define such state of readiness.ⁱ Hereunder I wish to share my current interpretation of what I now understand to be Heijoshin.

Judo has been synthesized in its two principles: better use of energy, and mutual welfare and benefits. When we address the terminology of Heijoshin, we somewhat reconcile with these two maxims. Sooner or later in life, we are bound to understand that we are really free and natural when we are not preoccupied; that we receive more by letting go; and that we achieve more by being selfless. As we enter the adult age, the term Heijoshin becomes more applicable and meaningful.

In the Encyclopedia of Martial Arts,ⁱⁱ Heijoshin is described as a warrior's mental attitude: *confident, strong, unshakable yet ready and determined for action*. It is reported to have its origin in the Zen-shu teaching where one should attempt to have the body and the mind perform in unison. This kind of balanced attitude was believed to be the proper and dignified behavior for all aristocrats and warriors of ancient times and is still true today for everyone.

In the Kodokan new Japanese-English dictionary, the authors describe Heijoshin *as an everyday mind of calmness*.ⁱⁱⁱ It also carries the meaning of a steady presence of mind: peaceful, calm, and a mind that stays constant and stable throughout difficult situations or conflicts. Heijoshin does not mean to be without emotion nor feelings, it rather represents a state of dominance over our normal emotions, a natural way to face the unknown and still be able to maintain a state of readiness to proceed with determined action.

The word has two parts: Heijo" and "shin". Heijo means ordinary, usual or normal. Shin is the symbol for "mind" or "heart". It may also be interpreted as being able to adopt a normal or natural state of readiness both in our mind and with the accompanying bodily movements.

What does being into a natural state of balance really mean? The sage's wisdom and the literature tell us that to be natural and free to act is not easy; if we want to be one with the moment, we have to work hard at it. It demands continual efforts, understanding and attention. One cannot achieve mastery without diligent practices.

"Tao abides in non-action. Yet nothing is left undone" Lao Tsu

Let us revisit the ancient literature and try to reunite it with our current knowledge.

Jacob Needleman in his introduction to the metaphysical work produced thousands of years ago by Lao Tsu as "Tao Te Ching"ⁱⁱⁱ informs us that the ancient civilization believed that the fundamental forces of the universe were mirrored in our own individual being; that man is but a part of the fabric of the universe and is dependent on the whole universe for his very existence. He, like so many other Buddhist teachers invites us to try to live naturally and in harmony with all the forces of the universe. He states: *"to be natural involves a state of openness or receptivity that is subtle, elusive and active. It means becoming aware of that supreme creative energy contained in all of us and which his subsequently expressed by our actions."*



Lao Tsu monument in China, public photo from Art Energy.org

Other masters associated with various martial arts such as Kendo, Aido, Aikido and Judo were somewhat familiar with the Zen Buddhism teachings and practices and understood the necessity to make the link between man and nature in order to better improve our being. They have repeatedly requested that we develop deeper understandings of our perception of nature and redefine our relations with the entities present in the universe. With greater sensitivity towards our surroundings and better comprehension of the laws of nature such as they pertain to dynamics, gravity, anatomy, psychology, philosophy and others, they believe that we could achieve greater freedom in our daily actions. As we often found in the past, such task is simply said but difficult to accomplish.

"Empty yourself of everything. Let the mind become still." Lao Tsu

The difficulties arise because our perception of nature is an individual process. It is relative to the degree of openness and sharpness of our mind. Daniel Kahneman the Nobel Laureate of 2002 for his works on cognitive sciences identified two levels of operations taking place in our mind:^{iv} *“Our behind the scene intuitive mind is fast, automatic, effortless, associative, implicit and emotionally charged. On track two, we find the familiar conscious mind (explicit) with is sequential, rational and require some effort to employ.”* The first level of cognition appears to function without making judgment or reasoning (intuitive mind), while the latter encompasses a period of time and several processes to apply reason and logic to what has been captured (intellectual mind) by our senses. He also noted that we have a tendency to apply mental shortcuts based upon mental and bodily experiences and these shortcuts may enable us to make snap judgments of the things we see and feel, and therefore be the subject of periodic mistakes, illusions and misinterpretations, notwithstanding that we can automatically resurface emotions and feelings that will influence our long term judgment.

Every day we are exposed to thousands of animated and still objects, we hear distinct sounds and background noises, smell different odors, touch different surfaces, see things, and are exposed to myriads of entities and events close by and far away. Most of these objects are captured by our senses, and then they are evaluated and processed in our mind within a fraction of a second. We often feel before analyzing. Just by being present here on one spot and at this moment, we are exposed to our environment, and to the whole universe. Just by being exposed, we acquire intuitive expertise that enables us to make quick and effortless judgment and response. We feel the cold and the heat and can recognize dry from wet surfaces. Yet, too often, we do not directly experience the forces and laws that govern their nature and their interrelationships.

If we wish to follow the instructions of the ancients, our immediate task is to increase our comprehension of natural phenomena. This is nothing less than rediscovering, recognizing and making greater use of our consciousness through our senses. We know that we are all capable of receiving the information from sensorial organs; what is needed is that we understand how to better make use of the two platforms of recognition and manage them correctly in order to better transform the information and make use of it without making unnecessary judgment.

Zen Master Shunryu Suzuki talked about the idea of naturalness in his book on Zen Mind^v when he warned that many of us remain confused and motionless when addressing the natural as a form of freedom. *“For a plant or a stone to be natural is no problem. But for us there is some problem, indeed a big problem. To be natural is something we must work on.”*

When describing the concept of naturalness, Master Suzuki makes use of the terms (wu) as of non-being or emptiness or the end of a process. He also refers to the term (wu-wei) to describe the non-action. This duality was a central theme in the ancient Chinese text of Tao Te Ching by Lao Tsu along with the expression “*nyu nan shin*” to describe the smooth, natural mind. He goes on to say: “*When you possess a natural mind, you have the joy of life. When you lose it, you lose everything. You have nothing. Although you think you have something, you have nothing. But when all you do comes out of nothingness, then, you have everything...that is what we mean by naturalness.*” If we focus our attention on these definitions, we may be able to make a rapprochement between the ancient text and the 2002 declaration of Kahneman about the cognitive process being accomplished at two levels.

This interpretation also corresponds to the Chinese Daoism theory that describes the existence of two aspects of the mind in our post-natal state: the intuitive mind (Yin Shen) and the intellectual mind (Yang Shen). The intuitive mind is associated with the functions of the parietal lobe of the brain, which corresponds to intuition and self-awareness, including the consciousness of the body and the previous memories stored in our internal organs such as emotions, personality, character, and so forth. The intellectual mind is associated with the function of the frontal lobe of the brain, which manifests itself as thought, ego, logic, reasoning, mental and cognitive abilities etc.

It is suggested that when operating at the second level (applying judgment and analysis) we can get easily disturbed and confused by our interpretation of events, words or images. We have learned to associate clues and feelings and have introduced them in our judgment making process. Such disturbances are produced by both internal and external signals that contain different strength levels of energy as they are received and transformed in our mind at the immediate instant of recognition or while encountering mixed or new information. We may even have encountered instances where our mental composure was more difficult to achieve because we were physically incapacitated, under stress, afraid or already engaged in other thoughts.

In those instances, the channeling of the ideas or signals seems to become erratic and may even result in the temporarily loss of thought and force some delay in our response time. It is fair to say that whenever our thoughts are disturbed for whatever reason, our mind becomes temporarily unstable and we become more vulnerable. Thus, Heijoshin means that in any given situation, in the dojo or elsewhere, we should keep the state of our mind as stable and as neutral as possible in order to think more clearly, make the right decision and act accordingly. Accomplishing such an action is employing only the sufficient amount of forces necessary and not displaying excessive energy.

“The undisturbed mind is like a calm body of water reflecting the brilliance of the moon.”

Yagyū Jubei.



Yin Yang concept expressing receiving and giving as interrelated energies. (Source not identified)

Before we begin clearing our mind of excesses we need to revisit the ancient Chinese concept of Yin and Yang which expresses the capabilities to receive and to give energy. To make intelligent use of energy, we need to discover the presence of the inner energies in our mind and as such be able to observe all other energy forms which are governed by the laws of interaction between humans and nature. Making such a discovery is not a given gift and not an easy accomplishment for it requires proper guidance with regular and precise practices of meditation.

For those who are capable of entering into their inner selves easily, they will soon find that: everywhere, all the phenomena depend upon their harmonious relationships with the universal forces which the ancient called Yin and Yang (receiving and giving- returning or expressing). For most of us layman, it is possible, with some added attention and improvements to the ways we observe our environment, to recognize that everything has an opposite. Every force evokes and depends upon a counterforce.

As some of us may have experienced with the performance of the fifth movement of the judo *Itsutsu-no-kata* where two opposing forces are converging towards a collision with each other that an effort must be made to avoid the destruction of either. Similarly, when we contemplate two opposing mental forces we need to be careful not being overtaken by either of them and we should seek to find the “middle ground or juste-milieu”. Awareness is the key to grasp the phenomenon of action-reaction as we develop greater power of attention. Such ability will allow us to properly capture and define the various relationships between ideas and mental connections.

I list hereafter a few opposing energies statements as contained in the old Chinese teacher’s handbook which merit additional meditation time:

“Yield and overcome. Bend and be straight. Empty and be full. Wear out and be new. Have little and gain much. Have much and be confused.” Lao Tsu, chap 22^{vi}

As mentioned above, Heijoshin literally translated means a natural, constant and stable spirit ready for action. Such state of readiness is a by-product of who we are as a unique person at any given time. As such, it can only be achieved by refining our fundamental nature, by improving our mental and physical responses and this can only be accomplished if our intellect, emotions, and character are developed in harmony with our physical energy.

Cultivating the natural and developing the spirit are not only associated with training the mind, but also training the body, particularly working with each internal organ within the body. Each organ is often considered as an information repository which contains organ-specific personal experiences, memories, family history and others. It has been found that negative images and harmful recalls from our internal system are frequently at the root and cause of chronic illness. Healthy habits should be maintained in order to ensure that the lungs, the heart, the liver, kidney, bones and muscular systems with other essential systems operate at their best and nourish the flow of energy making us more alert and responsive to external stimulations.



Zen calligraphic motif of « Anso » expressing completeness at each moment

Drawn by Tanakashi Kazuaki from Essential Zen^{vii}

What kind of training can develop and improve our personality you will likely ask? It is recognized in some social-psychology milieu that 50% of who we are may be the product of our genes; another 25% is dependent upon our upbringing (social status-education-family-recreation style etc.), the other 25% is a zone of opportunity under our immediate control. It can be developed through specific mental exercises and general experiences.

By recommending the use of personal meditation as a mental exercise, Doctor Mathieu Ricard of the Pasteur Institute and Buddhist monk addresses this kind of training when he states:^{viii} *“Un entraînement prolongé et une attention vigilante permettent d’identifier et de gérer les émotions et les événements mentaux à mesure qu’ils surviennent.” Entendre-voir-percevoir-subir-réfléchir-méditer-intégrer-agir et suivre l’action sont des activités naturelles d’une contemplation de l’esprit et une expérience profonde qui combine à la fois relaxation et flux; signe d’un calme intérieur et la présence d’esprit claire, éveillée, attentive et sans tension ».*

Free translation: “A prolonged training and a watchful attention allow to identify and to manage the feelings and the mental events as they arise and to follow their action are natural activities of a powerful spirit and expresses a deep experience which combines at the same time relaxation and flow; sign of a calm interior and the clear, awakened and attentive presence of a mind operating without tension “.

When we define internal cultivation we also refer to desire, will, intent, conscience, intellectual mind, intuitive mind, and soul since they are just different expressions of the spirit. Thus, spiritual development is not only associated with training of the intellectual mind, but also associated with the management of emotions and desires, with willingness, with refinement of one's intent, with empowerment of conscience, development of the intuitive mind, and the nourishment of the soul.

Dr. Ricard informed us that within the Buddhism concept, *“An emotion which strengthens our inner peace and aims at the welfare of others is considered as being positive and constructive. On the other hand, if it destroys our serenity, disturbs profoundly our spirit and is harmful to the others, it is negative or disruptive.”* It is thus crucial that we learn to manage our emotions in order to nourish the soul and develop the proper spirit. Negative emotions such as anger and fear could cause a huge loss of internal energy and result in energy depletion, fatigue and even exhaustion thus damaging our mental operations. Holistic medicine tells us that anger impairs the liver, extreme joy impairs the heart, grief and anxiety mess up the lungs and over-thinking impairs the spleen while fright and terror damage the kidney while the vital energy flow is often disturbed by extreme and prolonged emotional frustrations.

When our emotions prove to be positive like when we are calm and peaceful, showing integrity and dignity, they bring nourishing energy into the blood flow which results in greater joy and a healthy well-being. To be natural in a state of Heijoshin we need to be able to feed on what is positive and discard what is negative.

Some scientific studies have been carried out during the past decade, which have brought new light on our capacity to improve the mental process through meditation. Research has found that long-term mindfulness meditation practice do promote executive functioning and improve our ability to sustain attention. The value of short training periods in meditation has also been revealed by some scientists. One interesting study, the product of experiments done at the University Wake Forest in North Carolina in 2010 demonstrated that after only 4 days of meditation training, students were able to enhance their ability to sustain attention levels, improve both their working memory and their executive functioning.^{ix}

In its study of midterm period of meditation practices, a team of researchers from the University of California investigated improvements in continual attention with a form of training (~5 hr/day for 3 months) consisting of meditation practice that involved constant attention towards a stimulus produced by the participant's breathing cycle. It was found that such training produced improvements in visual discrimination that were linked to increases in perceptual sensitivity and improved vigilance. These results suggest that perceptual improvements can reduce the resource demand imposed by target discrimination and thus make it easier to sustain voluntary attention.^x

Let us leave the scholastic milieu and return to make the analysis of different training practices we perform in our own dojo. With careful attention of what we do and how we conduct different exercises, we can find ways to accomplish and improve upon our state of Heijoshin.

Mental training aiming at using the emptiness is yet another process that we must undertake in our path. Our Initiation to brake falls or do ukemis is along with the physical conditioning familiarization exercises an instrument that is used to bring a better understanding of our space-orientation and greater familiarity with our physical dimensions. Performing the first 100 ukemis is painful and requires constant adjustment. The next 1000 falls breaking gestures will accustom our body to the different angles, variations and speed and as such will discipline our body. The last 10,000 ukemis will be seen as refinement and will reach the maturity state where they are performed effortless, naturally, and without worrying about accident or injuries.

The same process can be said with the continued training for the acquisition of Waza. They are first introduced, detailed and explained piece by piece. The student then follows instructions, adjust his position, his spacing and perform the prescribe sequences. Once the fundamentals are understood, individual refinements are sought through repetitive Uchi-Komi and identification of opportunities. Following hours of study and preparation the judoka enters the free exercise mode where he opens his mind to all possibilities and both his mental attitude and his technical refinement are tested with different partners. Through the improved relationship attained with different partners via the Randori and Shiai he is able to reach a higher level of confidence and he becomes more capable of performing naturally at the right moment.

With the study and practice of different kata, one is following the same cycle: first, an observation, then an understanding of what is required followed by an imitation of different sequences to end with a greater understanding and feeling for each technique. Maturity and freedom will be reached when the judoka can internalize the techniques without thinking about the sequences of neither events nor the expected responses.

Another form of training at our disposal is the mental period provided at the beginning and closing ceremonies of the training period and called Mokuso. Here, the drills are not all external and not that easily recognizable. The short duration of the exercise may not provide sufficient time for deep meditation to occur. The task to enter into deeper meditating process is therefore more complicated and may well require many months of coaching, discipline, effort, sacrifice and a strong commitment. Nevertheless, these are ways and means readily available to begin our process of identifying the two levels of cognition with which we need to operate.

I have heard and experienced with other ways with which we can achieve such peace of mind. Some teachers have recommended that we bring lots of variety in our training programs to sustain interest. Others have recommended that we explain less and perform more; that we not concentrate or stop the flow of our mind at any one place; that we should not be obsessed by winning or worried about losing, that we forget what our opponent is about to do; that we note what disturbs our thinking and try to avoid the circumstance that produce such disturbance; that we lengthen the Mokuso period by several minutes and place more emphasis on the breathing process; that we find additional activities of interest where concentration can be sustained on things that are pleasing. The general advice is to clear up our mind and just become one with the present and enter into the flow of the moment. To become one with the action! When attempting to apply a technique, we must act without hesitation, we must let go the reasoning or cognitive process and let our mind do what it is supposed to do, that of liberating the body.

The great sword master that was Myamoto Mushashi mentioned one technique of development of the neutral mind in his book written in 1645^{xi}: "*Ken-Zen-Ichi-Nio (Body and mind together) You first learn the techniques, practice them, internalize them and then, forget them, just accomplish them.*"

Emptiness of the mind was discussed in the book *Kodo the Ancient Ways* by Kensho Furuya who related the teachings of Zen Master Takuan Soho (1573-1645). The latter used the image of a tree to explain the concept of the non-abiding mind e.g.: "*when we look at a tree, if we focus our attention on just one leaf, we lose track of the rest of the tree. In fact, if we focus very intently on just one leaf then we may not even be able to see the rest of the tree. Instead, however, if we attempt to focus on every leaf, our minds become confused and we will lose track of everything.*" Takuan asserted that when we focus our minds on one leaf or attempt to focus our minds on all of the leaves, our mind becomes attached to only what we are concentrating on, and in doing so; our mind loses the ability to focus on anything else. Takuan recommended that we instead FOCUS ON NOTHING IN PARTICULAR which allows our eyes and our attention to move naturally throughout our visual field. As a result, we are able to observe in its entirety the experience of the tree.

I return to the teaching of "Kata" as an integral part of the training curriculum for I believe that when students learn a Kata for the first time it is necessary for them to focus and be very attentive to learning the order and direction of each technique. Once the students understand the basic choreography, the Sensei can begin the process of refining each set of techniques, by introducing the rationale and purposes. After months of practice, students are encouraged to continue to practice Kata for the love of it and to become more integrated with the messages or meanings of various kata. Only after weeks and months can the students begin to experience the original or natural spirit. One can tell they have reached a higher level of consciousness when as performers, their bodies move freely from technique to technique without conscious thought. They are experiencing the flow or continuum directly, they become one with the moment. They have no longer the fear of making neither mistakes nor the illusions that something else is demanded. They are totally dedicated to the action and in the right rhythm with the timing of change. They have liberated themselves of their ego and became united with the action. They demonstrate the fullness and grandeur of the kata with the mental state of emptiness.

The more we observe the advanced judoka performing with such grace, the more we realize that they were able to clear up their minds, not being worried about all of these other issues associated with training regimes. They allow their bodies to act and react to what happens at each instant without thinking about what they should be doing. While witnessing such a demonstration we can easily coin the phrase “*They are in their proper zone*”. They are in that state of relaxation where their body moves effortlessly about and around the tatamis without any mental oppression.

“Cultivation to the mind is as necessary as food to the body.”

Marcus Tullius Cicero

It is the Zen Master Shen Yen who summarized this kind of training perfection when he said in the book “*Essential Zen*”:

“Be soft in your practice. Think of the method as a fine silvery stream, not a raging waterfall. Follow the stream, have faith in its course; it will go its own way, wandering here, trickling there, it will find the grooves, the cracks and the crevices. Just follow it; never let it out of your sight. It will take you.”

Can this judo mental training be exported outside the dojo? Surely, Steve Erickson summarized this concept of mental readiness in the following manner: ^{xii} *“If we can learn how to block out all of the internal and external voices that convince us that we should be afraid or that we are going to fail, then we will become more effective in our communication and our ability to perform whatever task we choose. From this higher level of consciousness, the ability to relax and block out extraneous thoughts including those of fear, self-doubt, shame and the judgment of others can dramatically change our lives for the better.”* On the other hand, the Korean Zen Master Kyong Ho (1849-1912) formulated 10 simple prescriptions to avoid being disturbed by undesired emotions, remain natural, at peace and become fully engaged with each moment. They were captured in the *Essential Zen* book by Kazuaki Tanahashi as follow:

1. Don't wish for perfect health for you may discover greed and wanting.
2. Don't hope for a life without problems, for you may become judgmental and lazy.
3. Don't expect your practice to be free of obstacle, for deliverance is attained after disturbance.
4. Don't expect to practice hard and not have weird feelings, for you get rid of demons.
5. Don't expect to finish doing something easily, for you need to try again and again.
6. Don't expect personal benefits from making friends, for purity in heart makes enduring friendships.
7. Don't force others to follow you, for it is better to bring peace between people.
8. Don't expect rewards for an act of charity, for you should throw away false spirituality like an old pair of shoes.
9. Don't seek profit over and above what you work is worth, for be rich in honesty.
10. Don't be taken by every hindrance, for cutting free of them will make you find their true treasures.

What more revealing as a closing statement than the one made by Louise Lecavalier for the summer edition of the Canadian More Magazine on the subject of becoming one with what we undertake. This 52 years old dancer known for her explosive and punishing choreographies said: "I dance what I am, someone feeling things intensely. Pushing your limits is really a question of willingness and of hard work. When you are able to transcend gravity, you can reach this meditative state. Over and above proving myself technically, searching out that peace has always been at the heart of my journey with dance."

We can sum up our description of Heijoshin by saying that it is a process of changing attitudes (becoming detached and empty-minded). It involves both physical and spiritual training needed for the acquisition of a greater awareness of who we are and how we interface with nature. It encompasses the training of the spirit to maximize the imprints left by good emotions and diminish the influence of unhealthy emotions. By doing so, we create higher moral and spiritual connections to our life without the use of extra artifices or effort. With Heijoshin we thus implement the judo principles of intelligent use of energy and mutual welfare and benefits.

Have a good training session.

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ⁱ Ronald Désormeaux, *The Discovery of Judo Arsenal, Shin Gi Tai*, August 2008.

ⁱⁱ Toshiro Daigo, Teizo Kawamura, *Kodokan New Japanese English Dictionary*, Kyodo Printing, 2000, page 76

ⁱⁱⁱ Jacob Needleman, Lao Tsu, *Tao Te Ching*, Vintage, New York, 1972, p V-XXXII

^{iv} Daniel Kahneman, *Track or systems, The high and low road*, www.scieammind.com, 2002

^v Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Weather hill, New-York, 1970, p 105-06

^{vi} Lao Tsu, *Tao Te Ching*, translated by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, Vintage Book, 1972

^{vii} Kazuaki Tanahashi, *Essential Zen*, Castle Books, 1994

^{viii} Mathieu Ricard, *Plaidoyer pour le Bonheur*, Pocket Évolution, 2009, p 18-123

^{ix} Ziedan F Johnson et al, *Mindfulness meditation improves cognition: evidence of brief mental training*. Conscious Cognition. 2010 Jun 19(2):597-605. Department of Neurobiology and Anatomy, Wake Forest University School of Medicine, Winston-Salem, NC

^x Maclean KA-*Intensive Meditation Training Improves Perceptual Discrimination and Sustained Attention*. Psychology sciences. (Maclean KA, Ferrer E, Aichele SR, et al.) Dept of Psychology, University of California, Mai 2010

^{xi} Myamoto Mushashi, *Gorin no Sho*, 1645, *The book of 5 rings*, translated by Bradford J Brown, Bantam Book, 1982

^{xii} Steve Erickson, *True Essence of the Japanese Concept of "Mushin"*. (2008). WWW.Center for Humane Living.