

MARTIAL ARTS: A THING FOR THE INNER PART OF THE BODY

Bo Munthe maj 1996

In my 35 years of training in and studying the Martial Arts, I have found that the average martial artist does not have a great deal of interest in studying the historical part of the art in which he trains. However, people involved in ninpo-training tend to be the exception to this observation. These people make great efforts to find out about the philosophy and history of the art, the ninpo bugei and shinobi-philosophy.

The reason why I write about this problem is that, as I see it, having muscle and raw attitude are becoming more important than cultivating brain and spirit. If people avoid the most important thing in the world -- studying to be better human beings -- we will soon see worse things than the Ultimate Fighting Championship and other so called "tournaments."

For me, and most of my students, training in the warrior way is about how to act in a confrontation. However, life on a day to day basis is not about physical confrontations only; it is more about mental conflicts. One good way to master those conflicts is to learn the proper way of the warrior -- the peaceful spiritual way. To quote Jack Hoban, "When in doubt -- think!"

Our training in my dojo, Kuro Yama Kai, is about those important things -- how to develop man's deepest strength -- to become a Tatsujin, a complete person, through training in shogyu.

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THE LEGACY OF MARTIAL ARTS IN DAILY LIFE

Bo Munthe or How to Develop Inner Strength maj 1996

My interest in Japanese Martial Arts started at the end of the fifties. At that time I had to train using the few books that were available. Only one book at that time, ZEN COMBAT, talked about using a person's mind in conflict. It described many of the arts, such as painting, calligraphy, etc. and their relations to fighting arts. My interest in the Zen philosophy had to wait a few more years before I could focus on the spiritual training.

A kohai -- beginner -- in Martial Arts is often a seeker in one way or another. Reasons for beginning training could be one of the following:

- 1. to train physically just for fun
- 2. for competition purposes
- 3. to learn self-defense
- 4. to learn how to fight as "they do in the movies"
- 5. to find the "right way"

Some beginners have become interested in training because they read a book in which a hero was using some obscure ancient Asian philosophy. One example is Lustbader's book "The Ninja" from the early 80s. That book introduced the good and the bad ninja to thousands of readers. I still have to tell some of them that it is a fiction novel.

The underlying thought in all Martial Arts, the true legacy, is that the arts were once used by warriors who protected their country, their families and themselves. The warrior was a person with high morals, because without a true moral sanction to act, one could never be a warrior - only a killer. The moral side for a warrior in Japanese bushi, is found in Nitobe's book,

BUSHIDO, THE SOUL OF JAPAN.

This book was written in 1899, after the demise of the Tokugawa-rule and the samurais -- when Commodore Perry and his black ships entered Japan in the 1800s. During the Tokugawa era, as well as before that, the samurais had a code -- unwritten at that time -- by which they lived. Nitobe wrote it down and published the secrets of the samurai. The Bu-shi-do/the military-warrior-way is basically a code of daily living for the fighting nobles, a moral code and ethical system, comprised of:

- Rectitude or Justice
- Courage, the Spirit of Daring
- Benevolence, the feeling of Distress
- Politeness
- Veracity
- Honour
- The Duty of Loyalty

Those seven ethical rules are still of current interest, for businessmen this time -- the warrior of the 21st Century.

When we talk about warriors we see them as the soldier of today, fighting today's wars. If we use this interpretation of the word, we get away from the true meaning for us budokas (Martial Artists) The proper context of the word is found in the Japanese traditional philosophy. A warrior was a person that could fight in all ways, known and unknown. But most of all, it signified a person who knew when it was moral to act, and why and when it was immoral to use his skills. A warrior today, as it was yesterday, is a man of action, guided by reason and motivated by love. A discussion of warriorship must contain the usual aspects of warfare, strategy and fighting. But what does a warrior do when he is not at war?

He continues to live a normal life, with his family or alone, depending on his life situation. However, all the time he is engaged in developing his mind, his inner thoughts, his spiritual life in an ongoing cycle forward mental development.

2,300 years ago, a Chinese man by the name of Sun Wu wrote a book that was to be read with great respect during the coming hundreds and thousands of years. Today, SUN TZU, THE ART OF WAR, is something businessmen all over the world are reading and studying with great interest. From being a book on warfare and strategy, its meaning has been changed to reflect on the "warfare" in business life. The same thing happened with the book BUSHIDO. Another samurai book translated into English, and used today in the context of business development is GO RIN NO SHO, Miyamoto Musashi's BOOK OF FIVE RINGS. It seems the knowledge and the philosophy from ancient Japan is evolving today. More and more people are using strategies, written down by samurais that lived 4-500 years ago, or more.

In feudal Japan, the counterpart to the samurai was the ninja. The ninja was an agent that could be bought for different purposes. The code of the samurai was not the code of the ninja -- the ninja belonged to a counterculture. Today, when we read about the history of Japan, we need to remember that the history books were written by the dominant society, the samurais. The truth, however, is difficult to find, but nevertheless, 100 million Japanese can not be wrong, or could they? When I visit Japan, speaking, as a gaijin, foreigner, to a Japanese person, and I tell him that I am a ninja, the person normally stares at me, and then he starts to laugh. For the average Japanese the ninja is related to the chanbara movies, the samurai, sword yielding movies that one can see on Japanese television everyday. One of the hoodlums in those movies, as well as they are in the modern western movies, is the ninja. A cloak and dagger, black-masked person with evil in his mind.

Things can not be further from the truth than this. One of my colleagues in the USA once wrote that Lustbader's ninja book, as well as those ninja movies today, give the same approach to the truth, as if the beaches in the USA were all infested with sharks as in the movie Jaws. The ninja once were warriors with great knowledge of Martial Arts and used

those skills when needed. Today the modern ninja still is a person with great knowledge of Martial Arts, but this time the reason for the training is different. The reason now is to develop one's mind and body, and as I said before, to develop the morality to know how and when to use our skills.

THE SPIRITUAL SIDE

The word for "whole person" in Japanese is Tatsujin. A whole person in that meaning is a person who has a heart, a mind and a body, in other words, completeness. Not in the way of a "perfect person", but in a matter of a person who knows his good sides, and also knows his weaknesses, and is capable of admitting those things, his faults and good sides to himself. In Sweden we have a saying, JANTE-LAGEN. It means that it is the law of Jante and this Jante was a thing, or a person, that always said to other people that "don't think you are anything, don't come and tell us anything " and so on. In other words, it is bad to look at yourself as a person with self-confidence and it is even worse to tell other people about your feelings. (In my mental development courses I give the students 5 minutes for writing down things they are good at -- and that gives me a great "phuuu" when they get the assignment, but it works. We have to find ourselves first, of course, since if we do not think positively of ourselves, other people will not do it either.)

THE INNER SIDE, URA

I have been training and studying judo, jujitsu, kenpo and most of all, the total Martial Art of ninjutsu, also called ninpo. (Ninpo is the higher order of ninjutsu and ninjutsu means techniques of the ninja. Ninja means man of endurance). To train in those ancient styles is to get a look back into the secret world of the people who lived during the feudal era. But training physically is only using the outer side, the omote. It is seldom that the teacher speaks about the spiritual part, the development of the inside of a persons self, the Tatsujin-concept. To find that, one has to search for oneself.

During the fifties and the sixties, not many instructors talked about the mental side. If that was because they didn't want to, or if they didn't know how to, I can not say. But, I'm sorry to say that there is still a big lack of information about the spiritual side. Instructors today are very eager to teach either how to defend oneself as effective as possible, or how to win a competition in any of those Martial Arts Tournaments. Very seldom have I met a person in Sweden, or in another country, who wanted to teach about the mind and the spiritual side. After almost 40 years in Martial Arts I see it as a very big loss for many of those seekers in Martial Arts.

To find and develop the mind one has to search for the right way. First one has to find the inner side and secrets of oneself. To know who you are, what your capabilities are, what you can do, what you can't do, your positive side, your negative side, to find your part in the IN-

YO (yin yang) is very important. Too many people is running around all their lives in circles. Full of stress and anxieties, they live a life "filled" with emptiness.

The mind of a ninja today is the mind of a humble and loving person. It is the mind of a man who can act morally when it is needed. The humanity of the teachings, the message from the grandmaster, is always with a smile that show the feeling he has when a technique is executed.

To keep your calm and to listen to the messages you get from the outside, messages that give you information about things, creates a deep knowledge of the spiritual side of a person. To feel, and to think gives great chances to develop ones' mind. In the book THE CELESTINE PROPHECY the author is getting very close to some of the insights to what is the essence in my way of living. For example, the insight on circumstances, is something I have tried to develop in my way of life.

This spring I went through one of the worst crisis in my life. Things fell over me from the past -- I call it the Elastic Bang, the eighties hit me in the head (I'm a "victim" of the happy days during the 80s). To survive I realized that I could not manage to work with this problem myself, I had to realize my limitations. I had to find a person to talk to, a person who listened and also could give me some advice -- I found a therapist whom I trusted. But both of us realized, after a couple of months, when we felt crisis was over, that I probably wouldn't have managed to work my way through it the way I did without my inner strength from the Martial Arts legacy. My mental training gave me proof here -- it worked since I knew who I was and also knew that once I was out from the shadows, things would be better and my mind and spirit stronger.

FINDING THE INNER STRENGTH

To train in ninpo in a dojo (dojo means hall of enlightenment) is to work with all details that are existing in our 900 year old style. It is to work with the physical part of the body, doing different techniques that have their roots in the past. It is also, and as I see it, more importantly, a training of the mind for finding the spiritual part. The confrontation in the dojo, with your training partner, gives you reasons to look into yourself, how do you react? Physically you know how you react, but mentally? Here is the great challenge, the opportunity to develop your mind and to find your strong sides, and eventually also your fears, through the physical confrontation. From your reactions you can work with yourself and develop your mind. To build up your inner strength and to find your spiritual goal -- to be a Tatsujin . All the training in the dojo should be a kind of ninpo meiso -- ninpo-meditation.

The primary training is with the mind, the secondary training is with the body, and last but not least, is the training of the Art that is important for defending your family and yourself -- the goal of a modern warrior.

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INJURIES IN THE MARTIAL ARTS

Bo Munthe juni 1996

Through my e-mail I got information from the States about how to cure injuries sustained in Martial Arts training. In this article I want to tell the people in Martial Arts my view of the training, a training that sometimes leads to injuries and sometimes, which I hope is more often than not, leads to mental development.

In my last two articles in Ura & Omote I have been talking about the importance of the inner side of Martial Arts training. There will always be a need for curing injuries, of course, since most of the trainees in this art put their emphasis on the physical side of the training. It is important to learn how to cure the injuries that might result in the training curing. Chinese Herbal Medicine is one way of curing injuries that works efficiently for martial artists. From the information that I've read I think that for most minor injuries (i.e. scrapes, small cuts, etc.), Chinese Herbal Medicine could be used effectively, with little side effects. However I wouldn't go about curing a serious dim mak strike with herbal medicine -- this could be fatal. Knowing when to seek proper medical is as important as knowing how to treat yourself.

If a Martial Artist has been injured during training there are some aspects I want to mention:

1. the training has been too hard, or wrong
2. the training partner has been too hard in his training or worse, lacking in knowledge of the technique
3. no control from the instructor
4. no respect between the two trainees

Whatever the reason for the injury, there must be a proper physical examination of the problem. To treat serious injuries by yourself could be fatal. Only persons with great knowledge of how the body functions should do it, and even they will say that a physical examination of the injured place must be done.

During my 38 years of training in the Martial Arts I have seen many injuries. Most of them has been during beginners training or during competition.

My own opinion of competition in Martial Arts, as most of the readers probably know by now -
- but for those who do not know it -- I feel that competition and Martial Arts are two counterparts. The true Martial Art, as I see it, should be done with a goal of finding inner strength, and through that injuries should be out of the question.

For those who enjoy competition it is alright, but as far as I see it, its a kind of modern tournament, mostly without stressing the inner side. Money, reputations, winning symbols are not things that belongs to the way a true warrior, or Martial Artist is walking.

I know that many people do not agree with me about this. But if every person was thinking as I did, the world wouldn't be as funny a place to live, not even for me.

To train in the Bujinkan is a way to train your inner side. Not all people realize that. I hope the time will come when they do.

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