



The Art - The Sword



ZEN IN THE MARTIAL ARTS

By Joe Hyams

I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in going beyond the technical aspects of Martial Arts, to the spiritual realm. I did, however, find that this book is but a tip of the iceberg, and that more intense study of Zen is needed. But this author is so good that the reader is left begging for more. Not only is the reader left with wanting more but with numerous questions, not only about Zen itself, but about the spiritual aspect of Martial Arts, also “Is something missing in Zen philosophy? Where is the love and compassion for humanity, not just for self in the Zen teachings?” If one is searching for the spiritual aspect of martial arts, I believe this is a good beginning, because one must love oneself before one can love others. **Knowing others is wisdom, knowing yourself is Enlightenment.** One of many points the author bring out is that even the teachers have teachers, meaning that Martial Arts is infinite, the learning should not and has not an ending. The light at the end of the enlightenment tunnel is but another tunnel. Now about this book, Zen in the Martial Arts;

Martial arts in their finest form are much more than a physical contest between two opponents- a means of imposing one’s will or inflicting damage upon another. Rather, avenues through which one can achieve spiritual serenity, mental tranquility, and the deepest self-confidence. The martial arts began to develop this emphasis on personal spiritual growth in the sixteenth century, when the need for fighting skills in the Orient diminished. The martial arts were transformed from a practical means of combat-to-the-death to spiritual educational training that emphasized the personal development of the participant. Thus the art of fighting with the sword, kenjutsu, became transformed into “the way of the sword” kendo. The ending do “the way” or more fully, “the way to enlightenment”. Batto-jutsu is the art of drawing and simultaneously cutting with the sword. Zen has no theory; it is an inner knowing for which there is no clearly stated dogma. The Zen of martial arts de-emphasizes the power of the intellect and extols that of intuitive action. Its ultimate aim is to free the individual from anger, illusion, and false passion. The practice hall—dojo (Japanese), dojang (Korean), kwoon (Chinese)- where martial arts is studied is traditionally called “the place of enlightenment.” A dojo is a miniature cosmos where we make contact with ourselves- our fears, anxieties, reactions, and habits. It is an arena of confined conflict where we confront an opponent who is not an opponent but rather a partner engaged in helping us understand ourselves more fully. The conflicts that take place inside the dojo help us handle conflicts that take place outside. The activity in the dojo calls on us to constantly attempt new things, so it is also a source of learning- in Zen terminology, a source of self-enlightenment. The instructor first teaches technique (waza) without discussing its significance; he simply waits for the student to discover this for himself. If the student has the necessary dedication, and the teacher provides the proper spiritual inspiration, then the meaning and essence of the martial arts will finally reveal themselves to him. The philosophy of the arts is not meant to be mused over and intellectualized; it is meant to be experienced. With each new technique, method, or style, one must empty the mind of past knowledge and old habits so that one will be open to new learning. This is called emptying your cup. Nothing is impossible to a willing mind.



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When learning the martial arts it is the process not the product that is important. To be patient is to have the capacity of calm endurance. To give yourself time is to actively work toward a goal without setting a limit on how long you will work. Your focus must be concerned with the process of working on, rather than on its completion, thus work without anxiety. Zen teaches that life must be seized at the moment. By living in the present you are in full contact with yourself and your environment, your energy is not dissipated and is always available. Thus, Seize The Moment; learn to live in the present. As long as what you are doing at the moment is exactly what you are doing at the moment and nothing else, you are one with yourself and with what you are doing—and that is Zen; doing it at the fullest. Each activity has your fullest concentration. Learn to conquer haste. Those who are patient in the trivial things in life and control themselves will one day have the same mastery in great and important things. Know your limits and accept yourself with your limitations. You must accept the fact that you are capable in some directions and limited in others, and you must develop your capabilities. What you lack in flexibility and agility you must make up with knowledge and constant practice. As we discover and improve our strong points, they come to outweigh our weaknesses. Thus one's capabilities exceed one's limitations. **Power of the mind is infinite while brawn is limited.** It is always better to improve and strengthen your own line or knowledge than to try and cut your opponent's line.

To spend time is to pass it in a specified manner; to waste time is to expend it thoughtlessly or carelessly. Learn to control the use of your time, productively. Life unfolds on a great sheet called Time, and once finished it is gone forever. Active inactivity is pausing to assess, adjust and correct according to the demands of the situation, pausing to regroup. Pausing works to assess your predicament, settle on a future course of behavior, and then take your course of action or initiative. Inactive activity is controlled patience and planning, one observes his opponent, studies his position or stance, watching, getting ideas, and charging one's energy. For instance, sticky hands is an exercise in which your hands seem to stick to those of your opponent's. Through this training, students learn to interpret the silent messages telegraphed by their partner's hands. The way in which a hand retreats can signal a shift of body weight, a change in posture, and/or the probable direction of the next punch. The technique teaches you to ward off an oncoming attack and still remain centered and in control, neither overreacting nor under-reacting. When a problem arises, don't fight with it or try to deny it. Accept and acknowledge it. Be patient in seeking a solution or opening, and then fully commit yourself to the resolution you think advisable.

Ki or Ch'i is an available inner strength that expands the concept of one's own resources. If you imagine all your energy coming into your body at a point in your midsection, running down through your legs and running up through your trunk, through your arms, and up into your head—and then, with your mind, you project this energy through your body in the direction you wish—you can be said to be extending your ki. This ki is very effective when doing a board break. To generate great power you must first totally relax and gather your ki, and then concentrate your mind and all your ki on hitting your target.



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Zen breathing is a technique especially useful in stressful or anxiety-provoking situations, when one's breathing becomes irregular and fear distorts orderly thought processes, which tend to immobilize both one's body and mind. Through Zen breathing one obtains a relaxed state by controlled breathing. Controlled breathing restores calm, confidence, and strength. When you breathe you must fill your entire lungs with air. Imagine that the air you breathe is fog, and visualize it coming through your nose and throat into the lower abdomen. Let it circulate there and through your body and your limbs. Visualize it as it travels around the various channels and meridians of your body. When you exhale, see the fog leaving your mouth. When you visualize the breath as fog, other thoughts are kept from your mind, and with total concentration on breathing, you will be relaxed. Total concentration can also combat pain. The mind's power of concentration is stronger than pain when the martial artist has learned to use the Zen technique of **mind over matter**. Regulate your breathing, fix your eyes and mind on something else—perhaps a rock or spot on the floor or ceiling. Concentrate on that object, savor it, taste it, give it color and smell the dimension. Let it absorb all your thoughts and concentration and the pain will diminish. As you can see concentration is but one key, and the other is visualization. Visualization can also be a main factor in controlling one's fear. See the fear, examine it, and then confront it. Fear is shadow, not substance. If you are afraid of breaking boards or bricks, think to yourself "this is how I will do the break", and then visualize yourself going through the board, clear your mind of all thoughts except the image of your foot passing through the board. Do not let negative thoughts in your mind. The mind is like a fertile garden. It will grow anything you wish to plant, beautiful flowers or weeds. Do not allow negative thoughts to enter your mind for they are the weeds that strangle confidence. Negative thoughts are overpowering only if you encourage them and allow yourself to be overpowered by them.

Another goal of Martial Arts is to **go with the flow**. One must yield to an oncoming force in such a way that it is unable to harm you and, at the same time, change its direction by pushing it from behind instead of attempting to resist it from the front. Softness triumphs over hardness. What is more malleable is always superior over that which is immovable. This is the principle of controlling things by going along with them, of mastery through adaptation. Also "go with the flow" means when an untoward event occurs in your life, react to it without haste or passion. One must learn to have anger without action and action without anger. It's not bad to have aggressive or hostile thoughts and feelings toward others. When you acknowledge these feelings you no longer have to pretend to be that which you are not. What is bad, however, is letting them dictate your nature. When you unleash your aggression or hostility on another person, it inspires aggression and hostility in return. The result then is conflict, which all true martial artists try to avoid. **How can you expect to control someone else if you cannot control yourself?** Control your emotion or it will control you!



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To Understand You Must Look To Zen.

BEGINNER'S MIND

"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few."
If you are not looking for the end, do you not always find the beginning?

One day I was practicing the draws of Iai-do. I was doing them to the best of my ability, but I always felt that something was missing. I asked my Master what was wrong. He told me "Ken wa hito nari" or, "The sword is a person."

Iai-do and Kendo go hand in hand. Kendo / Kenjutsu is the art of the sword when it is, out of the scabbard. Batto-jutsu is the art of drawing and simultaneously cutting with the sword. Iai-do consists of four movements: (1) Nukitsuke, draw, (2) Kiritsuke, cutting movement, (3) Chiburi, removing of blood from the sword, and (4) Noto, return of the sword to its saya or scabbard.

Mere technical Knowledge is not enough to master Iai-do. One must go deeply into the inner spirit of the art. Training in Iai-do can only be considered successful when one has absorbed the mental as well as the physical techniques so that they are so much a part of you that using them is purely intuitive and unconscious. Your attitude should be one of alertness mixed with calmness and fearlessness. When practicing Iai-do, you must create a consciousness free from all thoughts or reflections or distractions of any kind. The best way to explain this is to say that the sword must become a part of you and not an extension. When one does Iai-do it should flow naturally, with out the brain to tell you each individual motion. One is said to have mastered Iai-do when the technique works through your body and limbs as if independent of your conscious mind.

I became it. It gave me the soul I was searching for, and I gave it the heart to come alive.

Two reasons for not touching the blade. First, the ha or cutting edge being of surgical sharpness will cut you, and secondly, moisture and acids in one's hands will begin to make it rust in a matter of minutes. Take a clean piece of soft paper or cloth and hold the backside while you are looking at it. All swords should be handled with respect. Your sword is one of a kind and most important, it is yours. It will become you, with both your shortcomings and imagination. Do not let anyone pull your sword from its sheath and touch the blade, it is only yours.

The Samurai had just two things that were his alone. No man could take them from him. First was his honor and next was his swords. His sword was regarded as the truest emblem of his virtue, valor, and strength. The Samurai believed that all weapons meant to kill are inconspicuous and never must be used except on occasion of extreme urgency. If for this purpose of pushing evil and not for depriving one of life.

Cleaning The Katana

The first thing to do is (with a soft cloth) to wipe the blade to remove any oil or other substances that might be on it, always going up the blade from the back as not to cut yourself. Remember that if you get careless, the sword will remind you very painfully of your mistakes. Formal cleaning (to be discussed at a later time) is only necessary about 3-4 times a year. The cleaning after each lesson consists only of wiping the blade down with the clean cloth.



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Proper Sword Procedure - Iaido Dojo

Formal Bow

1. **(1st Bow – To enter the Practice Area) Bow onto the workout area first. When doing so the sword is sheathed. Hold the sword in the right hand with the Ha (edge) held downwards and the Kojiri (butt) is forward towards the front, your right palm is on the Tsuba (sword guard).**
2. **Walk into the room in a straight line to your position (sharp Military Style walk starting with the left foot). When you reach that point stop with feet together and pivot in place to face the front of the room. Sword still held in right hand, left hand is straight at your left side, bow. (2nd Bow - This bow is to the flags)**
3. **Reach across your body with your left hand and grasp the Saya (scabbard) just below your right hand. Rotate the Saya (scabbard) upward and turn it (keeping hold with both hands) so that the Ha (edge) is now upwards and the Kojiri (butt) is now facing towards the back. Place your right thumb on the Tsuba (sword guard). Bring your left hand back to your left side, bow. (3rd Bow - This bow is to the instructors)**
4. **With your right hand, bring the sword up to a horizontal position at eye level. As you do this bring your left hand up and place on the underside of the Saya (scabbard) near the Kojiri (butt), The Ha (edge) should be facing you, bow. (4th Bow - This bow is to the sword)**
5. **With a smooth fluid motion guide the Saya (scabbard) into the left side of your belt. The Ha (edge) should be upward. Guide the Kojiri (butt) into place with the right hand. Place your left thumb on the Tsuba (sword guard). Position hands midline center and forward (hand position is as in our omega finishing movement Hatchet). Return both hands to your sides, bow. (Final bow to draw your blade) You are now in the basic ready position to draw your blade.**

Drawing the blade

1. **Reach across your body with your right hand, placing your right hand on the Tsuka (handle), just behind the Tsuba (sword guard).**
2. **Place your left thumb on the underside of the Tsuba (sword guard). Pushing outward till the Habaki (collar) is clear of the Saya (scabbard).**
3. **Rotate the top of the Saya (scabbard) 45 degrees away from the body.**
4. **With a smooth fluid motion draw the sword out of the Saya (scabbard) till it is completely clear at the same time stepping out to the side with your left foot no wider than shoulder width.**
5. **Bring the sword to a vertical position in the center of your body, your right hand should be roughly chest high, Ha (edge) facing away from you.**
6. **Bring your left hand to the Tsuka (handle) just under your right hand. (This will be your basic starting position to strike from)**



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Happo-Giri: The eight basics

1. From the Basic position for strikes, jab straightforward at stomach level. Arms are extended. At the same time step and drag forward into a right front stance.
2. Pull the blade straight back towards your body. At the same time step back with the left foot, and drag the front foot back (step and drag).
3. Bring the tip of the blade back to your left side. Perform a horizontal cut from left to right. At the same time step and drag forward, still in right front stance.
4. Continue moving the blade in a downward arc to the right. Diagonal cut upward at a 45-degree angle from the lower right (roughly knee area) to the upper left (just past shoulder level). At the same time step and drag forward, in a left front stance.
5. Reverse the direction of the blade and diagonal cut back downward along the same path, 45-degree angle down from left to right. At the same time step and drag backwards, still in left front stance.
6. Bring the tip of the blade back to your right side. Perform a horizontal cut from right to left. At the same time step and drag forward, still in a left front stance.
7. Continue moving the blade in a downward arc to the left. Diagonal cut upward at a 45-degree angle from the lower left (roughly knee area) to the upper right (just past shoulder level). At the same time step and drag forward, in a right front stance.
8. Reverse the direction of the blade and diagonal cut back downward along the same path, 45-degree angle down from right to left. At the same time step and drag backward, still in right front stance.
9. Moving into a horse stance bring the blade around to the back. Handle centerline in back and hands in a position just above your head. Cut downward on the centerline of the opponent's body bending your knees and lowering your center of gravity to give more power to the cut. The Kissaki (tip) should be pointed roughly 45 degrees down toward the floor.
10. Bring your feet to center position (Left foot moves into informal attention, feet are not totally together) at the same time returning the blade to the starting position.
11. Bring the blade to the downward position to the right of the body in a sharp motion to clear the blood from the blade. This is called Chiburi (cleaning the blade).
12. Return the blade to the center position.
13. You are now ready to sheath the blade.

