

MUSHIN



The Japanese term Mushin is a shortened version of the Zen expression "mushin no shin" which translates as "the mind without mind" or "no-mindedness." This means a fully awake and aware mind not fixed or occupied by emotion or thought (implying the eyes or any other sensory input also not fixed or occupied on any specific awareness, action or target).

Mushin thus implies a state of mental clarity, awareness and enhanced perception (sensory and intuitive) known as pure mind, produced by the absence of conscious thought, ideas, judgments, emotion (fear and anxiety), pre-conception, or self-consciousness. It is a state of total awareness and reaction not impeded by higher mental function or emotion, a mind more open and reactive to subtle sensory input, intuition and spontaneous action. It is a mind that is totally calm -- a mind not influenced or caught up in events or others emotion, thus a mind more able to freely perceive and respond.

The goal is to enhance awareness (zanshin) and sensitivity, while reducing thought and emotion to allow intuitive and spontaneous action - to let the body, not the thinking or emotional mind, to take charge.

Mushin is prevalent throughout all Japanese arts, from flower arrangement (Ikebana) to calligraphy (Shodo) to modern martial arts. A person who studied Japanese flower arrangement once said that the state of mind was the biggest difference between Western flower arrangement and what she had learned in Japan: That in Japan her arrangements were intuitive and seemed to flow outward from her non-conscious mind.

The New York Police Department also teaches new recruits the importance of keeping a clear, non-emotional mind in difficult, potentially violent or emotional situations. They teach recruits not to feed anger or emotion and instead to allow calm authority and verbal strategies to resolve issues and gain compliance when possible.

For the Japanese classical warrior (Samurai or Bushi), or the 20th century soldier equivalent, as well as modern martial artists, mushin or clear mind is equally important. On the battlefield it could mean the difference between life and death. The Samurai recognized that the state of mind was an equal partner to technical weapons training. When potential death faces you from multiple directions, awareness had to be encompassing. Recognition of danger and response needed to be instantaneous, the body and weapon fully committed in powerful action without concern for the self or hesitation of thought.

This required the non-conscious mind and the instinctive trained body to be free. No longer inhibited, slowed, distracted, or clogged, the mind was free to fully perceive, respond and commit to action. The mind is not fixed on anything and is open to everything; a mind expanded through the whole body with total awareness of and focus on everything.

The concept of Mushin was developed by Hui-Neng (Wei lang in Chinese), the sixth Patriarch, or successor to Bodhidharma, who brought to China (and the Shaolin Monastery from India) meditative Buddhism and the concept that all the world comes from the mind and meditation should be used to attain a state of pure mind without stain or dust.

The concept is closely akin to the Taoist concept of stillness (inside) within motion, a concept closely akin to Fudo and Fudoshin (derived from the Buddhist deity Fudo myoo, a deity portrayed as calm within a ring of fire). Lao-Tsu (the 6th century Chinese philosopher who fathered of Taoism) said "The stillness within stillness is not the true stillness (as in meditation), the true stillness is within motion."

It is widely believed (but not always so) that Zen (and its mediation practices) was an important element of the ancient Japanese Warrior practice to develop Mushin. In reality the influence of Zen on Japanese martial arts is a more modern reality than an ancient one. But Zen meditation was not the only path to a mushin-like mind state. War, combat and experience dealing with danger, all promote clarity of mind and enhanced awareness.

Experience itself (if survived) allows modern day experienced soldiers to survive, they eye sensitized to see almost invisible trip wires, the senses honed to recognize patterns and subtle signs of roadside danger, or the presence enemies hidden behind buildings. This experience is also what allows an experienced law enforcement personnel to sense danger on the street, a potential crime situation, or an impending assault.

The modern view of Zen and the martial arts was promulgated largely by several factors. First was the relationship of the famous Japanese Zen monk, Takuan Soho, and the founder of Yagyu Shinkage Ryu, Yagyu Munenori (1570-1646), one of the most famous sword schools in Japan.

Takuan also is known to be a friend and advisor to Miyamoto Musashi (further lending credibility to the idea of Zen's influence). Musashi (c. 1584 – June 13, 1645), was a sword master and ronin (masterless warrior). He created a unique two handed sword school (known today as Hyoho Niten Ichi-ryu) and was made famous through his many successful duels recounted in books and publications ever since.

Musashi is also famous for his "Book Of Five Rings" (Go Rin No Sho), a book on strategy, tactics and philosophy popular even today among martial artists and in business. Musashi was also an accomplished Zen inspired artist and calligrapher.

Takuan related the proper state of mind to flowing. He wrote "The mind must always be in the state of 'flowing,' for when it stops anywhere, that means the flow is interrupted and it is this interruption that is injurious to the well-being of the mind." (The Unfettered Mind)