

ZEN AND THE MARTIAL ARTS

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Part I: Introduction

They seem as immiscible as oil and water: Zen, the peaceful practice of tranquillity, and the martial arts, the deadly techniques of hand-to-hand combat. Yet tradition insists that when Bodhidharma introduced them to the weary priests of Shao Lin Ji he presented them together - a solution to the problem of enfeebling Samsara, a compounded tonic for the spiritually ailing.

The priests of Shao Lin Monastery were keeping a stale, orthodox regimen when Zen's formidable "Blue Eyed Demon" arrived from India. They were following the "polishing" way of inactivity and removal, the way which claims victory over bodily temptations by avoiding other bodies, which claims victory over contentious thoughts by erasing all thoughts. Too much sitting had numbed their brains and let their physical condition languish, yoked in the sluggish pace of spiritual ennui. They gave the stranger from the West plenty to work with.

Bodhidharma taught them how to be still with purpose and how to be active with meaning. Relentless, he sat before the whitewashed walls of Shao Lin Ji and demonstrated Ba Guan (wall gazing) meditation, the effective alpha-generating method psychologists today call the Ganzfeld Technique. As such, it became Zen's only original contribution to meditation's vast catalog of methods. But it was a good one.

And when Bodhidharma got up from his cushion he taught the monks how to put Mind into muscle: he taught them the choreographed combat calisthenics of Gong Fu.

Or so legend has it.

Whatever the facts of origin are, one thing is certain: for centuries... from the Sixth to the Twentieth... in stunning proof that opposites attract, this unlikely pair, these two disciplines as counterpoised as peace and war, swayed together in a graceful embrace; and in every Asian country into which Chinese Zen Buddhism spread, generations of monks joined the spiritual dance in celebration of their union.

Nobody thought the dance would ever end. Nobody imagined that there could ever be a force strong enough to stop the music and sunder the bond. There was. The cataclysm came in the form of the surrender of the largest American fighting force in the history of U.S. warfare. The fission-event had a name: Bataan.

To understand the strange chronicle of union and dissolution we must retreat far into history and explore hidden places on the spiritual path.

In succeeding sections, we'll explore the origins of Gong (Kung) Fu. We'll discuss some of the physiology and psychology of the martial arts and the reasons why the combined regimen of meditation and physical skill is able to produce true mastery. We'll examine the Code of Wushidao (Bushido) that was formulated to guide and to sustain the true martial artist; and we'll review the reasons why the martial arts were separated from Zen and suggest ways in which we might reunite the estranged pair.

Part 2: Origins: A synthesis of cultures

Of all the oriental martial arts, Chinese Gong (Kung) Fu, which means "masterful", is the oldest. All of the other schools - Korean, Japanese, and other Chinese varieties, grew out of it.

But Gong Fu did not originate in China. It was an Indian import which, legends notwithstanding, had no doubt entered China long before Bodhidharma contemplated Shao Lin Ji's walls.

By the time the founder of Zen arrived, the imported "art" had already been refined, expanded, and in many ways perfected by Daoism's genius for elegant simplicity.

But neither could the "masterful" martial art be said to originate in India; for it actually arrived there by way of the Aryan invasions which had begun as far back as 1500 B.C.

The Aryans were an east-european people who loved to fight and, judging from the spread of their language - a sure sign of conquest - did it rather well. Sweeping around the world from Ireland to India, variants of their proto-indo-european idiom such as Gaelic, German, Latin, Greek, Persian, and Sanskrit testify that life to these happy warriors was one long and satisfying Blitzkrieg. As victors are wont to do, they thought of themselves as superior persons. Erin, Iran, and Aryan as well as the English cognate aristocrat all mean "noble".

True aficionados of destruction, they extended the work of conquest into leisurely pursuits, their fascination for warlike games and sport being mirrored in the Olympic contests of their Greek cousins, contests in which martial discipline was emphasized... throwing discus, hammer and javelin, boxing, wrestling, and especially an event called the Pancratium, a sport which combined boxing and wrestling and a peculiar ability to turn the force of an attacker's thrust back against him. In this event, no weapons or protective clothing was permitted. Hands and feet sufficed as instruments of engagement.

With no military force able to halt their advance, the Aryans swept eastward across Afghanistan and Pakistan, joyously demolishing every civilization in their path. But in India their irresistible force finally met an immovable object. In India they encountered that stolid monument to Spirituality, those amazing yogis, those peaceful men who were indomitable mental warriors. The Aryans were awed.

Without the slightest hint of condescension, yogis demonstrated their imperviousness to pain. They could walk on fire or withstand bitter cold. They could stay awake for as long as they wanted or sleep standing up. They could go without food for days and, using only the power of their minds, they could even staunch the bleeding of their wounds. Aryan generals rubbed their eyes and thought that they had entered Heaven's War Room. This kind of power was worth a good, long look. The Blitzkrieg ended. The blonde bullies settled down. The yogis were certainly a different breed of heroes. They desired little and lacked nothing. Through the simple expedient of becoming emotionally unattached to the people, places, and things of this world, they conquered and reigned, independent and invincible.

Practicing Raja (royal) Yoga, the kingdom over which a yogi so imperiously ruled consisted of only himself. But what a powerful state it was.

A yogi mastered his mind by meditative exercise, spiritual discipline, devotional observance, and, of course, by adhering to a strict ethical code. He mastered his body through the rigorous practice of Asanas, postures which promoted extraordinary balance and flexibility.

The Aryans took the spiritual techniques of Indian religion and combined them with the Pancratium event of Olympic sport and called this new synthesis Vajramushti which means Thunderbolt Fist.

Culture spreads along waterways, and the few hundred miles between India's Ganges delta and China's port city of Canton is filled with great rivers... the Irrawaddy, the Rouge, the Mekong, the Si Jiang. South China Daoists learned Vajramushti and then improved it by choreographing its movements and giving them fluid grace and by adding the powerful techniques of breath control which Chinese pearl divers had developed. They called the new version Tai Ji Quan which means Great Ultimate Fist. In its pure martial arts form it was called Gong Fu, the masterful art.

News of the new improved Chinese version traveled up and down the rivers' information highway. Centuries later in 325 B.C., when Alexander the Great in another Aryan incursion invaded India, he was stunned by the daunting abilities of even second-rate Vajramushti practitioners. (Even today India's martial arts' masters are second to none.)

Part 3: Bodhidharma, the alien Aryan

The great rivers which crisscrossed Indo-China carried more than information about self-defense techniques. Ideas and inventions also traversed these waterways. The people who occupied the area, though often racially and linguistically unrelated, were farmers, hunters, fishermen, housekeepers, and craftsmen who enjoyed the bounty of similar natural resources and suffered from the same dependable pestilences and unreliable weather. Their clothing, buildings, and implements of work and war differed in style but not in basic design. Form happily follows function but tradition drags its heels.

Naturally they placated gods of similar temperament. The philosophical principles of Yoga were well known in South China: Brahman and The Dao were virtually interchangeable concepts. The One. The Indivisible. The Union of Opposites. But Chinese genius had refined the concept; and Daoism was a cooler, more elegant version of its Indian counterpart. The heated and often overwrought methodologies of Kundalini Yoga were refreshed and moderated when presented as Daoism's Microcosmic Orbit meditations. Additionally, Daoism subsumed the entire body of Chinese medicine: the knowledge of physical anatomy, the comprehensive pharmacology and the pain relieving procedures of acupuncture and acupressure. Daoism's pragmatic approach also expanded and enriched Indian appreciation of Prana.

To the Indian, Prana was more than just the breath of life... the vital force or "inspirit" which God had used to vivify clay. It was the core discipline of the science of Yoga. Daoism's no frills approach to spirituality simplified the science and made it more accessible to practitioners. The beneficial distribution of Prana (called Qi (Chi) by Daoists) to every part of the body, became Daoism's singular obsession. Study of the meridians, the psychic nerve channels through which Qi was delivered and circulated, gave rise to the knowledge of dozens of particularly sensitive pressure points, points which the martial artist would later exploit. The human body's vulnerability to acute pain or to muscular paralysis at these points would make them the prime targets of a combatant's strikes.

It so happened that when Buddhism was about a thousand years old a certain fatigue, if not rigor mortis, began to set in. Tons of sutras and shastras began to press the life out of it. Desiccated old men haunted Buddhist libraries while younger, more adventurous devotees left to merrily pant the oxygen rich atmosphere of Tantrism. With so much Buddhist energy being drained away in pseudo-spiritual sexual hemorrhage, the religion found itself in desperate need of more than the usual dose of Mahayana rectitude. It needed a transfusion of Daoism's practical, holistic power.

Bodhidharma, who, as Indian Prince and Buddhist priest, was well-educated both in Vajramushti/Tai Ji Quan techniques and in philosophy and theology, wanted to bring Buddhism out of the libraries and lecture halls of esthetes and pedants and into the everyday minds of the common man. His Indian temperament, camouflaged amidst China's "southern" thinkers, accorded him a nearly native claim to Daoism's methodology. He therefore combined Indian Buddhist philosophy with Daoist methodology, and came to orthodox China to preach his new synthesis: Zen.

And what was this "Zen"? The word simply means meditation. In Sanskrit the word is "dhyana"; the English cognate of which is "dwell". Dhyana and Zen appear to be unrelated words, but in

fact they are similarly pronounced. Whenever a heavily voiced "D" precedes the glide "Y", as in Did You, the sounds are usually combined and pronounced as a "J". We say, "Di'ja go?" Ed-ucate becomes "ejucate." Canad-i-an becomes "Cajun." Sanskrit's Dhyān (meditation) became "Jen" - pronounced exactly that way but written as Chan in Chinese. In Japanese, a slight variation: Zen.

Temperament is not a mask. Bodhidharma was a blue-eyed aryan and tended to stand out in a crowd. Besides his startling appearance, he demonstrated some rather formidable meditation powers; and the Chinese, suitably impressed, gave him the sobriquet, "The Blue-Eyed Demon." Novelty being its own cachet the Prince from India was soon invited to the Imperial Court of the Liang Dynasty's Emperor Wu.

Bodhidharma did not fail to use the opportunity to publicize his new Zen doctrine, the rationale which would become the governing code of martial arts' conduct: The Code of Wu Shi Dao... The Warrior's (Wu Shi) Way (Dao). In Japanese: Bushido.

The Emperor had built many temples and performed many charitable acts and considered himself the most hard working and worthy of orthodox Buddhists; and so he asked the Zen philosopher how much merit all his imperial good deeds had gained him.

Bodhidharma looked surprised. "Why, none." he answered.

The Emperor grew indignant. "Then what," he demanded, "if not good works should I as a Buddhist have striven to accomplish?" "To be empty of yourself," answered Bodhidharma. It was not the sort of remark one generally made to Chinese emperors.

The emperor countered, "Just who do you think you are?" and Bodhidharma shrugged. "I have no idea," he said.

But the man with no ego was not a fool; The Blue Eyed Demon left town fast and headed for the sanctuary of Shao Lin Monastery.

At Shao Lin Ji, as legend has it, Zen's First Patriarch found the priests to be in such poor physical condition that, in addition to teaching them his new form of meditation Buddhism, he instructed them in the Tai Ji Quan/Vajramushti discipline

known to us now as Gong (Kung) Fu.

However the Shao Lin priests managed to learn Gong Fu, one thing is certain: they learned it well within the context of Zen's Code of Conduct. The martial arts were practiced as a spiritual discipline, a devotional exercise, an expression of egoless action. There could be no swaggering, no aggressiveness, no emotional involvement of any kind... and never a thought of vengeance. An angry man or a proud man was unfit for such ritualized combat. If a student started to behave egoistically and didn't catch himself in the act, he'd get a lesson in humility when his master caught up with him.

"To be empty of yourself!" Think of it. What did Bodhidharma mean and how exactly did that meaning translate into Wushidao/Bushido?

Part 4: Wushidao/Bushido explained

"Be empty of yourself!" Bodhidharma's directive had been a tough one for the Emperor to wind the Imperial brain around. The Emperor, unfortunately, was not to be alone in his predicament. All Mahayana Buddhists, regardless of rank, discover its confusing difficulty whenever they recite the Heart Sutra: "Form is not different from Emptiness. Emptiness is not different from Form." What does it mean to be empty and what does whatever it means have to do with the martial arts?

Essentially, Form is Samsara, the world of the ego. It is history, Greenwich Mean Time. It is Maya, the pleasing illusion of permanence, our erroneous notion that matter's form and constitution are fixed, that our own egos are as stable as the Matterhorn.

Maya is the conditional world. Under certain conditions water becomes ice. When the conditions change, it may become steam. Somewhere between solid and vapor we encounter liquid which, we arbitrarily decide, is water's normal state. Atoms of hydrogen and oxygen do their little molecular dance and laugh. Who are we, they wonder, to decide what is normal?

We see a rock and wax poetic about its eternal properties. Years pass and when gross inspection of the rock reveals no alteration, we are reassured. A geologist would see change as clearly as a farmer counts upon it; but we don't care to look. Rocks are what we build our faith upon.

We form a bond with an individual and think we know him and his face. We fix his character and his features in our mind, certain that they will be as indelibly etched in time as they are in our memory. Years pass and when we see the person again, we're so startled by the changes our suspicions are aroused. What destructive force... or behavior... wrought such premature decay? Naturally we are annoyed if the person whose facial lines we so have so carefully mapped regards our own face as so much terra incognita. Perhaps, we wonder, he has an ulterior motive for deliberately failing to recognize us.

In Samsara, all things are in flux. We cannot step into the same river twice. The water keeps flowing; new molecules rush to rub up against our sneakers as old molecules sigh with relief for having survived the ordeal. Our mind changes just as continuously, acquiring new data and forgetting old, and forming upon shifting data bases those evanescent opinions which it regards as solidly based convictions. No matter how many of us agree on the nature of another person's character, or on our own, or on the properties of an observable phenomenon, both the observer and the observed are changing, all our certainties to the contrary notwithstanding. Ultimately, we can rely on nothing. Samsara is the ego's world of conditional relationships. Samsara is our hell.

Emptiness is Nirvana... and what Nirvana is empty of is ego. Without the seductions of a fickle ego, reality lacks the incentive to transform itself into illusion. Nirvana may be entered when we are in elevated states of spiritual consciousness or in any true state of meditation during which, by definition, the ego has been transcended. In the sense that we are still physically present whenever we enter the egoless state, Nirvana and Samsara may be said to occupy the same place. But Nirvana consists in another "meta" physical dimension, a dimension which contains Plato's Ideal Forms, and the Tushita Heaven's Bodhisattvas and Buddhas, and the empty Void.

Nirvana is the eternal, egoless world of unchanging and therefore reliable reality. We cannot gain Nirvana through hypnotism, drugs or quietism. Among the ranks of spiritual heroes, we seldom find supper club hypnotists, potheads, or zombies. We gain Nirvana through purging ourselves of self interest. Pride, lust and greed have to be sacrificed in the interests of ecstasy. Prideful passions must be replaced by compassionate humility. Add to this a little Grace, and we're home free. Nirvana is our heaven.

In Nirvana, we become emotionally independent of those persons, places, and things of the world to which we previously affixed the adjective "my". We no longer identify ourselves in terms of our relationship to them. This independence does not mean that we do not care, it means that we do not possessively care. Instead of having friends, we are merely friendly.

Achieving Nirvana is the single goal of Zen Buddhists. Is this also the goal of the martial artist? Yes. We can have sport or athleticism without Zen, but to have artistry we require spiritual discipline and the peculiar insight that comes with spiritual experience.

Here, in part, is the Code of Wushidao/Bushido, the Spiritual Way of the Warrior:

"I have no parents; I make heaven and earth my parents. I have no friends; I make my thoughts my friends. I have no enemy; I make carelessness my enemy. I have no armor; I make goodwill and honesty my armor. I have no fortress; I make my Immovable Mind my fortress. I have no sword; I make my sleeping ego my sword. I have no magic; I make submission to Divine Will my magic. I have no miracles; I make the Dharma my miracle."

How does a man exist without parents and friends, we wonder. Why is it necessary that he cut himself off from the people he loves? Surely, we say, no great world religion such as Buddhism would ever impose such harsh conditions on its followers. But here is Jesus on the subject: Gospel of Luke, Chapter 14, Verse 26:

"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Hate? We cringe at the word. But Jesus is speaking metaphorically. In Buddhism this metaphor is further exaggerated but in the extension becomes more graspable: We say that we must kill those we love. The following Zen story illustrates this requirement:

Upon being told by his master that he must cut himself free of all emotional entanglements and 'kill' those to whom he is emotionally attached, the novice asks, "But my parents, Master? Must I slay them, too?"

The master answers, "Who are they to be spared?"

"And you, Master? Must I kill you also?"

The master responds, "There is not enough of me left for you to get your hands on."

This, of course, is the egoless state, the only state in which we can love unconditionally. In the egoless state we care for people without meddling in their lives. We reject all sentimental, contractual relationships which lull us into comfortable illusions of security or press us into compromising our integrity.

In religious terms, the ultimate object of both Zen and the martial arts' training is the conquest of the ego. A man has to realize that the arts of war which he practices in the Dojo are first and foremost the tactics and stratagems of a battle that rages within his own soul. This is how he conquers himself. The Code of the Warrior, therefore, is an innocuous enumeration of the sacrifices which flesh must make to spirit, a restatement of the creed of worldly non-attachment which, in one form or another, exists in all religions.

How do we attain the goal of emptiness? Just as we grasp with the whole hand and not with one or two fingers, we make a many pronged attack upon the problem, approaching it from many angles.

We first accept the spiritual regimen which Wushidao's Code prescribes, realizing that it is an integral part of a discipline which is known and observed in all the world's great religions. Spiritual soldiers are hardly unique to Buddhism.

Wushidao, however, is antithetical to pseudo, pantheistic nature religions and it is unambiguously opposed to any form of ancestor worship including all forms of Confucian-style deification of human forebears. Nana and Pop-Pop do not reign over the Dharmakaya.

Yet, however strongly the concept was presented in Luke 14:26 and elsewhere in the New Testament, the western world found the concept unthinkable when it was presented in Buddhist terms. The reason for this is clear: the doctrine had been corrupted by the militaristic regimes of Japan.

When Zen entered Japan in thirteenth century medieval times, it was immediately drafted by the Samurai. It was still suffering this conscription when a series of Zen monks compiled the Hagakure ("Hidden under the leaves"), a rewriting of Wushidao principles which conformed them to the requirements of militaristic schemes.

According to the new version, Bushido, the Zen martial artist's singular objective was honor, by which it was meant doing nothing shameful, i.e., doing nothing to embarrass one's ancestors, who, as it happened, were always ardent supporters of whichever Shogun or Warlord was employing the Zen martial artist. Dishonor, which was to be avoided at all costs, was equated with the fear of death. Therefore, for a man to be really honorable, he had to actively seek a proud and honorable death. Buddhist humility was no where in sight.

The Hagakure version of the Way of the Warrior thoroughly confounded and compromised the original doctrine and set the stage for sundering what the Buddhist world had thought was divinely joined: Zen and Wushidao.

The sundering was accomplished in World War II.

Part 5: The Battle of Bataan

Bataan was not a routine early-war defeat for the U.S. Army.

The Battle of Bataan has the distinction of resulting in the surrender of the largest American fighting force in the history of U.S. warfare. But numbers do not necessarily describe defeat. The real winner of an engagement may well be the one who inflicts the most damage; and according to this combat criterion, the greater loss was Japan's. It was rather like the Alamo when, after the battle, one of Santa Ana's generals surveyed the carnage and said to him, "One more victory like this and we're finished." The Japanese paid dearly for the privilege of raising the Rising Sun over the Bataan peninsula.

It is sadly recorded that on December 7, 1941 Japan launched a surprise attack on American territories in the Pacific. Among the chief targets were Hawaii, now a state, and the Philippines, now an independent nation.

While Japan's planes bombed Pearl Harbor, her ships went to the Philippines and disembarked a huge invasion force consisting of several hundred thousand men. The prize they sought was the port city of Manila.

Manila was situated at the innermost point of Manila Bay in what might be described as the bottom of a bottle. To get to Manila by sea, the Bay-bottle had to be navigated. The right side of the bottle was the large Luzon landmass; the left side was the narrow, twelve-mile-wide Bataan peninsula. The bottle's long neck was only a few miles wide, and in the middle of its opening lay a small waterless rock called Corregidor. In order for their Navy to enter Manila Bay and dock at the port of Manila, the Japanese had to take both the heavily jungled Bataan peninsula and the rock of Corregidor.

Deciding on a classic pincers maneuver, the Japanese army advanced overland and took the City of Manila, cutting off the Bataan peninsula. This inland thrust severed all lines of supply to the American and Filipino defenders of the peninsula. It also caused thousands of civilian refugees to stream southward into the defensive positions.

Having secured the north of the peninsula, the Japanese placed their warships off the west and south and proceeded to pound American positions from the sea while simultaneously launching amphibious attacks on coastal defenses. Then, there being no American warplanes of any kind in the area, unopposed Japanese warplanes bombed targets at will as thousands of Japanese soldiers pressed down from the north.

General Douglas MacArthur, ordered to defend both Corregidor and Bataan, foresaw the inevitable and said, "Well, the enemy may hold the bottle, but I hold the cork."

The Japanese regarded the guns of the cork - Corregidor's famous cannons - as a joke. With amusement they noted that the guns had been cast in the year 1896 and could not even rotate on their mountings. Japanese weapons of war represented, on the other hand, the absolute state of the art.

With American supply lines cut off and the additional drain on resources by the refugees, all stores of food and medicine were quickly depleted. The defenders of Bataan and Corregidor did not have enough of anything to last for more than thirty days.

General Tomoyuki Yamashita estimated that the peninsula would be in Japanese hands within two weeks. It should have been. It wasn't.

When December... January... February... passed with huge Japanese casualties and no dent in the American defensive positions, the general, furious and in serious danger of losing face, requested and received thousands of fresh troops.

The American forces, however, received nothing. Throughout the entire siege they received no military support of any kind nor any resupply of food or medicine. As the weeks dragged on they battled not only the enemy but malaria, dengue fever, hookworm, amoebic dysentery, beriberi, scurvy, infected war wounds, and, of course, starvation.

Cavalry, they ate their horses and mules, and when these were gone, they ate snakes and rats and whatever else they could scavenge. Their Japanese attackers were on full rations.

And so with no relief, no resupply, and not a single word of hope from home, the defenders of the strategic entrance to Manila Bay rightly considered themselves military orphans. In a now-famous poem one GI wrote:

*We are the battling bastards of Bataan.
Ain't got no mommas, no pappas, no Uncle Sam.
Ain't got no nephews, no nieces, no artillery pieces.
Ain't got no one out there who gives a damn.*

The American people gave a damn... they just couldn't do anything about it. Every night on the news came the reports the battle... of the suffering and the bravery... and all people could do was bite their knuckles and pray.

Then, in March, after months of relentless naval and aerial bombardment and the hand-to-hand combat of wave upon wave of amphibious and land assaults, the Japanese began to penetrate American lines with suicide squads.

Still, March came and went and the Americans and Filipinos fought on. Despite their exhaustion, disease, starvation and the utter hopelessness of their cause, they fought on.

And in the face of this uncommon valor, on April 1st, General Yamashita sent his airplanes to drop canisters on the American positions. Inside each canisters was the following note:

To His Excellency, Major General Jonathan Wainwright:

We have the honor to address you in accordance with Bushido - the code of the Japanese warrior. You have already fought to the best of your ability. What dishonor is there in following the example of the defenders of Hong Kong, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies? Your Excellency:

Accept our sincere advice and save the lives of those officers and men under your command. International law would be strictly adhered to.

Yet, for more than a week afterwards, the American and Filipino defenders continued to fight until they were finally overrun and forced to surrender on April 9, 1942. The four month siege had ended.

Estimates of the number of survivors vary. The Japanese captured some fifty or sixty thousand men. Though announcing that they would adhere to the life-respecting rules of Bushido, they instead gave the survivors only one canteen of water each, no food or medicine whatsoever, and forced them to march the sixty-five mile length of the Bataan peninsula in the tropical heat. A postwar count revealed that 25,000 American and Filipino prisoners died on the road, many of them with their hands still tied behind them, their heads lopped off or their backs bayoneted, the penalty for begging for water. This was the infamous Death March of Bataan.

When a Time Magazine correspondent later asked General Wainwright why he had waited a week before surrendering... why he hadn't accepted General Yamashita's promise to adhere to the principles of Bushido, General Wainwright replied that he knew all about Bushido. He knew how the Japanese had treated their Chinese prisoners of war. "I therefore gave the offer all the answer it deserved," he said. "I ignored it."

After the war, General MacArthur oversaw the American occupation of Japan. It is a measure of his greatness that he succeeded completely in his mission to restore the dignity and the economy of that defeated nation. But he remembered Bataan. He remembered Bushido. And as generous as he was to the Japanese, he absolute forbade them to practice any of the martial arts covered by Bushido's code. All secular martial arts' clubs were disbanded. (He allowed only one exception: pacifistic, defensive Aikido.) Even Zen Buddhist monks were forbidden to practice any of the routine exercise "forms" of the disciplines. Anything related to Bushido was seen to be at the core of a disgusting, subhuman, fanatical, warrior cult. It didn't matter that the Japanese military had never really taught the Code much less observed it . . . that they had merely pirated its benevolent mystique much as the Nazis had plundered the mystique of the Swastika, Buddhism's other goodwill icon. These deliberate subversions of Buddhism's reputation had been intended to conn the world into believing that the intentions of those who used them were entirely as noble as any ancient Aryan had ever dreamed of being. The world was slow to recover from the ruse.

Post World War II saw a burst of international cultural exchanges. The French ate hamburgers. Americans ate Pizza and imported Yoga and Indian forms of worship. But not Buddhism nor the martial arts. Americans wanted no part of either of them.

China could have exported Buddhism and Gong Fu, but nothing was coming out of China. Nationalists and Communists were fighting a civil war that would close China for decades. It was not until the late 1950s, after the Korean Conflict, that American prejudice against Buddhism and the martial arts had lessened sufficiently to tolerate their import. And when they came they, of course, came separately.

Zen Buddhism and the martial arts had been officially divorced.

Part 6: Postwar American Buddhism - the Swinging Singles

While China as both hunter and hunted engaged itself in the blood sports of revolution, Zen (Chan) Buddhism's wily Fox Spirit "went to ground".

Zen's premier monastery, Nan Hua Si, led by the Venerable Xu Yin (Empty Cloud), quietly drew on thirteen hundred years' experience of surviving political challenges. It recovered from the ordeals of Japanese invasion in time to brace for what was to be a quarter-century siege of civil war, bullying Communist bureaucrats and brutal Red Guards.

Most of South China's monastic centers, suppressed to skeletal function, entered suspended animation and hibernated through their long, dark winter's discontent as they waited for the clemency of a more enlightened government; but northern religious centers, too close to Beijing's officious notice to elude the war dogs, usually found no underground to run to. Priests were frequently "re-educated" often with swift, short, and fatal lessons. Shao Lin Ji, along with other ancient monastery complexes, was closed. Throughout China, those masters of the martial arts who had escaped conscription or imprisonment continued to teach Gong Fu to anyone who brought the proper attitude to the discipline, but such spiritual teachings as there were appeared publicly in the more secular guise of Qi Gong.

Although Buddhism, Daoism, and the Buddhist/Daoist synthesis, Zen, were far too ingrained in the Chinese psyche for marxist ideologues to eradicate, the exportation of Chinese meditation and martial arts' teachings was effectively halted. Hong Kong and Taiwan, more concerned with the immediate life and-death issues of sovereignty, gave no priority to the international marketing of their ancient religious disciplines.

On the heels of Chinese Communism's civil war victory, came North Korea's 1950 invasion of South Korea. U.S. participation in the defense of South Korea left Americans certain about the evils of Communism, but more confused than ever about Buddhism now that they had encountered it in a friendly nation. The religion didn't seem like the same fanatical and godless cult the Japanese had introduced nearly a decade earlier.

That Buddhism finally began to get the benefit of doubt was no doubt due to the application of the adage, "The friend of my friend is possibly my friend, but the enemy of my enemy is definitely my friend." Chinese Communists were killing American soldiers in Korea; and in the Chinese mainland, Chinese Communists were attacking both Christianity and Buddhism. Common enemies make common allies, and allies are at least temporary friends.

In the U.S., a benign but restrained interest developed in things Oriental . . . artwork, literature, philosophy, religion, and physical fitness programs. But in particular, doomsday scenarios of nuclear catastrophe had given the average Joe a survivalist mentality. This, of course, and the rise in street crime made Americans ripe for learning Asian forms of self defense.

Ironically, it was the importation of Japanese culture which became the legacy of the Korean Conflict.

By the mid-1950s, while Korea was still struggling with the aftermath of war, Japan had long since come to grips with peace; and, since China had already withdrawn from polite society, the

field was now open for the divorced pair of Japanese Zen and Japanese Martial Arts to present themselves to their American hosts as legitimate Buddhism and Bushido. The antics of the shameless couple were as shocking to the Japanese as they were exciting to the Americans who separately entertained them.

In the U.S., Zen, cool, refined, intellectual and exotic, helped engender the new postwar attitude - a wave of sang froid to compensate existential angst and postdiluvian Christian righteousness. Beatniks and Dharma Bums. Bongo drums and bhang. Hippies, Peace-niks and Flower Power. Zen was definitely In.

Across the country Zendo ubiquitously appeared, to use the Buddha's Diamond Sutra simile, "as miraculously as mushrooms . . . or gods . . ." So did Zen Buddhist converts.

Fortunately for the importing savants, Japanese Zen stands to Buddhism as Protestantism stands to Christianity: austere . . . straight-lined buildings with no-frills interiors and minimal or no artwork... and, of course, a non-celibate clergy. Chinese Zen stands to Buddhism as Roman Catholicism stands to Christianity: expansive . . . intricate architecture with ornate decoration and much statuary . . . and a strictly celibate clergy.

The new American posture, being of the Japanese orientation, was, therefore, easy to maintain. Nobody had to explain all those Buddhist statues with their troublesome swastikas.

Callow American youths declared themselves bodhisattvas, and with zeal conferred by bhang and benzedrine, proceeded to save, if not all sentient beings, then at least the sensual ones. The Doctrine that forbade sentimental attachments to parents and friends did not seem to prohibit lovers. In fact, the permission to marry was often interpreted as a mandate for promiscuity as birth control pills and condoms completed the clerical Kit. Scandal followed scandal. With no established hierarchy to maintain order, anarchy naturally resulted. Personal disagreements led to fragmenting schism. As new groups formed, self-ordination became the order of the day. What was Zen? Whatever anybody wanted it to be.

Persons with bachelor degrees in psychology or English literature seemed automatically to qualify for the honorific title of Roshi. Here and there the title was deserving: Jiyu Kennett, Philip Kapleau, Bernard Glassman, Joko Beck, Robert Aitken - to name a few of the real-mccoys teachers who rose to prominence. Unfortunately, the landscape was dotted with fake mccoys.

The Reverend Alan Watts, a Church of England priest, became Zen's principle exponent even though, by his own admission, he had never so much as attained the altered state of consciousness defined as meditation. Nobody seemed to think it relevant that Zen, which means "meditation", had never been experienced by the person who spoke with such authority about it. (Sadly, Alan Watts would later die an alcoholic's death.)

Wherever it was not anchored by the truly spiritual, Zen drifted off into the wretched currents of Six Worlds' spurious Zen: the Angel Zen of esthetes; the Animal Zen of the timid; the Human Being Zen of the efficient; the Titan Zen of bullies; the Hungry Ghost Zen of dilettantes; the Devil Zen of well attired poseurs.

There was merit in the approach. Zen remained unmarked by the cachet of fanaticism which Bataan had caused Christian America to stamp on Buddhism. Either Zen was not a true Buddhist Path or else it was too bizarre to take seriously.

The problem for the martial arts was different.

Since Bataan, Christians, who understood the purpose of Christian monastic training - the deliberate quest for humility through the systematic destruction of egoism - a process called "dying to self", were convinced that when Buddhist monastics used the term they were advocating ritual suicide - seppuku or hara-kiri. The Hagakure, which came to the West's attention after World War II, confirmed this view.

For American martial arts' entrepreneurs the problem was simply stated: how to attract Christian clients without offending Christian sensibilities? The solution was simply effected: dump Bushido and with it any suggestion of religious sentiment. Fortunately, Daoist emblems were untainted. On one hand, nobody had waved a Tai Chi (yin/yang) symbol at the Americans on Bataan or Corregidor; and on the other hand, the Tai Chi symbol was omnipresent in friendly South Korea.

Overnight the intriguing black and white pair of commas was incorporated into the logo of every martial arts studio in Christendom. In applique and embroidery, dragons and tigers, freed from all negative associations, appeared on Tee-shirts and jackets. There even appeared an occasional "laughing Buddha" whose innocence extended to permission to rub his belly for luck, something martial artists, in lieu of spiritual fortitude, were in need of.

Without the moral code of Bushido to conform theory to practice, the martial arts degenerated into mere sport just as Zen had degenerated into New Age fluff.

Imitation showed the extent of flattery's sincerity. Dojo etiquette was de rigueur as travesties of formality obtained. Students eager to kick ass bowed stiffly from the waist to opportunists who called themselves Sensei.

Inevitably, the same lack of hierarchical authority produced fragmentation and schism. Dojos multiplied like amoebas. One produced two; two produced four; four produced sixteen, and so on infinitum. Storefront studios popped up in the shabby malls of every town.

The sport that fed itself upon fad and fear developed an appetite for theatrical heroics.

If we could not produce masters, we could produce movie stars. American born but Hong Kong trained Bruce Lee became, unquestionably, the brightest star in the martial arts' cinematic firmament. A consummate martial artist, Lee brought to his performances an exquisite level of skill and a resonating spiritual charisma. But it was Chuck Norris who would best exemplify the American martial arts fighter. Tough and with the spiritual persona of a rutabaga, Norris led the sport down the only path it could go at the time. Due to the popularity of the Billy Jack films, the Kung Fu television series, and the Karate Kid films, people came to study martial arts under black-belted entrepreneurs, many of whom had managed to attain mastery in the empty halls of Shao Lin Ji.

A rise in street crime brought adults to the dojos or training gymnasiums, but adults soon learned that, given their dismally inadequate physical condition, they ran greater risks of being injured in the dojo than on the street.

In the "me" generation of the 80s, a new trend developed: The martial artist was seen as a buffoon... John Belushi and other comedians lampooned him; and in one of the more important films which referenced the martial arts, Indiana Jones laughed in the face of a threatening Ninja and then matter-of-factly drew his gun and shot him dead. The point was not lost on a generation of sofa spuds. It didn't take years of muscle training to squeeze a trigger.

The dojos contributed to the humor. Many continued to emphasize high-flying kicks and other flashy acrobatic moves that were originally intended to enable foot soldiers to knock horsemen off their mounts. Such moves were regarded as ludicrous in terms of modern self-defense. Nobody in the 1980s expected to be mugged by someone on horseback.

The public perception of the value of the martial arts steadily declined as the return in personal protection no longer seemed worth the investment of time and money and the risk of training injuries. Besides, the average businessman felt strange carrying stardarts in his breast pocket. A more conventional can of mace, a stun-gun, a hired bodyguard, or a Beretta would protect an individual far better. And so, in the public mind, the martial arts degenerated even further into just another blood sport.

And in the United States as well as Japan, young men and women of stamina and ambition were well advised to take up tennis or golf. More deals were cut at country clubs than at dojos.

And then real Buddhists started arriving from the Orient. Mature, celibate priests began to arrive from China and Viet Nam, Korea, Taiwan, Japan and Tibet, priests who understood the commitment to Dharma. Ordinary Buddhist immigrants arrived and became ordinary neighbors who flew the Stars and Stripes on the Fourth of July.

Orientalists began to join oriental martial arts' studios and with their influx, the need for organization became both obvious and acute. Responding to this need, the various schools began to organize into regulatory federations which established standards of performance, competitive criteria, and so on.

When the martial arts finally submitted to the idea of self discipline, people stopped laughing. But still, there was a gap in every school's training regimen, a split that lay open like a wound. The martial arts needed the Code of the Warrior; and the Code of the Warrior was pure Zen... of which, during the narcissistic 1980s, there was precious little in the U.S. Zen, too, needed order and stability. Zen, too, needed Wushidao.

And somebody began to wonder if the divorce was final, after all. Whether frivolous Zen could reunite with macho Gong Fu, whether these pseudo-disciplines could mate again and become what they were always intended to be: two halves of the glorious whole: the Buddha Dharma's Gentle Force of Goodness. Power and the Law Power Obeys.

Part 7: Why the marriage works

*One man may conquer ten thousand men in battle
while another man may conquer only himself. . .
yet this man is the greater victor.*
- The Buddha (Dhammapada)

Every Zen practitioner is a warrior and the Code of the Warrior, Wushidao (Bushido), defines his objectives and governs his actions.

In medieval Europe, the Paladin, a religious knight who trained in the heroics of championship, was expected to be brave, modest, pious, generous and courteous to his foes even as he impaled them on his lance or cleaved them with his sword. Likewise, the Wushi, the Chinese Paladin, was expected to conform his conduct to the high standards of a spiritually refined knighthood.

It is no accident that martial arts were traditionally taught in monasteries. From the earliest days of the pancratium/yoga synthesis, it was seen that the surest way to produce a champion was to fuse in his character the ethics and humility of spiritual conviction with the wisdom which only meditation can provide. In fact, it was always assumed that an enlightened man required very little in the way of additional physical training and conditioning to attain mastery in any martial art. As art transcends technique, martial art had to go beyond mere athleticism.

Without Wushidao, there could be skill in boxing, wrestling and kicking; but mastery would not inform the practice. Without Wushidao, there could be meditation as therapy or devotional exercise, but spiritual authority would not be attained. Therefore, in all regimens of physical training, the spiritual code of the warrior was given pre-eminence.

Depending upon such considerations as geography and politics, different varieties of the martial arts arose; but regardless of stylistic differences, the common denominator of all masterful performers was a peculiar spiritual demeanor, a demeanor evidenced by imperturbable humility.

What rationale and methodology did the master follow which conferred upon him such distinct advantages over any opponent who was not similarly disciplined?

We have all heard of a martial arts' master who, though old and, compared to his opponent, weak to the point of fragility, still manages to win. His defeated opponent will afterward insist that the master has an uncanny ability to read minds. What the master has is an uncanny ability to anticipate.

The moment his opponent begins to execute a strike, the master has already begun to block or parry and to follow through with a well-targeted counter-strike or riposte. Additionally, the master moves with effortless fluidity, without conscious consideration of a single move. He remains in a state of complete dispassion, going through the motions of combat without feeling the emotions of combat. He is able to remain calm because his ego is not involved in the contest. Let's look at how he accomplishes this.

Even though in his relaxed or casual moments the master may experience a comparatively high state of awareness, when beginning a contest he will nevertheless heighten this state by entering

a meditative trance. To an observer, this shift of consciousness may be so subtle as to be imperceptible, yet the master has completely evicted his ego from the combat arena. The method he uses to accomplish this is usually a simple triggering stimulus.

First, he concentrates his attention on some object - think of a hypnotist swinging a gold watch back and forth in front of a person's eyes or a fortune teller staring into a crystal ball. In the martial arts the focal point is usually the body's center of gravity, sometimes called the Hara, which is a point deep in the abdomen where the aorta (the large blood vessel that exits the heart and travels down the center of the body) splits to become the femoral or thigh arteries.

Using specific meditation exercises (given at the conclusion of this series) the master trains himself to feel his pulse beating at his Hara or center of gravity; and, using concentration on this point as the triggering stimulus, he enters a meditative trance as he simultaneously balances himself around this center.

At this point, the master's ego-identity has vanished. He's no longer a person. He's simply a fighting machine. He's not wondering how good he looks. He's not wondering what he's going to do after the contest or even what move he's going to make next. He's not thinking, period. He has practiced his combat skills to reflexive perfection, and he lets his training take over, reacting automatically as he enters an intense Zone of egoless concentration.

This egoless state gives him several distinct advantages. He can react instantaneously; he can process fainter signals, signals which otherwise might be undetectable. He can respond to sensory data which his conscious ego might not notice or know how to interpret correctly, and he can prevent his own body from experiencing the deleterious effects of emotion or pain. And yes, he can even curtail blood loss should he be wounded. How does entry into this Zone facilitate such advantages? Let's examine the mechanics of an action/reaction event.

In order for a person to respond to a given stimulus, that stimulus must cross several thresholds. First, it must be noticed by an appropriate sense organ. Sensory organs pick up information in the form of energy: light energy excites the receptors within the eye; compression waves of sound strike the ear drum; heat energy directly passes through our fingertips, and so on.

Let's say that a student martial artist, a man with normal vision, is sitting in a dark room and that he's been given the instructions to shout "Yo!" whenever he sees a tiny green light flash. For him to respond, the light stimulus must be bright enough to excite the cones and rods in his eyes. If the light is too dim, it will fail to excite these receptors. But if it does excite them, it has crossed the first threshold: the SENSORY threshold.

The stimulus must then have enough energy remaining to travel along neural pathways to his brain. If it succeeds in making itself felt in the brain, it has crossed the second threshold, the PERCEPTUAL threshold. The brain records the green light event - it's now entered in the student's data banks, so to speak.

The student can "overlook" or otherwise pay no attention to this data (his ego may be directing its attention elsewhere or he may simply be daydreaming) in which case the light event is recorded in his brain without his being aware of it at all. Under hypnosis, he can retrieve the information. Consider the often cited case in which a bystander sees the license number of a getaway car but simply can't remember it. The visual stimulus clearly crossed the sensory and

perceptual thresholds but, in the excitement of the moment, the data became garbled and the ego-consciousness could not process or memorize it.

Or, the student can access the "green light event" data in two ways. He can ego-consciously respond to it by thinking, "I see a flashing green light now. I'll do as I'm instructed and yell 'Yo!'" When this happens the stimulus has crossed the third threshold, the CONSCIOUS ACTION threshold. He has noticed an action and has considered and executed a reaction to it and he can usually recall this action/reaction event. If, for some reason, he is unable to summon a recollection of it, under hypnosis he will be able to remember the event.

To retrieve forgotten or overlooked data the confused ego has to be bypassed - transcended in the trance or hypnotic state. A re-entry into the perceptual threshold's domain has to be effected.

This retrieval technique is related to the second way the student can respond to a stimulus: he can experience it directly or unconsciously and then react to it automatically without his ego's involvement. We call this action/reaction event "subliminal". "Limen" is the Latin word for threshold. It is this direct, subliminal response that the master uses.

For very good reasons, the martial artist wants to prevent his ego-consciousness from interfering in the combat.

The ego's domain - the world of I, Me, Mine and Numero Uno - is the place we find those seven deadly sins: pride, envy, lust, laziness, gluttony, greed and anger... all those reckless, destructive motivations.

Whenever a stimulus is consciously acted upon, the ego evaluates the stimulus and decides what, if anything, ought to be done in response. If the ego does decide to act, it directs the body by sending out electrochemical messages to the appropriate muscles. In fact, the ego has an array of chemicals at its disposal which can influence and interfere with all body systems. Unfortunately, the ego does not always act in the body's best interest. Think about fear: Some people who are loquacious in their living rooms can't utter a meaningful syllable when standing in front of a microphone. The quick-draw artist at a gun club may find that his hand has turned to stone when he's suddenly confronted by a live, hissing rattler. We say that such individuals are paralyzed by fear.

Any emotion can be detrimental. A surgeon doesn't operate on people he loves or hates because his ego's involvement might prejudice his judgment. Lawyers, likewise, abstain from representing themselves for an understandable fear of compromising their own self-interests.

A person can become so angry that he will kill another person even though he knows that he, himself, might be punished later with imprisonment or death. We say that his reason has been consumed by rage.

The ego always sees itself as being at the center of a drama, the principal actor... the one whose feelings count.. the one who requires loyalty, respect and admiration. Egos, as we know in Zen, demand attention and they don't much care how they get it.

Animals don't see themselves as being in the center of a drama. Animals don't have egos; and because of this they respond efficiently and without prejudice. Their reactions are fast and direct and if they kill it is to satisfy hunger, not anger. Animals do not resort to mortal combat to settle territorial disputes; humans, providing they reasonably feel threatened, may kill anyone who intrudes into their premises. Male animals fighting over mating rights to females do not kill their competitors. If a rogue male enters a harem and dallies with a female, the dominant male runs the rogue off. A human male, on the other hand, will likely be excused if, upon catching his wife en flagrante, he dispatches her lover. Though the husband be a notorious womanizer who only vaguely recalls that his wife is a female, the stain upon his dishonored ego is naturally too great to be cleansed by anything less than the lover's detergent blood.

Again, animals respond faster than humans because animals don't have egos that interfere with their body's actions. Their responses are pure reflex, uninhibited by personal judgments.

Which brings us to another reason martial artists don't want their egos involved in the action: Response times. Subliminal responses can be nearly twice as fast as consciously considered responses!

Animals do something else that martial artists emulate: they read an array of sensory signals - smells, sounds, and body and facial language; and these signals are invariably more reliable than verbal language or deliberate gestures.

We've all heard of a poker face. The expert card player trains himself never to reveal pleasure or displeasure or to give any inadvertent clue to his true intentions. He looks for such signals in the faces, tics, or mannerisms of the other players.

Boxers, too, train never to "telegraph" a punch, that is to squint an eye or raise an eyebrow prior to striking in a specific way.

The fact is that we human beings have inherited from our primate ancestors a variety of facial and body signals; but in the course of evolution, our mushrooming cerebral cortex with its commanding verbal abilities has largely replaced our non verbal signaling system. Somebody can approach us with hate in his eyes, but if he warbles, "Good to see ya', old buddy!" we go with the verbal message and discount that look of hate.

Our cerebral evolution has also caused us to discount olfactory signals. We all know what a roach motel is... roaches check in but they don't check out. Glue keeps them in, but what gets them to check in in the first place is the chemical attractant added to the glue. The roaches are responding to a mating odor stimulant. Human beings also give off a variety of smells... pheromones.. that signal an existing emotional state.

When encountering a large dog on a leash, we ask, "Does he bite?" and we instinctively extend our relaxed, palm-down hand to let the dog smell that there is no scent of aggression on our skin.

Alexander Pope, the English poet, related that despite the protesting snarls and barks of his great dane, he permitted a flattering acquaintance to become his house guest. To his chagrin he learned that the guest had stolen many valuable items. Pope thereafter insisted that his dog was a far better judge of character than he was.

Fear also has an odor and at a subliminal level we detect that odor. Olfactory data have the most direct route of all to the human brain; and if a combatant senses, i.e., unconsciously smells fear in his opponent, he's ahead in the game. Clearly, he doesn't want to experience fear lest he signal his opponent that he is aware of the weakness of his own position. Fortunately, fearlessness is a universal characteristic of the truly spiritual person. The Zen man understands that death is nothing to fear. He is immersed in the safe Zone of the Divine, i.e., he has truly taken refuge in the Buddha. On the other hand, he's not stupid. He wouldn't likely volunteer to be drawn and quartered on the rack. But martyrs there are aplenty; and none has a reputation for cowardice.

Naturally, guile is a combatant's weapon. An attempt is always made to mask one's real intentions. This is simple strategy. An attacker doesn't announce the time and place from which he will launch his missiles. Just as certainly, the wise bully does not tell the Judo expert that in five seconds he's going to kick him. Zen training at every level denigrates verbal communication. The often inane language of koans is intended to demonstrate how untrustworthy words can be. Especially when life or property is at stake, words can be a great enemy. Flattery and deceitful assurances may cause the ego to enjoy comfortable feelings of safety which will annul suspicion and relax a guarded stance. Threats and innuendo may create fear and confusion. To whatever extent a combatant succumbs to deception or fear, he yields his own resources to his opponent.

Verbal messages are conscious messages and conscious messages fall under the control of the ego. The task of the martial artist is clear: he must keep his ego from getting involved in the contest, yet he may not suspend intellectual control. Hypnosis or drugs may make him egoless, but they will require him to surrender control of his judgment and will ultimately lessen his awareness.

The master further demonstrates his acute awareness by immediately determining not only which hand or leg his opponent favors, which is clearly valuable information, but also which eye his opponent favors. In the use of weapons the combatant is always taught to keep his "eye on the target". When the hand or foot is the weapon, the favored eye will just as surely aim at the targeted area.

Anyone can discover which eye he favors by selecting an object on the wall directly in front of him. He lets his nose lineup with the object and then extends a thumb until it covers the object, while remaining midpoint in his gaze. He shuts one eye and if the object continues to be covered by the other eye, that other eye is the one he favors. If he then shuts the favored eye and looks out through the other, his thumb will be seen to shift several inches to the side of the favored eye.

Meditation, by definition the state, par excellence, in which the ego is transcended while awareness is enhanced, will alone provide the martial artist with the means to achieve this necessary state of mind, or, more precisely, No Mind.

But the meditative, egoless state has even more to offer the martial artist. Let's go back to the student who was sitting in the dark room hollering "Yo!" whenever he saw a dim green light flash. Let's say that every time he correctly yelled, he received some food. If the student was hungry, an extremely dim green light could provoke a shout. In fact, a light that he might have been able to detect only half the time might have its odds of being seen appreciably changed.

He might see it 90% of the time which means that the additional positive motivation of reward could cause him to lower his sensory and perceptual thresholds and to respond to more subtle signals. Of course, he will have acted too quickly for conscious consideration; and so the question then becomes, "Who or what inside his head is responding to the reward?"

Part 8: Reading face and body signals

Be careful whenever you consider a singing horse.

It isn't what he sings or how well he sings it.

It's that he sings at all.

- Anonymous Wise Person

A martial arts' master is often credited with the ability to read his opponent's mind. No sooner does the poor fellow decide to execute a strike, but the master begins to parry it and to riposte effortlessly, the force having been supplied by the opponent, himself. Can the master read minds? If so, how does he do it?

We human beings believe that we're experts at concealment, that we're terribly clever in the ways of deceit. We're sure that we know how to put on an act. Certain that we shall perform convincingly, we rehearse our little denials or excuses or flattering phrases. So confident are we that if someone tells us that our body and face language may unintentionally reveal our true intentions to our intended dupe, we indignantly protest. Impossible, we say.

But, in fact, the language of body and face is far more eloquent than any rehearsed phrase. Great literature is written in that language. Some of the sign-words are universally used and understood but many are peculiar to the individual, and these are the words the Master interprets. (Which horn does the bull favor? Is he near or far sighted? Does he feint with one horn before attempting to impale with the other? Life and death ride on this information. Ask Manolete.)

In the early nineteen hundreds, as the various schools of thought converged into the science of the human mind, the gathering herd of psychologists found itself stampeded by a horse named Hans.

Groomed by his private trainer, or tutor, Herr Von Osten, Hans could add, subtract, multiply and divide with degrees of accuracy we should all admire and envy.

Further, Clever Hans could identify playing cards, determine dates upon which certain moveable feast days would fall, and perform any number of astonishing calculations. University professors, who studied and presumably graded him, were unanimous in their praise of his uncommon intelligence. Not a few offered him as a role model to the lugheads who occupied time and space in their undergraduate classrooms. The halls of Academe rang with paens to horsesense. All and sundry were absolutely amazed by this most intelligent animal.

There were, however, a couple of disturbing kinks in his performance. Hans, the undergraduates were pleased to note but disinclined to investigate, was not infallible. He had a few shortcomings, which, being so unlike their own, were rather noticeable.

For example, if Hans' questioner didn't know the answer to his own question, neither did Hans. (This almost never happens to a sophomore.) Further, if Hans was not standing in full view of his questioner (a normally dreaded confrontational examination) Clever Hans didn't have a clue. He actually required the physical presence of his interrogator in order to produce the correct answer.

Since Hans performed best when his trainer quizzed him, teams of experts scrutinized Von Osten's demeanor searching for signals - ponies, if you will - that provided the horse with correct answers. They could find nothing... no cues or clues as to how information might be conveyed to the cerebral horse. So they scratched their heads in wonder and dispensed inferiority complexes to college boys.

But these nagging kinks in Hans' performance chaffed one particular psychologist, a persistent investigator named Oskar Pfungst. Pfungst said "Pfooey" to claims of the horse's mathematical genius.

Everyone else had wanted Hans to succeed. Not Pfungst. He was determined to expose the horse as a fake. Pfungst intuitively understood that it was everybody else's desire that had something to do with the horse's abilities.

Anticipating B.F. Skinner, Pfungst noted that in the horse's early days of what would only later be called "operant conditioning", trainer Von Osten, anxious that the horse succeed, enthusiastically rewarded him for each correct answer he gave. This enthusiasm was still revealing itself in the most subtle ways. Whenever Von Osten posed a question, he imperceptibly raised his eyebrows, arched his shoulders, and pushed his face forward - a universal attitude of expectation. He maintained this pose as he waited for Hans to tap out the correct answer; and when this goal was attained, he would, in a universal attitude of relief, sigh, ever so slightly, lower his shoulders, and jerk his head back. These signals, being universal expressions of expectation and relief, were shared by all of Hans' interlocutors.

Again, when the questioner asked, "Hans, what is seven minus three?" he would pause, poised in anticipation, waiting for the horse to answer; and this pause of expectation would signal Hans to start tapping. Of course, the horse would have continued to tap until bursitis set in if the questioner had not sighed, ever so slightly, with relief when Hans reached the desired answer: "four" - and had not stopped, say, at three. And in the course of this tiny sigh of relief, the interlocutor invariably lowered his shoulders and jerked his head, signals which let Hans know that it was time to stop tapping. Though the distances moved might be measureable only with a micrometer, Hans could detect them and get his cue.

This, of course, was the reason he could not answer a question if his questioner did not know the answer. This is also why he could not answer the question if his questioner was concealed behind a screen.

What is important about the story of Clever Hans is that nobody intentionally signaled the horse and that the horse was ingenuous in his receipt of the signals. He was an egoless creature... but he had senses and a brain. He, in every sense of the word, could act subliminally. He didn't need ideomotor responses. Thoughts, of which he had none, did not motivate him to act. He relied on reflexes.

Hans, incidentally, gives us the reason why the "double blind" procedure is essential for accuracy in certain test results. When trying to determine the efficacy of a drug, for example, a technician might dispense distilled water to some patients and the experimental drug to others. There is no question but that if the technician knows which phial contains which substance, he unintentionally conveys this information to the patients who, just as unconsciously, receive it

and respond accordingly. In order for the technician not to influence the test results, he must not know the identity of the substances he is administering.

So the aim of training, aside from acquiring basic skills, is to solve the problems posed by unintentionally given signals which are unconsciously received and subliminally acted upon.

What, after all, does training consist in?

Creatures learn in two basic "conditional" ways: they learn passively simply by repetitive associations of one stimulus with another as, for example, Pavlov taught his dogs to salivate at the sound of a bell. He merely rang a bell immediately before feeding them, and they soon associated the sound of the bell with the arrival of the food. Thereafter, in anticipation of the food, they salivated whenever he rang the bell.

Creatures learn actively by the same associative process. If Pavlov wanted to teach his dogs to press a lever, he'd have withheld food until they happened to press the lever, and then he'd reward them with the desired food.

In either case, he'd have had to be constant in his reinforcement of the learning sequence. After awhile, if he rang the bell and didn't feed them, or if they pressed the lever and got nothing, the association would attenuate until it was nothing but a dim memory. They'd soon ignore the once generous bell and lever.

Hans the clever horse had actually conditioned his trainer into acting like a mathematics teacher. All that Hans learned was that if he stopped tapping his foot whenever Von Osten signaled relief, he'd receive a piece of apple or carrot. Any questioner who knew the Calculus could get Hans to come up with the derivative of $3x/dx$; but while the horse may have received more honor, not to mention food, than Leibnitz had ever been given, he was never in line to replace the great German.

But the meditative, egoless state has, in this regard, even more to offer the martial artist. Let's go back to the student who was sitting in the dark room hollering "Yo!" whenever he saw a dim green light flash. Let's say that every time he correctly yelled, he received some food. If the student was hungry, an extremely dim green light could provoke a shout. In fact, a light that he might have been able to detect only half the time might have its odds of being seen appreciably changed. He might see it 90% of the time which means that the additional positive motivation of reward could cause him to lower his sensory and perceptual thresholds and to respond to more subtle signals.

But more than just being motivated by reward (always a nice incentive) is the significant fact that the student was motivated by hunger. This is an important distinction to which we shall soon return.

Of course, he will have acted too quickly for conscious consideration; and so the question then becomes, "Who or what inside his head is responding to the incentive?"

Martial arts training, as in Hans' case, involves the reading of signals so subtle as to be imperceptible to any "experts" who purposely attempt to discover them. It helps to know where to look.

The martial arts' master, demonstrating his acute awareness, immediately determines not only which hand or leg his opponent favors - which is obviously valuable information - but also which eye his opponent favors. In the use of weapons the combatant is always taught to keep his "eye on the target."

When the hand or foot is the weapon, the favored eye will just as surely aim at the targeted area.

Anyone can discover which eye he favors by selecting an object on the wall directly in front of him. He lets his nose lineup with the object and then extends a thumb until it covers the object, while remaining nose-midpoint in his gaze. He shuts one eye and if the object continues to be covered by the other eye, that other eye is the one he favors. If he then shuts the favored eye and looks out the other eye, his thumb will be seen to shift several inches to the side of the favored eye.

Meditation - by definition the state, par excellence, in which the ego is transcended while awareness is enhanced - will alone provide the martial artist with the means to achieve this necessary state of mind, or, more precisely, this state of No Mind.

Meditation permits the Martial Artist to enter the egoless state and become rather like one of the animals he has used as a training model in his asanas or other "forms": the horse, the crane, the monkey.

Hans would have had no problem in determining which eye his food provider favored. This information is readily available to the brain though it is discounted by the ego - which much prefers to engage in byzantine linguistic complexities... verbal messages of threats and flattery. To read these subtle signals, the egoless state must be attained - an easy state for an animal, but a difficult one for a human being to deliberately

Part 9: The Censor

In the early years of research into subliminal phenomena scientists discovered something peculiar. They conducted an experiment using two electrodes and tried to determine how close the two electrodes would have to be placed on a person's skin for that person to feel the two shocks as a single one.

The experimenters began by placing the electrodes far apart from each other on the subject's back so the he could clearly and separately feel the shocks. Then, as he no doubt wondered whether taxpayers' money had been used to fund such a project, the experimenters kept moving the electrodes closer and closer until they reached an area in which the person simply could not determine whether he was receiving one shock or two. In other words, the electrodes were so close their impact areas coincided in the sort of union that Venn diagrams so neatly illustrate.

Then the scientists played a kind of game. Confining themselves to just this narrow area, they shocked the subject sometimes with two electrodes and sometimes with only one and asked him to guess immediately - without thinking about it - whether they had used one or two electrodes. Instead of being 50% accurate, the statistical probability, the subject was amazingly accurate. When he had to respond spontaneously, he somehow knew the difference.

Something in the subject's brain had the power to raise or lower perceptual thresholds. Sigmund Freud wasn't surprised by this peculiar "something" in the brain. He had postulated its existence. He called it The Censor. In Zen we call it our Buddha Self.

This spontaneous state is precisely the egoless state that a martial artist strives to attain. An old Buddhist story helps to further clarify the difference between spontaneous and contrived thought:

A novice approaches a Zen master and begs to be accepted as a disciple. "I'll accept you," says the master, "providing you can say one word of truth. Come back when you can tell me a truthful word."

The novice leaves and begins to think and think until he decides he's got the right word. He returns to the master and kneels before him. At the master's nod, the novice softly intones, "Buddha."

"Get out, you fool!" shouts the master, "and don't come back until you can utter a truthful word!"

Again the novice thinks and thinks and decides upon another word. He returns to the master, kneels, and whispers, "Love."

"Get out, you fool!" shouts the master. "Don't come back until you can utter a truthful word!"

The novice thinks some more and finally decides upon another word. He returns to the master and as he kneels, the master kicks him. "Ouch!" cries the novice and jumps up.

"Sit down," says the master. "You have just uttered a truthful word."

Thoughts generated in ego-consciousness are usually self serving, compromised thoughts. They are products of deliberation and as such have a manufacturing time-line. Spontaneous intuitions, simply because they occur without considerations of advantage or detriment, cannot be devious and, taking no detours, are direct, immediate, and "true".

In a monastic setting, training is an uninterrupted and comprehensive process. One area or another of a novice's development is always being addressed. Just how the spiritual curriculum proceeds is often a mystery to the harried novice, but his martial arts' training is usually clear and unambiguous. One approach, which has had a long and colorful literary career, is typified in the following anecdote:

A novice enters a monastery prepared for some serious theological instruction only to discover that every monk in the institution has been given permission to strike or kick him not only at will, but at the most unexpected times, and in the most unlikely places. He may be walking in the garden, or working, or eating, or even sitting in the privy, when suddenly a passing monk may strike him. The blows are hard and so randomly delivered and from such a variety of sources, that the novice, disheartened and battered by what seems to be perpetual hazing, quickly doubts that he will survive his freshman year - or even the first 1/12th of it.

Since he cannot initiate an attack, he finds himself in a curious situation: before he can counter a strike, he must first be able to block it - and this, as yet, he lacks the skill to do. Unfortunately, he possesses no firearms.

Inside or out of a monastery, the best way to deal with a problem is, of course, to avoid it; and the novice quickly learns how to determine when a strike is imminent. He studies the approaching monk. Is his expression different just before he actually strikes from the way it is when he passes without striking? When he does strike, will it be from the right or left? With fist or open hand? From above or below? Will the blow be a kick? From which direction? What balancing movements will the monk make before he kicks? At what precise point is the monk looking when he strikes? The novice becomes extremely observant and soon compiles a compendium of the most incredibly subtle mannerisms about his potential attackers. No nuance goes unnoticed. He has no choice in this: he cannot maintain the tension of constant alarm. A warning siren that doesn't cease, ceases to be a warning siren.

All animals have an attack mode, attitude, or poise; and humans, being members of the animal kingdom, share this behavioral trait. Discretion is still the better part of valor; and an accurate reading of a potential opponent's intentions is better than a constant state of Code Red readiness. So the novice submits to a training game, a contest of wits which requires enormous concentration; and concentration, as we know, is the first step in meditation.

It is at this point that the path of the merely skillful diverges from the masterful.

The sine qua non of the true martial artist is his peaceful demeanor and peace, as it happens, is Buddhism's most vaunted state. While Buddhists do not hold universal patent rights on Peacefulness, if any one group can be said to revel in it, to prize it more highly than any other state, Buddhists are that group. Zen Buddhists, be they martial artists of the most deadly and consummate skill, are nothing if not tranquil.

On the surface, paradox defines the incongruity: the peaceful warrior. Do these opposed characteristics function in spite of each other or because of each other? Let us take an admittedly oversimplified look at their baffling contrariness.

Just as the brain has two independent but cooperative halves, the body has two autonomic nervous systems: the sympathetic and parasympathetic.

The sympathetic nervous system is activated in the cause of fear, anger, pain, and, oddly enough, seminal ejaculation. By releasing adrenaline into the bloodstream, an increase in heart rate and blood pressure and a dryness of mouth is produced. The concomitant mind-set is one of self-preservation, and the attention contracts and focuses upon egoistic demands. Sensory input diminishes. We do not savor the fragrance of flowers when we are running for our lives. We do not note which key we are screaming in. And the Gucci silk we pierce with a steel blade we rend without due esthetic appreciation.

The parasympathetic nervous system is activated for feeding and for sexual arousal. Blood pressure and heart rates drop and we secrete saliva to the point of drooling. Long wet kisses or filet mignon with sauce Bernaise: juicy mouths attend them both. Blood is needed elsewhere than in the extremities of brain and feet and everything slows down to let us enjoy its midway pooling. The concomitant mind-set is convivial, expansive and sensory-appreciative. We smell the perfume. We taste the cinnamon. We hear the steak's tiniest sizzle or feel the slightest wisp of breath in our ear. In short, we are completely aware of the moment as we relish and linger in it. Assuming we are not psychopaths or perverts, we are joyously peaceful and in no way looking for a fight.

It should come as no surprise, then, that meditation techniques facilitate parasympathetic responses, that hunger and the preparation for feeding are excellent inducements to sharpen sensory awareness, and that martial artists or meditators are always advised not to practice "on a full stomach".

As the body relaxes, the mind expands. Brain activity slows down in order to increase awareness. Brain waves go from the frazzled, albeit normal, beta rhythms of ordinary or alerted consciousness to slower more sensory-aware alpha and theta rhythms, the frequencies associated with states of deep relaxation, subliminal awareness, and the vaunted Meditative Zone. Clearly, a combatant who experiences fear or pain, inhibits his ability to enter the Zone.

The first of the necessary disciplines the martial artist must master is Pranayama, the science of controlling breath and circulating energy. Every training program incorporates its rigorous practice.

Each martial arts' "form" must be learned with the appropriate breath inhalation and exhalation in concert with the choreographed movements. Naturally, these forms must be practiced until they are performed reflexively. Just as we frequently operate a car in traffic, braking for red lights and avoiding pedestrians as often as possible, with all our movements made automatically - our minds being engrossed in other scenarios, so the martial arts' students must learn the various forms so thoroughly that he can perform them unconsciously.

Controlled breathing invariably slows down breathing rates, initiating a biofeedback loop: because breathing slows, heart rates decline, blood pressure drops, awareness increases, and in this relaxed, non-threatened state, the meditative Zone may be entered.

The martial artist must maintain a peaceful demeanor since before his mind can enter the meditative state's higher zone of total awareness it must pass through this "base-camp" stage of relaxation. Tension, a product of fear, anxiety, aggressiveness, pain, or anger, will cause his sympathetic nervous system to secrete adrenaline; and this will prohibit him from experiencing this necessary relaxed awareness. All subliminal lines of information will thereby be obliterated.

Preserving the peace is a singularly militaristic poise.

The student's Buddhist training complements his physical regimen. The Eightfold Path requires him to scrutinize all of his actions to determine if they are noninjurious, generous, self-reliant, and directed towards his maturity.

The student who neglects his spiritual development stultifies his progress, arrests it at the level of the consciously athletic. He must be loving. He must truly care about the welfare of all other human beings. He must be committed to their salvation as well as his own. He must be receptive to their needs, gentle in his help, and generous in forgiveness. In all this he must personify humility. This is basic Buddhist training regardless of whether the discipline is flower arranging, tea service, archery, or swordsmanship.

Therefore, it is not from entirely altruistic motives that the martial arts' master insists upon the essentially passive code of Wushidao/Bushido. The impervious and imperturbable fighter must get himself into the egoless Zone of absolute awareness, i.e., the pure meditative state.

Accordingly, in any confrontational situation, the master instructs his disciples to achieve a lessening of tension:

The warrior must first actively strive to avoid conflict by gracefully removing himself from the argumentative equation.

If his antagonist persists, he must try to blunt the edge of his anger by apologizing for inadvertently having given offense. He should assure his antagonist that he had no intention to inconvenience or discomfit him and suggest peaceful ways to resolve the dispute.

If the antagonist physically attacks, only minimal force to repel the attack should be used. The martial artist should merely defend or, if necessary, disarm, but not counter attack. All effort should be made to let the antagonist retain his honor. Conciliatory gestures and statements should again be made.

If the antagonist proceeds with an obvious intent to kill, he should be dispatched cleanly and with appropriate regret. At this point, the warrior is blameless. All will respect him. None will condemn. He won't need a lawyer and he won't have to worry about vendettas.

In addition to pranayama, the martial artist must, of course, master Pratyahara: the ability to eliminate any sensations which he wishes to exclude. For example, he does not want to feel pain (since pain provokes an adrenaline response), and so he practices entering those trance states

which produce "anesthesia" effects; and, just as a dentist can use hypnosis to control blood flow, the martial artist knows that he can staunch his wounds by the same trance-induced method. He can also use the trance state to help him to overcome the effects of heat, thirst, and fatigue.

This is the totality of martial arts' training: the inculcation of Buddhist values of love and understanding; the acquisition of a natural state of vigilance; the proficiency in trance-induced hyperesthesia (the ability to respond to subliminal data); the disciplined obedience to rules of engagement; the clear and unequivocal adherence to peaceful objectives; the embrace of humility which fosters the control of mind and body; and the combat skills acquired through constant practice.

The secret of the master is that he melts into his skill a coolness of mind. He never becomes emotional. His focus is upon reconciliation and not upon egotistical preservation or posturing. If he can't quite feel genuine love for his antagonist, he can at least feel respect and sympathy. He finds more honor in yielding than in defeating. The attitude of the Zen warrior is achieved and maintained in training's Mobius strip - one side martial and the other spiritual - in an ever circling progression traced endlessly in the disciplines of meditation.

This is adherence to the Paladin's Creed: Wushidao.

Part 10: Conclusion

Zen teachers often take too much for granted. We're like school teachers who find a student's spelling error and demand to know why he didn't spell the word correctly. He says, "I didn't know it was wrong. It looked all right to me." Then we look him in the eye and offer the sage advice, "If you don't know how to spell a word, look it up in the dictionary." Words to live by.

Unfortunately, assuming we are sufficiently inspired by doubt to open the dictionary at all, we often have to know how to spell a word before we can look it up. English is funny that way. So is Zen.

Martial arts teachers often demand that a student focus his attention upon the Hara. It is believed, correctly so or not, that the body's weight is evenly distributed around this point and that it is a kind of balancing fulcrum. "Concentrate upon the Hara!" The instruction is everywhere the same. But nowhere, apparently, does anybody tell you precisely how to do that. An Aikido master once confided to me that his master had fervently insisted that he sit in meditation "concentrating upon his Hara" and, having been told that the Hara was a point "a couple of inches below and behind his belly button" he tried to concentrate upon this general area. He said that for months he sat there trying to visualize his intestines. This was a bit disconcerting and lacked, shall we say, a certain esthetic appeal. He decided instead to imagine that his Hara was a star and that a bunch of imaginary planets revolved around it in his abdominal universe. The effort brought him new insights into astronomy but did nothing to deepen his Zen.

The Hara is a place. It is the specific place in the abdomen where the aorta, the body's major blood vessel, splits to become the femoral (thigh) arteries. The blood which traverses the aorta moves under great pressure and when it strikes this fork in its path, it slams into it. It is easy to feel a pulse beat there in the pit of the abdomen. When we wish to concentrate upon the Hara, we relax, quiet ourselves, and focus our attention on this pulse beat. This may be too great a leap forward. It's best to begin with the following instruction:

1. Sit quietly and relax. Let your right hand rest upon your lap. Study your right hand.
2. Lightly press your thumb and index finger together until you can feel your pulse beating.
3. Count the beats until you reach ten. Open your hand and focus your attention only upon your thumb. Now, count ten beats in the thumb alone.
4. Shift your focus onto the index finger. You'll feel your pulse beat there. Count ten beats and then shift your attention to your middle finger and count ten beats there. Do the same for your ring and little fingers.
5. Feel your entire hand pulse. It will actually feel warm since by having focussed your attention upon it you are unconsciously directing blood to it.
6. Shift your attention now to your left hand. Repeat the procedure.

With a little practice, you'll soon be able to feel your pulse beating in your eyelids, lips, feet, etc. Now you're ready for the major leagues: The Hara.

Start by pressing down into your abdomen with two fingers until you actually feel your pulse beating deep in the pit of your abdomen. Lying in bed is the best position for accomplishing this. Once you succeed, you'll know how and where to look for the pulse. But again, in order to feel it when you are "on guard" or even simply sitting in meditation, you will have to relax, draw your attention inwards, and focus upon this specific point.

Success in this exercise helps to gain several important objectives. In addition to the physical sense of security derived from feeling "balanced", concentration upon the Hara, by initiating a relaxation response, can prevent panic and the adrenalin surge associated with fear. Relaxation is as much an enemy of fear as fear is an enemy of relaxation. This one pointed concentration also lends itself to becoming a triggering mechanism for entering the trance state. It is the equivalent of swinging a gold watch rhythmically before a subject's eyes.

There are many breathing exercises and other forms of meditation which the martial artist employs to his advantage. Several chapters of *The Seventh World of Chan Buddhism* are devoted to these techniques. All are available on our Web site at <http://www.HsuYun.org/>.

Peace.