

Zen and the Martial Arts



When Sifu asked me to speak to you today, it was in the hope that I could enlarge upon some of the issues I addressed in my first talk, *Zen and the Martial Arts*, which I gave 12 years ago in Nevada.

The text of that talk has been published in the Zen Buddhist Order of Hsu Yun website, and in several other locations on the Internet.

I won't repeat today what's written there, instead I'd like to give a new and I hope, a more practical approach to the subject.

We all want to see a reconciliation between the spiritual half and the physical half of Zen and the martial arts. But time, place, and ethnic diversity militate against the kind of fusion that was the norm in the Golden Age of their union.

Live-in institutions in which the trainee receives religious instruction in the zendo and physical training in the dojo are not available to us; but the spirituality of the Samurai was the spirituality of Zen; and Zen and its ideals are alive and well.

Of course, we have the counterpart of some of those entertaining martial arts movies that use actors, dancers, and trick photography. Much of what is called Zen today is no more Zen than a Megabucks lottery.

Fortunately, genuine Zen ideals are not limited to oriental warriors and Buddhist mediators. Men and events that do not seem remotely related to Zen embody every principle that Zen embraces.

I think that if we took a closer look at some of our own heroes we'd see that though they did not wear breechclouts and body armor or chant the Great Dharani, they nonetheless exemplified those qualities of courage and character that the martial artist would recognize and welcome as that long-missed half of the Duo, Zen AND the Martial Arts.

So today I'd like to discuss the spiritual essence of the truly brave man of selfless integrity. I'd like to contrast a man who had the Samurai spirit with a man who was like most men and simply did not have it.

The difference between those who have the Samurai spirit and those who don't is not always easy to discern. As we say, it requires a knowing eye to see it, and even a knowing eye can be fooled. My subject, then, is pride and humility.

The world isn't big enough to contain the difference between the man who fights with skill and pride and the man who fights with skill and self-less humility.

Let's assume for the moment that the two men are equally skilled. We can say that the proud man has a sense of his own dignity and value, and that he takes satisfaction in his own achievements.

The humble man is obviously the opposite. He's modest and unpretentious; and takes little notice of his own achievements.

This huge difference between them clearly consists in self-awareness, and the importance each man places upon the way others perceive him.

We can see this difference in the attitude towards work. The man with pride works with a sense of accomplishment, he puts his hallmark upon the finished product, extending his identity to it. It is proprietary attitude; I made this, and I have placed my seal upon it. The quality of his work allows him to distinguish himself further by honorific insignia which advertise his rank, whether he's a master, a journeyman, an apprentice. The finished product creates emotion in him – joy if it's pleasing, anger if it's not.

The humble man is quite different. Gertrude Stein once said of Oakland, California, When you get there, there's no *there* there. This may no longer be true of Oakland, but it's still true of the humble man. He may have an immense reputation, but he lacks a personal identity.

He's indifferent to the placement of hallmarks. Though his work be of the finest quality; such value as it has remains separate from him. The result elicits no emotion. If it's good, fine. If not, he learns what he can from it.

But always, he works without the self-consciousness that says, **I** am doing this. This is significant. It sounds simple, but it is the essence of Zen and Bushido.

While he is working, he is not thinking, I am doing this. He has released himself from performing deliberate actions, and instead relies upon another interior consciousness to initiate and complete the actions.

In the same way, a great swordsman says, my sword has its own mind. He knows that he, in his ego-identity, does not direct its movements. He might also say that in combat a god possesses him and wields his sword. So strong is the feeling that the actions occur without conscious intention that many great swordsmen give names and personalities to their swords and attribute magical powers to them. Excalibur is an example.

This absence of self-consciousness is called *Muga* or Mushin; the action- less action of Wu Wei.

It is a state that is achieved through the mastery of meditation which is a state that is achieved through the humility that comes with mastery of oneself.

Regardless of how religious the proud man seems to be; if, in action, he is self-aware, he is not performing in humility meditative state of *Muga*.

Meditation takes many forms. In the Bhagavad Gita Krishna tells the warrior Arjuna that the highest form is Jnana, the contemplation of life's meaning the purpose, and the constituents of honor, and the principles which ennoble man's existence.

How does this yoga affect a man? How does humility's meditative state of *Muga* appear when it is garbed in civilian clothing and unannounced by the flash of steel?

It's often said that the best way to learn the grammar of your own language is to study a foreign language. A concept gains clarity when it's viewed in another context. So, regarding pride and humility, let's stay with the subject of combat – but step outside the martial arts and consider another kind of contest – one involving rhetorical art. We'll consider two speeches given at the dedication of a Civil War cemetery.

In the summer of 1863, a hundred sixty thousand Union and Confederate soldiers engaged in battle at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The South had carried the war into Northern Territory, and after three days of combat and 51,000 casualties, the Union prevailed.

It was a costly victory; but its significance demanded that a grand memorial service be held at the dedication of the Union's battlefield cemetery. No one less than the greatest orator in the United States would qualify to give the main address: Edward Everett was therefore summoned to the task.

The ceremony had been scheduled for October, but so valuable were the words of Edward Everett that when he requested another month to polish his speech, the authorities rescheduled the event for November. President Lincoln had also been asked to speak.

Lincoln, self-taught and unsophisticated, was considered a strong speaker – with moral insight that he could readily articulate; though the electorate had not always appreciated the clarity of his vision. Unsuccessful as a political candidate for lesser offices, his debating skills had gotten him national attention; and he became his party's presidential candidate. No one expected him to sin; but when the opposition party votes split along north-south lines, he was elected.

By 1863 the war had gone so badly that the Union military, despite superior strength in men and armaments, suffered a devastating string of losses. Gettysburg was one of the few Union victories that could be ceremonially noticed.

Edward Everett, unlike Lincoln, was an urbane and cultured gentleman. Ad what a resume he brought to the performance.

He had divinity degree from Harvard and a Ph.D. in Greek Literature.

As to elective office, he had been Governor of Massachusetts, a member of the United States House of Representatives and a U.S. Senator, too.

He had been a Secretary of State and high ranking diplomat to Great Britain.

He had been both a professor and a president of Harvard University. He had even been his party's candidate for the office of President of the United States.

Edward Everett was proud of his accomplishments; and as to his skill as a orator, all critics agreed that he was indeed second to none.

On the November day, Everett spoke for two hours, the usual length of such an address. He began by recalling the battle of Marathon in which an Athenian Greek army defeated a larger Persian invasion force. A messenger was told to run with the news of the victory from Marathon to Athens, a distance of some 26 miles, a feat which is still commemorated around the world in various Marathon foot races.

Everett recounted the Battle of Gettysburg. He gave names, dates, places, and so vividly recalled the horrors of the three day holocaust that the audience was deeply moved. And then Lincoln rose to speak.

Before departure for the ceremony, he had written-out his speech on a tablet. It was a mere 267 words and required only two minutes to deliver.

The audience had viewed the event as a kind of speaking contest and nearly all were disappointed by the brevity of his remarks. In terms of rhetorical art, his plain, direct style seemed inappropriate.

But let's take a moment to consider art. What specifically defines art? We know that a work of art must meet four requirements: it has to arouse imagination; stimulate reason; and stir emotion; and a work of art must also possess a strange, indefinable power to endure.

This fourth eternal quality happens to accord with those Buddhist definitions of reality and truth that are encountered in the literature of most oriental martial arts:

If a thing is real, it is true. If a thing is true now, it must be true always. If it is true here, it must be true everywhere. And it must be true unconditionally. It isn't true under some circumstances but false under others.

It is eternal, immutable, and universal.

This is transcendental truth, the reality of Nirvana, as opposed to the ever-fluctuating illusions of the material world.

We read or attend the plays of Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides. Nearly two and a half millennia separate our lives from the lives of these authors. But nothing separates us from their art. And so it is with all great works of art.

On that November afternoon at Gettysburg, the audience judged Everett to be clear winner. Today, scattered around the world, there are historians who have actually read Edward Everett's

speech; but I will guess that not a single person here, myself included, can quote a line of it. I cannot – and I read it.

Many of you may not even have known that a person named Edward Everett spoke for two hours before Lincoln spoke. I had to look it up myself – that’s how utterly irrelevant Edward Everett and his oratory are.

But what about that shameful paucity of words that Lincoln spoke? Every American knows them. They are carved into the granite of our national identity.

They begin, Four score and seven years ago and end, ---and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earths.

The magic in these words is the difference between kill and pride and skill and humility. Both speeches were skillful. But only one had the power to endure.

We often find that projects that are initiated by egotistical whim quickly collapse. It is as if the excitement of the planning phase and the fantasies of future glory soak up all the energy so that none is left for the hard, thankless, day-to-day grind. Everybody wants a title and nobody wants to work weekends.

What it always comes down to is that unselfish quality of endurance, of perseverance.

Edward Everett was proud and ambitious and identified himself with virtuous causes.

He fiercely opposed the plan to relocate the south’s Cherokee Nation to the West.. On that infamous Trail of Tears.

-----But they were moved west anyway.

He argued passionately for the right of African-American men to take Harvard’s entrance examination; and they were given that right.

-----But none was accepted.

Before the war, when Massachusetts, as a textile manufacturing center, depended on the cotton grown on all those southern plantations, he never railed against slavery.

-----But once the war started and commerce with the South ended, he valiantly took the North’s high moral ground.

When things go wrong in an organization, when there is schism... when egos clash and disagreement becomes opposition and then Breakaway secession, what kind of leadership is required to preserve the group’s cohesion and prevent this competitive disintegration?

This problem – the preservation of Union – is faced by every head of family, club, business, church, and state.

Lincoln had been humbled – not by personal inadequacy – but by the grandeur of his principles – those values that he so thoroughly contemplated. He understood that the Republic, divided against itself, could not stand and must be held together; and that human slavery violated human decency.

This war was a matter of honor; and like the Samurai ideal, victory and defeat, life and death, none of these mattered compared to the greater causes of honor and principle.

A leader has to be prepared to sacrifice anything... except honor and principle.

Everett had been a Presidential candidate. Suppose he had won. Would he have been the man to preserve the Union? I don't know but I somehow doubt it.

The Confederacy would have been a sovereign, slave-holding nation. Texas would have been a separate Republic. California would very likely have been an independent county... if it already isn't.

Everett's own sense of self-worth required that he maintain his high standards. He had accepted an assignment, a paying job, and he wanted to do his best and to be appreciated for doing it.

But his attitude towards the event would have been no deferent if he had been dedicating a new railroad station. He stood outside the event and projected his ego into it, and the feedback was ego gratification.

But Lincoln obviously didn't care about the impression he'd be making. If he had he wouldn't have jotted down his speech just before he left for the ceremony.

His words were a natural expression because he was naturally, inextricably included amongst the actors, within the action. Being egoless, he merged with the event, itself. It was as if the dead had asked him a question. He didn't have to polish or rehearse his answer.

We see this goal of Unity in the egoless state in which, when facilitated by skill, the archer, the bow, the arrow, and the target merge into a seamless whole. Ego separates the archer. Egolessness spiritually blends him into the action.

Now let's turn our attention to that egoless state of humility as it's found in Zen and the martial arts... while keeping in mind that Zen Buddhism is a religion, a combination of Indian Buddhism and Chinese Daoism. Zen is not merely a stoic Way of life.

The word "Zen" means meditation, that altered state of consciousness in which we participate in a divine consciousness, and by which we overcome our ego's nagging need to be gratified, to stand out and be noticed.

In 1985, in south China, I took the bus out to Nan Hua Temple where I would later be ordained. Sitting beside me was a Zen Master, who was also a Gung Fu Master, from Hong Kong. He

spoke English and as we talked the bus rounded a curve and suddenly skidded to a stop on the dirt road.

It had braked to avoid hitting a man who was lying face up in the middle of the road. I was puzzled because nobody gave any indication of wanting to help the man.

Then as the bus drove around the man, the master looked down at him. Gung Fu, he said to me, but a foolish demonstration of bravery.

“Oh”, I said, “like the people who dance with rattlesnakes.”

“No” he said. “People who dance with snakes are usually in a hypnotic trance, but the man who is lying in the road is engaging in wide-awake bravado. “Look how brave I am,” he is saying. “See how little I fear death.” In combat, he’d be the first to fall.”

I told my companion that he sounded like a veteran, a man who had seen combat... up close.

“Yes,” he said. “Too much and too close.”

I remarked about the “quick-draw” artists of the old west who were deadly accurate when they were shooting at a bottle but who froze when they were confronted by a coiled rattlesnake.

The Zen master smiled. “But if the snake strikes the man,” he said, “the snake’s not likely to lose his job.” He gestured at the bus driver, and we laughed.

I asked, “How do you distinguish an act of bravery from an act of bravado?”

“Well,” he said, “the man in the road was feeling relief – I could see it on his face. And the bus driver was surely relieved. The true martial artist wouldn’t have felt relief. He would’ve felt nothing. He’d have remained in a kind of static calm, empty of emotion but filled with faith, resigned to the outcome of his actions.”

And now we’ve come to the heart of the issue... that eternal quality that differentiates *true art* from merely *competent execution*.

There are 3 parts of any Zen or martial arts’ discipline: Perfecting the Skill; Perfecting the Man; and Spiritualizing the Man that is, engendering faith in a belief system that supplies the honor and principles for which he is willing to fight.

Every man, but especially a warrior, requires a spiritual core to sustain him in defeat or in triumph.

The first part, *Perfecting the Skill*, consists in practicing techniques until they are correctly and efficiently executed. Is this enough? No.

Chuang Tzu, the great Dao Master, wrote the following lines:

“When an archer is shooting just to practice, he has all his skill. But if he shoots for the prize of a brass buckle, he’s already nervous. And if he shoots for a prize of gold, he goes blind or he starts seeing double! He’s trembling as he draws his bow!

“His skill has not changed. But the prize has divided him. He desires something. He’s not shooting an arrow. He’s thinking about winning. And the *desire* to be a winner drains away his power.”

So, skill is not sufficient. This archer is like “the house divided against itself.” He has placed ego gratification, personal desire, between his eyes and the target.

The archer must cultivate a trancelike zone and stay focused in it. He has to withdraw his senses and exclude all thoughts if he is to become a unit with the bow, arrow, and target. And Chuang Tzu’s archer also needed a different value-system. To a man of Dao, brass buckles and gold are not supposed to matter.

The second part, *Perfecting the Man*, consists in moral training, in acquiring the ethics which condition a man to refrain from committing the Seven Deadly sins.. Which are, in case anyone needs reminding, lust, greed, anger, jealousy, pride, laziness, and gluttony? All religious codes of conduct include them to one degree or another.

Knowing how to shoot a gun is different from knowing when it is right and proper to shoot a gun.

Also, keeping the Commandments or Precepts keeps a person out of trouble; and in trouble-free state, he’s more likely to succeed in his spiritual goals.

And there’s another benefit. Guilt – whether we are aware of it or not – is an emotional complication – an obstacle to entering the selfless state – and therefore it lengthens response time.

In Zen we believe that the Buddha is a omniscient entity within each of us, just as Christians believe in an omniscient God.

In either case, our thoughts and actions are clearly known by our Preceptor. We can’t get away with anything... and this is another reason the master strives for emotional purity and insists on integrity. He wants to remain guilt-free.

And, as the Gung Fu Master on the bus indicated, actions do not exist apart from their intention. To shoot at bottle perfects the aim; but a gun is a weapon and it is not intended to attack or defend against bottles. We cannot overlook the human element.

All right. Let’s assume we’ve succeeded in producing a skilled athlete who is also a man of integrity. We arrive then at the third part, *Spiritualizing the Man*.

For students, spiritual training has to be taught in an acceptably secular way.

A Sensei ought to give small *dokusan*-like talks to his students... but obviously he can't discuss politics or religion or the latest bit of gossip; and it's also not a good idea to display Buddhist icons or to teach Buddhist theology to children or teenagers in the dojo. Most people are extremely protective of their religious beliefs. Rather than expose their child to alien creeds many parents will act on the side of caution and remove their children from the class. There is a great deal of misinformation about Eastern religion in circulation today; and there is little to be gained by inviting suspicion. Adults, however, have an independent right to learn whatever they wish.

There's an old saying, "If you give a man a fish, you feed him for one meal. If you teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime."

Giving young people the tools they can use to analyze people and situations is a great way to build character.

This essentially is what Krishna advised the warrior Arjuna to do. Take the Highest Road to spiritual experience! Discipline your thinking processes!

I have a prison sangha at a high security prison. The topics the men most ask me to discuss are Defense Mechanisms and Logical Fallacies.

I think they get so much out of the discussions because they've never *objectively* considered their own actions and motivations... or anyone else's either.

I'm presently working on a short series of essays that cover these topics at an elementary level. It'll be published on this website.

A good way to teach this is to take one of the basic defense mechanisms or logical fallacies at a time, explain it, give a few examples, and then ask the students to return at the next appointed time with their own examples. Naturally, it's best to avoid all religious and political references.

Although you can find many secular meditation techniques in books or on the Internet, I'll give a few here that are particularly suitable for young trainees.

Visual focus is perfected by means of a yantra. This one is Sufi in origin... none of the lines is straight although each looks straight.

This yantra will dance for you – the diamonds will stand out and then retreat and the squares will stand out and then retreat... just like an old fashioned square dance.

First you have to recognize the complete collection of geometric designs – the dance steps. Just let the yantra dance as it wants as you study it..

Then record each of the dance steps. Take the time to color them in. Make a complete catalog of them.

Once you're familiar with all the configurations, you focus on the yantra and order specific "steps" to appear.

In other words, just like the Caller in a square dance, you choreograph the dance steps by calling up the patterns of your choice. This is much more difficult than you think.

The training can actually be fun as you try to recognize what seems to be an infinite number of "steps."

This exercise trains the eye to see an array of possible responses, just as it trains the power of concentration to discipline the dancing yantra.

Incidentally, in the Hagakure, a reference to such training is given in Chapter 7.

A master has clipped his nails. He hands the clippings to a novice and instructs him to throw them away. The novice takes them but doesn't move.

"What's the matter?" the master asks, and the novice replies, "One is missing. There's only nine."

And then the master gives him the one clipping that he had deliberately hidden to test the boy.

A simple breathing meditation is deep breathing done with focus on the words So'ham that are heard inwardly as white noise. This is the sound you hear when a sea shell is held up to the ear.

Inhale making a breath sound... Sooooooh, a gentle inward whoosh of the sound... and exhale with a certain force from the abdomen, making another breath sound. Hahmmm.

In many activities, the breath is held in tension awaiting the precise moment to release the tension and exhale.

To prepare for complex Qi circulation, training begins with mastery of the pulse meditation – which also serves to engage the Hara, the body's center of gravity.

This meditation also enables you to put your mind inside your body, whatever it's needed, using a mind-over-matter technique similar to hypnotic control to staunch bleeding or to alleviate pain.

Physicians and dentists can use such a technique to control a hemophiliac's bleeding during an extraction procedure or for the relief of pain in childbirth and surgery.

Details for the pulse meditation can be found in my first martial arts talk on this website.

Briefly, put your mind into the tip of your index finger and feel your pulse beating there. It might be helpful to gently place your thumb against your index finger pad.

When you can feel your pulse beating, count 8 to 10 beats and then shift your attention to the next finger, and repeat until you complete all your fingers.

Then go on to your legs and feet and even your lips; and when you can reliably do this, concentrate on the Hara which is the point deep in the abdomen where the aorta bifurcates to become the femoral arteries.

To see this force, you need only lie quietly upon your bed and place a piece of paper on your naked abdomen and watch the paper bounce with each pulse beat. Whenever there's blood, there's a pulse... and with concentration, you can feel it.

We can stare at the bull's-eye of a target or at our reflection in a mirror and let our consciousness retreat into the point of visual fixation.

We can meditate doing tai ji quan by literally imagining that we are pushing or pulling an actual object, putting force into the movements as we do this active imagination mediation.

We can sit and meditate on a Platonic Ideal form by closing our eyes and visualizing a rose or a tennis hoe or an umbrella ...and, piece by piece, taking it apart... and mentally laying all the pieces beside each other in a row.

We can perform routine chores with single-minded concentration. There is a variety of meditation forms.

As for more advanced or religiously specific meditation forms, *Every religion has its own methodology for attaining high spiritual states*; and all the methods work well.

Anyone who wants to probe bushido and the Hagakure, however, needs to understand the theological concepts that inform these writings; and these concepts are essentially Buddhist.

Now, most religions, including many forms of Buddhism – but not Zen, envision two existences, an earthly life which is then followed by another existence in heaven or hell, or in another life via reincarnation.

Zen developed in China where an ancestor – especially one's mother in law – does not conveniently reincarnate into a gurgling baby. No... Ancestral spirits hang around to help you, or to torment you if you don't show them the proper respect.

This material world – and the self-obsessed ego which is part of its flux – is our hell.

This is the world in which the ego desires status and devises a variety of strategies to gain that status, to manipulate people and events to get what it wants... that sense of one's own proper

dignity and value... in short, that definition of pride with which we began this discussion. So, in Zen we don't worry about a afterlife.

But we do recognize the two existences of heaven and hell which to us, however, are not consecutive, life – and then death. *They are concurrent.*

An old Zen story makes this concept clear:

There once was a king who fancied himself to be a great philosopher. He thought a great deal about spiritual matters and determined that there was no such thing as heaven or hell.

It annoyed him greatly to think that people actually believed in such nonsense.

And so he decreed that henceforth, in his kingdom, under penalty of death, no one could teach such spurious doctrines.

And since the king was known to be intolerant of error and to lack the quality of mercy, no one in the kingdom spoke about heaven or hell again.

But one day a holy man visited the kingdom, and he refused to be silent. He stood at a street corner and discoursed on the subject of heaven and hell.

When the king heard about this act of disobedience he ordered the holy man to be dragged into court. The king hissed at the holy man, "How dare you teach a doctrine that I have determined is false?"

The holy man looked up at him and said, "Do you expect me to discuss philosophy with a buffoon like you?"

Instantly the king was on his feet. "Seize him!" he screamed at his soldiers. "Seize him and kill him!"

But the holy man raised his arm and shook his hand and said, "Wait! Sire! Wait! Wait! Look at yourself! Do you not see that there is a hell and right now you are in it!"

The king stood there, his chest heaving, his face red, his mind furious, and he suddenly realized that hell was not a place where the body burned but where the soul burned, the conflagration of an enraged mind.

And he looked at his trembling hands and his heaving, bellows-chest that fanned this fire, and he understood. He understood.

And he sank down onto his throne and buried his face in his hands, and then slowly, incredulously, he looked up at the holy man and said, "To think that you risked your life to teach me this great truth. Oh, master, can you ever forgive me?"

And the holy man said “And you see, Sire, there is a heaven, and right now you are in it.

So, heaven and hell exist and they exist here and now and in our own mind and we can choose to live in one place or the other... but unless we’ve been decapitated we carry our heaven and hell with us wherever we go.

Once, when he was asked to define hell, Jean Paul Sartre, the Existentialist, said “Hell is other people. Well, so is heaven. And to other people, we are other people.

We need also to understand Zen’s concept of time.

Our ego gives us a continuing sense of identity – a time element – that adds paradox to confusion: We say, “I am not the same person I was when I was 20... but neither am I anybody else.

When we function in an egoless way, we function in the present moment’s natural continuum; but when we function in the material world of the ego, we tend to concretize everything, to give things arbitrary boundaries, even though the things may be in varying states of change.

On the day before a boy becomes 18, he’s still a child. He can’t sign a contract and isn’t responsible for his debts. But at the stroke of midnight, he becomes 18. He’s an adult. He can sign a contract. He’s responsible for his debts.

But did the boy become a man within the span of a clock’s striking midnight? No... of course not.

A woman reaches into her purse and not only must an onlooker wait until the light that conveys this information travels from the woman’s hand to his eyes and then enters his brain, but he must take a moment to interpret that sensory stimulus. Maybe he’s heard something about this woman. “Why is she reaching into her purse? Is it nothing or should I be concerned?” He has to evaluate the stimulus... the who, what, where, why of the action... as well as an appropriate response to it.

The martial artist is alert, but he doesn’t have to wait to see what happens next.

Wait means time. He doesn’t wait. If she removes a handkerchief from the purse he will do nothing. If she removes a gun he may act. The decision to do either will be done spontaneously.

The brain and the mind are two different things. The mind usually forgets things. The brain usually doesn’t.

A person speaks, and we hear nothing until the sound waves reach our ear drums and travel into our brain and then undergo all those interpretations of “meaningful sound.” But even if it is not meaningful at the time... even if we are not paying particular attention, our brain is recording the sound, and our interior Buddha Self can act upon that date if called upon to do so.

Along with our tendency to concretize, to put a label on one particular stage of an ever-changing entity, to fix in time this arbitrary form, we also enjoy a false sense of immediacy. In fact, nothing exterior to us occurs at the moment we perceive it.

Lovers look at a star and vow to love each other for as long as that star shall shine; but what they're seeing is light the star emitted eons ago. Perhaps they're vowing that their love will last as long as a star... that has already passed out of existence.

Additionally, while the martial artist is in the selfless zone he has the ability to notice subtle signals that the ego-conscious mind usually ignores or misinterprets.

He can pick up changes in body language that telegraph an intention to strike, or changes in facial expression – particularly in and around the eyes, that indicate deceit or desire; or he can detect changes in breathing rates, or odors such as the pheromones of anger and fear.

These and other signals that give the accomplished martial artist an uncanny kind of ability are referred to in much more detail in my first martial arts talk.

The ego does not know the present moment. It cannot know it. There is only the moment that is to come and the moment that the ego has just acknowledged and is therefore past.

It is only when we look at the world through our interior eyes – the eyes of our Buddha Self, our Big Mind – as Japanese Zen Buddhists say – that we can experience the eternal present.

The pure, egoless state and the rapidity of action accomplished without ego-engaging deliberations are major theses in the Hagakure.

Life and death is not always indicated in the question, “Is a man dead or alive?”; but rather, “Is a man enlightened and therefore alive in the real, eternal world, or is he not enlightened and therefore a blip on the radar screen of the material world, a momentary conglomeration of atoms,” elements that constitute whatever temporary form he has at the moment we consider him.

Certain extraordinary acts of bravery or love can briefly penetrate selfless Nirvanic reality,” but otherwise, this world of me standing here and you sitting there is merely a play of time-distorted, ego-evaluated, ever-moving shadows.

It is not direct perception. To perceive directly is not to look through a muddled veil, but face-to-face, and with exquisite clarity.

The illusion, then, consists in the distortions of time, and also in our failure to appreciate how many disparate elements combine to create a single moment, a single even in time, and also how that moment, itself, flows into other events in the continuum.

And this is why it is impossible to label an event absolutely good or evil, and why a Zen master does not waste time being judgmental and getting himself involved in idiotic discussions and pointless emotional arguments.

Nobody knows what other event might have occurred if the one we experienced had not occurred.

Even something as terrible as a loved one's accidental death has to be accepted with the realization that nobody knows whether death spared that person from a long and painful terminal disease that he might have contracted a week later. Yes, he might also have gone on to win a Noble Prize. But we do not know that.

I like to use the illustration of a businessman who goes to Tokyo.

A pickpocket steals his wallet which contains his airline ticket home, causing him to miss his flight. So he curses the thief for stealing his wallet and making him miss his flight.

But then he learns that the plane has crashed at sea. So he blesses the thief for having stolen his wallet causing him to miss the flight that crashed at sea.

Then he returns home and discovers he has a costly incurable illness and that the families of the crash-victims have received large settlements. So he curses the thief for having stolen his wallet causing him to miss the flight that would have ended his life with merciful quickness and would also have given his wife a large sum of money.

Then he discovers that his wife has been cheating on him with his best friend and so he blesses the thief for having stolen his wallet, causing him to miss the flight that would have rewarded his unfaithful wife and his perfidious friend with all the settlement money. And so it goes.

In Chapter 6 of the Hagakure, we read that during a break in certain battle, Lord Takanobu receives a messenger from the enemy camp. The messenger carries food and drink for him.

Takanobu is hungry and wants to eat, but his aides stop him, warning him that the food is quite likely to be poisoned.

This profound, albeit cryptic, expression functions at many levels: He is saying that the material world is an illusion, a work of fiction. It has no effect upon reality, that in the vast scheme of earthly matters, what significance has he, a fictional character called Lord Takanobu? None! Food has been placed in the bowl of a hungry man, and he is grateful. In the world of the Spirit, there is no ego identity, no Takanobu and no arrangement of molecules that can be called poison.

In effect, he is counseling his men, "Transcend the ego, and there in the world of Spirit, where everything is real, you will find joy and peace and truth and freedom. Everything there is good, and it is eternal, immutable, universal.

“But this meal in this battlefield tent is simply a shifting flux of matter. The food is converted to energy. The corpse rots into dirt. It is all Illusion. Facts today. Forgotten tomorrow.”

We see this denigration of material world events in Lincoln’s Gettysburg address. “The world will little note nor long remember what we say here.” Said Lincoln in those 267 words. Just so, Takano says, “Even if it is poisoned, how much of an effect would that have on things?”

In the film version of E.M. Forster’s novel A Passage To India, Sir Alex Guinness plays the part of a devout Brahman philosopher, Dr. Godbole.

A young Indian physician, who has been falsely accused of rape, has seen his reputation ruined, his children disgraced. He is distraught and seeks advice from wise Dr. Godbole. “What is going to happen to me?” he asks.

And Dr. Godbole consoles him with his fundamental spiritual principle: You simply must understand that ultimately it *does not matter.*”

What does matter is that a man gains the perfect tranquility of Nirvana. If he gains it, nothing else is remotely significant.

We cannot freeze the moment, and concretize it, and then egoistically evaluate and qualify what is and must remain an indefinable and illusionary flow.

How do we know that we’re egoless? When we’re not being self-conscious? We lose track of time. We’re absorbed in music or a book or in solving a problem. Our ego is not there and neither is the clock. This is concentration, the first phase of meditation.

As we gain power in his ability we can enter the egoless state under the duress of combat when we’re shooting an arrow or wielding a sword.. or giving a speech at a battlefield cemetery.

Zen steps out of the flux and brings us into the eternal now. “E” means “out of” or “away from” and “tern” means “time”. Eternal.

We step outside of time and enter the eternal moment and look around and say with astonishment, “How wonderful! How mysterious! I chop wood. I carry water.”

And suddenly we establish a connection to the real world and all our values change. We have a different kind of goal... it is to construct a usable and reliable pathway – a dao or do – to that world, a way, a method, a code that when followed with the heart and the mind reliably delivers us to it.

Wu Shi Dao is the Chinese warrior’s way which the Japanese call Bu Shi Do.

A show of emotion, particularly pride and anger, warns us that we are not in the sacred zone, that we’re in the ego’s profane world.

We've all heard the story about the Samurai who has cornered the man who killed his beloved master. As he draws his sword, ready to dispatch him, the fellow spits in the Samurai's face, infuriating him. Since the Code will not permit him to kill in anger, the Samurai sheathes his sword and walks away.

He must compose himself and attain an emotionless, egoless, pure state before he can complete his mission.

Emotion signals the presence of ego and that is when we need to stop what we're doing, walk away, and compose ourselves.

Every combatant is conscious; but the egoless combatant's actions and reactions are automatic, direct, and spontaneous. Technically, they are "subliminal" since they go under the limen or threshold of ego-consciousness.

The essence of Zen is spontaneity, but this spontaneity is not haphazard. It is predicated upon the absolute reliance that we place upon a divine interior entity, our Buddha Self – the same Buddha Self we trust to keep our heart beating while we sleep.

I don't want to conclude this talk without taking a moment to consider the extraordinary mystique of the Samurai and his ability to lead so effectively.

Even though the term "Samurai" means simply "one who serves," as it is generally applied, a Samurai is not just any fellow serving in the ranks.

We regard medieval European Knights as men who were highly trained, of sterling character, and spiritually accomplished, as men who were set apart and dubbed "Sir Knight" by their sovereign. Many ordinary men fought with swords and rode horses. but a knight was somebody special – and his counterpart was the Samurai, a man who didn't just serve, but who excelled in combat skills, was ethically secure, and had spiritual depth.

In the study of Zen we employ Jungian psychology. Carl Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist, and D.T. Suzuki, the great authority on Rinzai Zen – which is the branch of Zen I follow, were correspondents. They shared and supported each other's views.

Jung revealed the reasons why Zen worked and Suzuki revealed the methods that made it work.

Regarding combat, we have to ask what makes a group of individuals follow a leader and become a cohesive force for aggression or defense.

In all animals there are instinctive survival forces that create herds or packs and that provide for a lead stallion or alpha male.

These forces constitute the projection of two basic urges or emotional drives that all men possess – Jung called the instinctive force to congregate for social or for military reasons, "the Shadow"; and he called the instinctive force to follow a charismatic leader, "the Hero"

The leader, Samurai or Sensei, must be that special person upon whom his subordinates can project the inspiring, “role-model” Hero. His is the exalted example they must follow.

The Shadow is like a coin that has two sides. One side is the Friend and the other side is the Enemy. In my prison sangha the men have no problem understanding this coin metaphor.

A man commits a crime with his best friend. They are caught and brought to trial.

The man expects his victim to testify against him. But just as we flip a coin, the prosecution “flips” his best friend, his accomplice... and the man is stunned to see that his friend has “turned” state’s evidence against him.

Today’s friend can be tomorrow’s enemy and anyone who doubts this is criminally naive.

Before we are spiritually mature, we have a desperate need to feel connected, to have friends, to belong to a group. Yet at the same time we have the capacity to turn on our friends, to look out for Numero Uno, to be motivated, as we say, by “self interest”.

The emotional charge of these psychological investments is enormous, often to the point of irrationality.

Even in *our* everyday life, among respectable citizens we see the extent of these bizarre devotions. Consider the conduct of sports’ fans – the word fan comes from fanatic.

In Minnesota fans will paint their faces purple and wear horned-helmets. Even in freezing weather, groups of men will strip to the waist to show that letters painted on their chests spell V-I-K-I-N-G-S, while in Wisconsin fans will paint their faces yellow and green and wear large cheese hats. Men will strip to the waist in freezing weather to show that letters painted on their chests spell P-A-C-K-E-R-S.

And then, when a player who is paid millions to throw a football *throws* it, and a player who is paid millions to catch a football *catches* it, people jump and shriek like banshees.

In military service we can find the same fanatical adoration of a leader and identification with a group. Deliberate scarring or tattooing of the body may graphically aver permanent membership in and loyalty to the unit.

The leader who can control this wild behavior and channel it into a fighting force can indeed assume mythic proportions.

That many Samurai chieftains, by their dress and demeanor, encouraged such unbridled allegiance ought not to surprise us. And certainly it is no more extreme than other military leaders whose exploits are better known to us.

Alexander the Great's men truly thought he was divine. When someone would ask, "Are you a god?" he'd wink and say, "Ask the man who empties my chamber pot." It didn't help. His men still worshipped him.

And, of course, by thirty he had conquered the then known world.

And the excessive devotion that Corporal Chauvin felt for Napoleon has given us the word chauvinism, meaning blind, uncritical idolization. Napoleon, too, easily overran Europe.

We also have family attachments in which we invest troublesome emotions that can compromise our principles and divide our loyalties. The prejudice in family relationships is sometimes incomprehensible.

An army is marching down the street. All the people on the sidewalk are cheering. One woman is suddenly surprised. She says to another, "Look! Everybody's out of step but my son John." And she means it.

Prejudice and betrayal, inter-group squabbling, homesickness or worries about family members are psychological hazards to the warrior and do not help the war effort.

And this is why the code of bushido emphasizes the need for men to detach themselves from sentimental bonds and to direct all their allegiance to their leader and fellow soldiers.

Now I'll end this talk with a line by a very humble leader, china's great saint, Hsu Yun. He said "Strive to cultivate the poise of a clock that continues to tick – even in the midst of a thunderstorm's in martial arts" circles this advice is usually given as, "Cultivate the poise of a dead man."

Thank you.