JUDO AND ZEN BUDDHISM

Zen and Judo is the title of a chapter in a booklet on Zen Buddhism written by Masunaga Reiho who was a noted Zen priest of the Soto-Zen sect. The word *zen* crops up from time to time in judo and some may wonder what it is. It is fairly commonplace for a Japanese judo champion to say that his victory was down to *munen*/*muso*/*mushin* (literally no-thought or freedom from all thoughts) a particular zen expression which says in so many words I don't know what happened but something (the winning technique) just happened. It is also standard practice to end a judo session with a few minutes of seated meditation known as Zazen although by monastic standards this is a mere drop in the ocean. Kano himself rarely mentions it although among his immediate circle there was one well-known zen Master called Kaishu. The chapter gives in fairly concise form the relationship between zen and judo. This article also contains the introduction to Zen and the Ways written by Trevor Leggett 6th Dan[1]. The first part is by a Zen priest who has not done a lot of judo by the sound of it and the second is by a man steeped in judo and with a long grounding in Zen. The two together make interesting reading:-

Zen and Judo by Masunaga

"Growing interest in Zen and judo has gone along with the so-called Japan boom in the West. While superficially quite different, zen and judo are essentially similar. Judo is the art of using one's strength, both physical and mental with maximum effectiveness. Through practice in offensive and defensive tactics, it helps the trainee realize the full potentialities of his body and mind. The successful trainee gains an insight into his true self and emerges with a desire to work for social good. To reach this stage is the ultimate goal of judo.

This goal agrees with the two ideals of Kodokan judo namely to make the most effective use of one's energy and to contribute to the mutual growth of oneself and others. These ideals focus the trainee's efforts toward helping others to achieve the same joy-bringing growth.

Kodokan Judo differs from the jujitsu of ancient Japan. Traditional jujitsu featured many tricks whose purpose was to maim the opponent. It was also something of a show put on for paying customers. Jigoro Kano, the founder of judo, changed all this. After studying various ancient jujitsu schools he picked out the best techniques and systematized them. Kano did not limit his aim merely to a contest to determine victory or defeat. He made body-mind training an integral part of his system.

Though derived from the Jikishin (jujitsu) school, the word judo takes in more than the technical. Kodokan Judo of course teaches technique but its main emphasis falls on Dō – the way to self-realization or self-understanding. It aims primarily at experiencing the Way. In the process the judoka enjoys a sport and sharpens his ability at self-defence.

In 1890 Kano was sailing back to Japan from Europe. While crossing the Indian Ocean, he was through a misunderstanding challenged to a fight by a huge Russian on board. As the fight began the Russian tried to grab Kano in a bear hug. Kano seeing

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an opening twisted round and threw his opponent with o-goshi, one of the judo hip throws. The Russian arched overhead, seemingly toward a head-first landing on the deck. But Kano kept a firm grip on the Russian's wrist and brought him down on his feet. The spectators were impressed not only by the well timed throw but by the cushioning of the fall. The Russian shook Kano's hand. They parted good friends. This episode underscores the judo ideals of strength fully used and of mutual growth.

Learning in judo begins with Ukemi – the art of falling. By practising Ukemi the trainee learns to fall safely no matter how he may be thrown. At the same time he builds up his own confidence and deepens his interest in judo. Next the trainee learns the art of throwing. He develops an understanding of how to use his strength most effectively. By constant practice he begins to master the various ways to break his opponent's balance and make a throw. A throw, it is said, must be practised 3000 times before it can become effective. Judo groundwork although not too popular these days must also be practised. It is just as important to the mastery of judo as the art of throwing. The two go together like the two wheels of a cart.

In working out with an opponent the judo trainee should move in a relaxed way and try out his newly-learned techniques without hesitation. He must act positively: when thrown he should break his fall, arise immediately and resume the attack. To test his strength the trainee should occasionally take part in judo tournaments.

Quite often a new set of attitudes develops as a result of this training. The trainee may find himself (1) more relaxed in any situation, (2) convinced of the need for learning from a good teacher (3) more eager to practise techniques as taught, (4) less tempted to try 'dirty' tricks (5) more sensitive to openings in the opponent's defences while less concerned with his own (6) always poised to make effective use of the opponent's strength (7) accustomed to silence and calmness and (8) naturally disposed towards simplicity and cleanliness. Judo training in short stimulates courage and freedom of action, teaches constant awareness and resourcefulness, helps develop respect for human dignity and tempers body and mind for vital social action. With flexibility and grace or in the words of an ancient text, "like a shadow following an object", the judoka quietly does his part of the world's work.

In Tokugawa Japan (1600-1868) master swordsmen like Yagyu Tajima-no-kami and Miyamoto Musashi studied Zen to learn the innermost secret of swordsmanship. They often took up training under famous masters. Some, after the usual round of sharp criticism [interrogation] and psycho-physical discipline, managed to gain enlightenment [understanding]. A similar relationship holds for judo and zen.

Gaining full Zen enlightenment does not differ from experiencing the ultimate meaning in judo. In this way, both the Zen and judo trainee come upon the truth of life. Through intensive training they experience what it is "to know coolness and warmth for oneself". As Zen Patriarch Dogen said, "Training enfolds enlightenment". Enlightenment dwells within training and training takes place within enlightenment.

One cannot know anything deeply or experience it completely without undergoing some hardship.

While Zen has been called the comfortable entrance it is actually not so easy. The trainee gets up very early in the morning to practise zazen (cross-legged sitting meditation). During Sesshin (the special training period) he does zazen for seven days [without sleep]. Cold and sleepiness disturb him and his feet and legs begin to hurt. Usual monastery routine demands that the trainees do monastery work such as sweeping the garden in the morning and doing zazen again in the evening.

Similarly judo has its special training periods – kangeiko (winter practice) and doyogeiko (summer practice). Having gone through both kangeiko and Zen training I can vouch for the fact that neither is easy. But only through disciplined practice without regard for heat and cold can the trainee gain an inkling of what a total experience means in zen or judo. You don't learn swimming by practising on the tatami [mats].

Both zen and judo grow out of the self-identity of body and mind. To train the body is to train the mind. In zen the emphasis falls on letting go in the truly existential sense. Dogen, it is said, transmitted the 'relaxed' mind from China. Relaxed of course does not mean soft. It means breaking free from the tyranny of the ego and penetrating to the not-self or the self. Freed even from the desire for enlightenment one understands finally what makes the world tick.

In judo, too, the body and mind are relaxed. There is no burning desire to win. The zen insight into the non-duality of body and mind dwells at the centre of judo. A Zen calmed mind expresses itself in integrated action. Full function of body-mind leaves no opening. A lion it is said uses its full effort to catch a rabbit. The same applies to judo. One throws, holds, and wrestles going all out, but without strain. The body shifts immediately to adjust to changes in time and place. Those with judo sense escape injury in usually dangerous falls. They can take care of themselves with ease against violence.

So judo goes beyond mere self-defence. It builds up character and leads to responsible freedom. Harmonizing with nature, judo stresses effortless action. Similarly zen respects the natural order of things, "One's everyday mind is itself the Way," is a well known zen expression.

Just as birds in the sky and the fish in the water leave no traces of their passing, judo leaves no aftermath. The breaks are clean. In judo as in zen, when awareness is full, every action embodies vital freedom. The great masters of zen and judo move along the same path of no-hindrance.

The zen trainee understands 'no-hindrance' primarily through zazen in upright sitting and rhythmic breathing. This training method strikes most Westerners as rather strange but it corresponds to the throws practised 3000 times in judo.

Both zen and judo therefore put their basic emphasis on ultimate freedom and creativity. The zen trainee not only must absorb all that the master teach but must excel him. The trainee has to transcend the master. This, as professor Eugen Herrigel has said in his Zen and the Art of Archery, means "to climb on the shoulders of one's teachers." Judo also has many creative aspects least subtly perhaps in the development of new techniques. It too uses form to wean man away from

enslavement to form. When fully experienced, Zen and judo help replace illusion with insight. Previously routine activities then take life and find the buried wisdom in what seems at first glance to be the least rewarding of Zen sayings, "Every day is a good day: every hour is a good hour."
Masunaga Reiho

Zen and the Ways by Trevor Leggett 6th Dan.

"What are called Ways (Dō) are fractional expressions of Zen in limited fields such as the fighting arts, calligraphy, serving tea and flower arrangement. These actions become Ways when practice is done not merely for the immediate result but also with a view to purifying, calming and focussing the mental and physical apparatus, to attain to some degree of Zen self-understanding and express it. This is not a book on the Ways, but on Zen influence in them, and little is said here about technique. It is a widely accepted principle that what applies in one Way has some application to others. Some of the examples are taken from judo, in which I can draw upon my own experience as a student and later as a teacher, and which is the most widely practised field of a Way in the West. Judo's disadvantage is that the technique is so complex that the effect of anything beyond technique is masked.

It is easiest to have a first flash of Zen understanding in a Way like Flower Arranging, which is done in a static environment, but the combative arts are capable of clearer expression of Zen because they require immediate response in a potentially serious situation. It is true that today the combative Dō are mainly practised as sports, but the tension at time of contest is sometimes as great as at times of real danger. There is hardly any systematic instruction in the Ways as such. Most teachers teach technique and method of practice. The stories given here [in the book] are to alert the student to something which, if he is seriously practising, will come occasionally in his own experience. When he has isolated it he can cultivate it.

In this Zen and the Ways section I am presenting some of the background so that the next section of extracts from the so-called 'secret scrolls can be appreciated. It must be said that the Japanese are prone to use words very loosely; the same thing may be called spirit, essence of mind, true self, way of heaven, the great ultimate and so on. But the pairing of inspiration and formal technique (ri and ji), and heart and vital energy (shin and ki) are fairly standard in all the Ways.

The central notion of going beyond technique, and indeed beyond thought, is so unfamiliar here that it is best presented through the traditions of the knightly [military] arts (Budo), where men risked their lives on it. The main thing to realize is, that it is not a question of established tricks simply going into action automatically as a sort of reflex. The manifestation of Ri is quite different from the established techniques that have been learnt; this point should be noticed carefully – it comes again and again in the texts. It is the very reverse of mechanical repetition, because it is creative.

A Way as such is hardly ever taught directly; perhaps it cannot be taught directly – a pupil has to find out for himself. As an indication, let me say that I have known only a handful of men who could always demonstrate the Way in their judo, but quite a number who at times have had an experience of transcending the normal limits of

their technique. Sometimes the man himself does not realize what has happened and just says, 'Something sort of came to me.' The point of having literature on the Ways is to make these happenings clear for what they are, and so encourage him to cultivate the conditions which help them to manifest. To read this kind of literature without practising a field of a Way may be annoying as well as fruitless'.
Trevor Leggett.

One of the features of Zen is the way its stories, slogans and sayings embed in the mind and the way they have a habit of surfacing at odd but often appropriate moments. For example the saying, 'Every day is a good day….' may spring to mind in a period of stress or danger and judo-ka who have undergone extreme and intense training may know what it means 'to feel warmth and coldness to oneself.' On the other hand Zen's actual philosophy and psychology may seem incomprehensible to the average Westerner.

For example Masunaga writes on Zen Buddhism in the rest of his book as follows:- 'The real consists of *now* and *here*. At the junction of now and here, we live, work, and die. The junction is the place of human practice. The words '*panta rhei'*, "All flows" uttered by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus' express the realities of a universe that is constantly changing. Things do not remain as they are, they are always changing, constantly in flux. Our present life is the changed form of our former life and source of our future life. Buddhism expresses the truth of panta rhei by the words, 'sabbe sank-hara anicca', "All things are impermanent." The spatial relations of all things are expressed in Buddhism by the word 'paticca samuppada,' inter-relativity. All things depend on, and give life to, one another. Nothing has its own substance; everything exists through others. The truth that there is no-self is expressed by the phrase Sabbe dhamma anatta, "All things have no ego". Nothing has its own substantiality. Indeed modern physicists say that seemingly solid matter is really made of wave motions.

The existence of a self which we think we have in our everyday life is but an illusion. All the desires that are attached to this illusory self are, therefore sins. The true self will be revealed when the unenlightened self is annihilated. In Buddhism, this revelation is called the reawakening of the non-ego to its own essence.

This Buddhist truth is sought for in quiet seated meditation. Zen actually means 'meditation.' In meditation the mind is stilled and not perturbed by restless thoughts. Zen came to Japan from India via China thousands of years ago. In Japan it became the practice of the Samurai who daily faced death in combat but at the same time it combined with Japanese aestheticism and effected all the arts and culture of Japan. Delicacy and detachment with emphasis on simplicity of form characterized zen culture.

In Buddhism the study of psychology has flourished since ancient times. The structure and dynamics of Buddhist depth psychology probably appear in greatest detail in two concepts - in the Alaya consciousness of the Yogacara school and in the Buddha-nature or Tathagatagarbha of the Lankavatara sutra and Zen. There are also some similarities with Jungian ideas although Jungian psychology is a very recent arrival.'
Masunaga Reiho.

Like Christianity there are many forms of Buddhism and indeed many forms of Zen Buddhism. Buddhism's earliest message is the Four Holy Truths and the Eight-fold Path. According to the Four Holy Truths (1) Life is suffering (2) This springs from craving (3) Suffering stops when craving stops and (4) the Path to this is the Eight-fold Path namely having(a) Right views (b) Right intentions (c) Right speech (d) Right conduct (e) Right livelihood (f) Right effort (g) Right mindfulness and (h) Right concentration. Systematic meditation on these truths is the central task of Buddhistic life. (See Buddhism by Edward Conze).

As above are some quotes and thoughts on Zen. Unfortunately it can be a breeding ground for charlatans both in Japan and in the West. Should you ever meet anyone on the judo mat who claims any knowledge Zen be wary. As Leggett said, in a Way such as Judo there is only a *partial* expression of Zen. The full training course in a monastery for a Zen priest could take many years of intensive meditation with little or no practice of judo or any other Way. At first glance Buddhism would appear to have little relation with martial arts – one wonders for example whether being a samurai would qualify as Right livelihood - although in their training of the mind for battle the samurai seemed to have gained partial Buddhistic insight. See works on Buddhism by Daisetsu Suzuki.