



反省 HANSEI



SELF REFLECTION

NEWSLETTER - JANUARY 2016

Shihan's Corner

Ty Aponte

Wishing everyone a healthy, happy and purpose driven 2016!



The year is off to a great start in that our dojo is nearly completed and we are ready to begin classes in our beautiful new location. This dojo started as a dream of mine many, many years ago. I have shared this desire with many people throughout the years, but James Augur, a black belt, friend and student of mine since he was fourteen, in his extreme generosity, offered to fund the dream. So after two years of discussing the possibilities and finally finding the right location, two years of blueprint designing (Dale Cummings -

Architect) haggling in our favor for city approval, permits and all the red tape that comes with working with the City and one year of construction this dream has finally become a reality.

Although there is still a lot of work to do in the final touches (soft opening –before our grand opening) we are ready to begin teaching our regular Shotokan karate classes as well as a few new and exciting classes in various martial (or not) disciplines i.e. Kendo, Judo, Taiko drumming, etc.

Over the years, I have studied some of the great advocates of positive thinking: From Norman Vincent Peal, Tolle, Chopra, Robins, Paulo Coelho, Dyer, and Millman, to Yoda and even Shai LaBeouf (search YouTube for “JUST DO IT” ☺).

Newsletter Table of Contents

Shihan's Corner	p 1-2
New Beginnings	p 2-3
Promotions	p 4
Test Schedules and Fees	p 5
Winter Gasshuku	p 6-7
New Class Schedule and Fees	p 8-11
Testing Photos	p 12
Announcement!	p 13
The Last Word	p 14-20

I strongly believe that if you have a goal or passion and you do your due diligence, put in the effort to achieve your desired goal:

"It's the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting."

"And, when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it."

— **Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist***

It is my hope that after the holiday break you come back (past, present and future students) with a renewed spirit and motivation to set and achieve new goals throughout the year in both the martial arts and in your personal life.

See you out on the training floor.

Osu!

Sincerely,

Shihan Ty Aponte

TyAponte@yahoo.com

951 204-0341

New Beginnings

Editor

Our new dojo on Foothill Boulevard hosted it's first classes on Saturday, January 9th, following weeks of intensive effort to get the building ready. Thank you to everyone who contributed their expertise, time, and energy toward making Sensei Ty's dream come true, and toward giving us all a truly spectacular space in which to continue our training.

None of this would have been possible without the financial support of Sensei James Augur, so remember him every time you think of how happy you are not to no longer risk catching your toes on blue foam.

Our dojo is growing in many other ways this year – the Defense Arts Center, already home to several schools of martial arts, will have expanded class offerings soon, beginning with Kendo classes for adults and children on Monday and Wednesday evenings, under the direction of Sensei Inkee Lee, 7th Dan. This brings the DAC that much closer to Sensei Ty's vision of developing a true budokan, home to a broad range of martial arts. You can read more about the Kendo classes, and about our ongoing classes in Shotokan karate, Matayoshi Kobudo, and Arikai Iaido on our website.

Speaking of which, you are soon to see a new design to our website (defense-art.center.com), the result of volunteer efforts from several students. Please visit the site and give us your feedback on what you see there and what you would like to see there.

DEFENSE ARTS CENTER
UPLAND

HOME CLASSES ARTS SENSEI INFO

DEFENSE ARTS CENTER

Iaido and Kobudo Shotokan Karate Kendo

Grand Opening Special - first 30 new signups -- 3 months classes FREE!

Traditional Eastern Martial Arts
for children and adults of all ages and skill levels.
A variety of classes, taught by experienced, professional instructors,
each specialized and officially ranked in their respective arts.
Located in Upland, California

CLASSES CONTACT US PHILOSOPHY

The celebration of a “new year” can sometimes feel a little contrived, but our USKL family tree is truly turning over a new leaf. I hope that we all feel inspired to renew our commitment to our training, to our collaboration and friendship with one another, and to furthering our long-term health and happiness.

Promotions from Late 2015

Editor

Many of our students (and teachers) took part in examinations at the end of the year and earned promotions. Congratulations to everyone who advanced and thanks to everyone who participated, on and off the floor, for showing your dedication and sharing your spirit.



Dan ranks:

S. Lynn Aponte	Godan (5 th degree black)
S. James Augur	Godan (5 th degree black)
S. Robert Johnson	Godan (5 th degree black)
S. Leo Shortle	Godan (5 th degree black)
S. Dave Turney	Godan (5 th degree black)
Jared Goldberg	Sandan (3 rd degree black)
Chris Becker	Nidan (2 nd degree black)
Dr. Dave Michelson	Nidan (2 nd degree black)
Adrian Vera	Shodan (1 st degree black belt)

Kyu ranks:

Dr. David Dang	1 st kyu (brown)	Clarissa Lekpor	3 rd kyu (brown)
Jose Luis Nuñez	1 st kyu (brown) *	Laurel Oken	3 rd kyu (brown)
Juan Miguel Nuñez	1 st kyu (brown)	Tyler Ritter	3 rd kyu (brown)
Jason Chen	2 nd kyu (brown)	Casey Kwok	5 th kyu (green)
John Flechas	2 nd kyu (brown)	Jessica Kwok	5 th kyu (green)
Abby Pelliteeri	2 nd kyu (brown)	Milagros Moreno	5 th kyu (green)
Tim Richmond	2 nd kyu (brown)	Iman Peerzai	8 th kyu (orange/black)
Jasmin Tran	2 nd kyu (brown)	Fabian Cruz	9 th kyu (orange/white)
Cynthia Vera	2 nd kyu (brown)	Sonali Ortiz-Casillas	10 th kyu (solid yellow) 3 stripes
David Voiles	2 nd kyu (brown)	Derek Kwok	10 th kyu (solid yellow)
Kayler Wildasinn	2 nd kyu (brown)	Branden Flores	10 th kyu (yellow/black)
		Daniel Zuver	10 th kyu (yellow/white) 3 stripes

* provisional

If I have missed anyone, I apologize. Please bring it to my attention.

Test Schedules and Fees

Editor

Members should be familiar with schedules and fees for their recent and upcoming tests:

Beginners and Novices – testing every 3 months (Mar, Jun, Sep, Dec)

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Belt</u>	<u>Fee</u>
10 th Kyu	Yellow-white (youth)	\$25.00
10 th Kyu	Yellow-black (youth)	\$25.00
10 th Kyu	Yellow solid	\$25.00
9 th Kyu	Orange-white (youth)	\$25.00
8 th Kyu	Orange-black (youth)	\$25.00
7 th Kyu	Orange solid	\$25.00

Intermediate Students – testing every 4 months (Apr, Aug, Dec)

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Belt</u>	<u>Fee</u>
6 th Kyu	Green-white (youth)	\$35.00
5 th Kyu	Green-black (youth)	\$35.00
4 th Kyu	Green solid	\$35.00

Advanced Students – testing every 6 months (Jun, Dec)

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Belt</u>	<u>Fee</u>
3 rd Kyu	Brown (-white youth)	\$50.00
2 nd Kyu	Brown (-black youth)	\$60.00
1 st Kyu	Brown solid	\$70.00
1 st Dan (Shodan)	Black (-white youth)	\$150.00
2 nd Dan (Nidan)	Black	\$200.00
3 rd Dan (Sandán)	Black	\$300.00

The fee is only \$10 for students who are awarded a progress band but who do not change belt color.

Winter Gasshuku

Dr. Dave Michelson

Save the Date – Sunday February 7th at 6 AM!

合宿

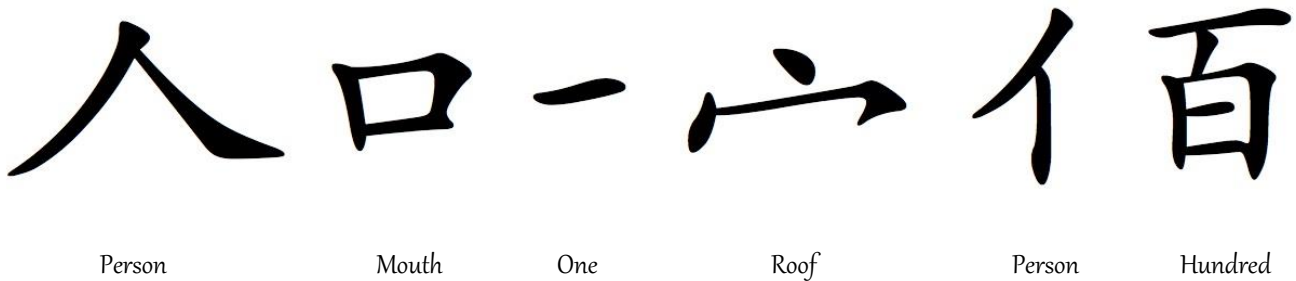
Shihan Aponte would like to invite **ALL** of the USKL membership to come together for a traditional Winter Gasshuku – a very early morning class to celebrate the coming new year of training together. We have bundled ourselves off to beaches and hillsides in past years, and we will again, but for this new year, I think it will be very special having our Gasshuku in our new dojo. This will be the last Sunday of the Chinese calendar year, ushering out the year of the Wood Goat, patient and helpful but resistant to change, and welcoming the year of the Fire Monkey, full of dynamic, creative, and sometimes impulsive energy.

After our (hopefully) energetic early morning class, we plan to have breakfast together at 7:30 AM at Maniac Mike's Café, located within the Cable Airport just up Benson Avenue from new dojo. The address is 1749 W 13th St, Upland, and the online reviews of the menu, and of the view of the planes taking off and landing, are very good.



On a side note, one of my personal goals for the new year is to learn more about reading and writing Chinese and Japanese characters. I'll add something on the topic to each newsletter that I help put together, in case anyone else finds it interesting. The characters above for *Gasshuku*, translate to "training camp" in English, but do you too wonder where they came from?

The Japanese borrowed written language from the Chinese culture in the first century AD and the meanings of many of the more complex pictograms diverged over time, but these are still very similar in Chinese where they would be pronounced *hèsù* in the Mandarin dialect, which translates to "co-residential". I can see the meaning in the characters because they are each made up of three fundamental characters or "radicals". I'll tell you what these ingredients are, see if you can imagine how they might have come about (what they are drawings of) and how they might have been put together to mean training camp.



Send any questions or ideas to me via text or email – I'll pick from among the plausible answers and announce a winner at the *Gasshuku*!

On the topic of sending me things, Sensei Ty asked that I help with editing this newsletter – so I hope you all enjoy the new design. Please send me your questions, ideas for changes, and most of all, suggested stories and excerpts of your writing for the next edition. (Send all complaints and corrections care of Chris Becker). Similarly, Ty has invited me to try updating the USKL.org website, giving me a chance to learn a little about coding. Sensei Robert Johnson created the original USKL website as a school project when attending Redlands University in 2001 and he has maintained the site ever since. Many thanks and kudos to Sensei Bob for his years of selfless contributions, for setting such a high standard for quality, and for giving me great advice as this transition gets underway. While doing my best, I am more than happy to accept help from all who have suggestions regarding design, content, features, and...collaboration!

Dr. Dave Michelson
909-286-0316
dmichels@llu.edu

New Classes and New Training Fees

Ty Aponte

Our larger, lovelier training facility comes with new opportunities, new arts, and new class times, as well as greater maintenance costs that we all will need to share. Class fees for January were unchanged because we were not able to start classes right away, but as February rolls in, please be aware that training fees will be changing.

This schedule remains somewhat tentative and, as always, you are encouraged to call me (951-204-0341 or 909-981-6368) if you have any questions about class times and availability. Some of the classes listed on the schedule will only happen if enough students are interested. Even one more person could be what makes the difference, so feel free to let me know your thoughts. If there is a class shown on this schedule that you would like to take, please call to confirm that the class is active. If a particular class is not currently active, but some students remain interested, we will keep a list and call people back when there is enough interest to make the class active.

If you are interested in taking a particular class on a different day or at a different time than what I have listed here, please -- let me know! If enough people have the same preferences, and I am aware of it, I will try to accommodate them as best as I can. If people don't tell me their preferences, there's little chance that their ideal class schedule will come to pass.

So that you are not tardy, try to arrive 10 min. or more before class starts.

Some classes may be held upstairs or may share floor space with another class, but generally, each class will have its own instructor.

New Class Schedule: (subject to change)

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<p>Early AM Karate Beg-Int 5-6 or 6-7 AM (call first)</p>	<p>Early AM Karate Beg-Int 5-6 or 6-7 AM (call first)</p>	<p>Early AM Karate Beg-Int 5-6 or 6-7 AM (call first)</p>	<p>Early AM Karate Beg-Int 5-6 or 6-7 AM (call first)</p>	<p>Early AM Karate Beg-Int 5-6 or 6-7 AM (call first)</p>	<p>Adult Karate Beg-Int 9-10 AM L. Aponte</p>	<p>Adult/Teen Karate Int 9:³⁰-10:³⁰ AM Various²</p>
<p>Morning Karate Beg-Int 10-11AM or 11-12 PM (call first)</p>	<p>Morning Karate Beg-Int 10-11AM or 11-12 PM (call first)</p>	<p>Morning Karate Beg-Int 10-11AM or 11-12 PM (call first)</p>	<p>Morning Karate Beg-Int 10-11AM or 11-12 PM (call first)</p>	<p>Morning Karate Beg-Int 10-11AM or 11-12 PM (call first)</p>	<p>Youth Karate Beg-Int 10-11 AM T. Aponte</p> <p>Youth/Adult Karate Int-Adv 11-12:¹⁵ PM T. Aponte</p> <p>Adult Karate Adv 12-1:³⁰ PM T. Aponte</p> <p>Iaido (Samurai Sword) 1:⁴⁵-3 PM T. Richmond</p>	<p>Adult/Teen Karate Adv 10:³⁰-11:³⁰ AM Various²</p>

<p>Youth Karate Beg-Int 5-6 PM T. Aponte</p>	<p>Youth Kendo 4:30-6 PM S. Belko</p> <p>Special Forces Karate Beg-Int 5-6 PM A. Wildasinn</p>	<p>Youth Karate Beg-Int 5-6 PM T. Aponte</p>	<p>Youth Kendo 4:30-6 PM S. Belko</p>			
<p>Adult Karate Beg-Int 6-7:15 PM T. Aponte and A. Wildasinn</p>	<p>Adult Karate Beg-Int 6-7:15 PM R. Nuñez</p>	<p>Adult Karate Beg-Int 6-7:15 PM T. Aponte and A. Wildasinn</p>	<p>Teen/Adult Karate Int 6:30-7:30 PM* M. Whiteside</p>	<p>Youth Karate Beg-Int 6-7 PM O. Jamil</p>		<p>Adult/Youth Karate Beg-Int 5:30-7 PM L. Shortle</p>
<p>Teen/Adult Kendo 7:30-9 PM I. Lee</p>	<p>Adult Karate Int-Adv 7:30-9 PM Varies¹</p>	<p>Teen/Adult Kendo 7:30-9 PM I. Lee</p>	<p>Adult Karate Adv 7:30-9 PM Spirit Night* M. Whiteside</p>	<p>Matayoshi Kobudo (Weapons) 7-8 PM B. Johnson</p>		

Beg = beginning students (white, yellow, and orange belts)

Int = intermediate students (green and brown belts)

Adv = advanced students (brown and black belts)

* Spirit Night: the evening classes (6:30-7:30 PM and 7:30-9 PM) of the last Thursday of each month are devoted to “spirit night”. All students who know Heian Shodan may participate.

¹ Varying instructor schedule for Tuesday evening (7:30-9 PM) karate classes:

- 1st Tuesday of the month: Lynn Aponte
- 2nd Tuesday of the month: Ty Aponte
- 3rd Tuesday of the month: Robert Johnson
- 4th Tuesday of the month: Tom Serrano
- 5th Tuesday of the month: Leo Shortle

² Varying instructor schedule for Sunday morning karate classes (9:30-10:30, 10:30-11:30 AM):

- 1st Sunday of the month: Leo Shortle
- 2nd Sunday of the month: Ty Aponte
- 3rd Sunday of the month: Robert Johnson
- 4th Sunday of the month: James Augur
- 5th Sunday of the month: Lynn Aponte

New Training Fees: *(subject to change)*

Shotokan Karate

- o 1 class per week: \$50.00 per month
- o 2 classes per week: \$90.00 per month
- o 3 or more classes per week: \$130.00 per month

Kendo

- o 2 classes per week: \$100.00 per month

Matayoshi Kobudo:

- o 1 class per week: \$50.00 per month
- o Requires membership with the Matayoshi Kobudo Kodokan International (MKKI)

Iaido

- o 1 class per week: \$50.00 per month
- o Requires membership with the Araki Mujinsai Ryu

Special Forces Adapted Karate

- o 1 classes per week (for now): \$50.00 per month

If any senior students (even college students) offer to help as assistants or as instructors, it will be possible to offer this class twice a week. Please contact Sensei Ty if you have any interest in working with these incredible kids!



Test Photos



Announcement!

James Augur

Greetings, all. I have an announcement!

On the weekend of January 15, Tracey and I escaped to San Jose to attend a sci-fi convention. But that is not all that we did.

On January 15, 2016, in the Japanese Friendship Garden in San Jose...WE GOT MARRIED!



The Last Word

Dr. Dean Pickard

Editor's Note:

Shihan Dean Pickard is the founder and former head instructor of the USKL. He has taught courses in philosophy at several local colleges and universities and has himself been a student of a wide range of martial arts since 1965, including Shorin-ryu (with Senseis Nishioka and Nakano), Shito-ryu, Shotokan, Tae Kwan Do, Tai Chi Ch'uan (with Professor Wen Shan Huang), kickboxing, and Filipino and Chinese martial arts (with Dan Inosanto at the Kali Academy of Torrence, CA).



This article was originally published in Black Belt Magazine in 1979. While this may come as a surprise to some of you, this gem of writing and many more like it have been freely available for reading on our USKL website for many years. I greatly enjoyed following along with Shihan Pickard's deeply insightful reflections on the nature of martial arts training and meditation. I encourage any of you who have not previously or recently read this article to find a comfortable place, sit down, and spend some time with the founder of our organization.

Levels of the Martial Arts Experience

Levels I, II & III

The view of martial arts as merely combative or competitive is highly misleading. There are various interrelated aspects or levels of experience in martial arts. Unfortunately, many practitioners explore only a few of these levels and may even reach a high level of skill without using this process of discipline and development of skill to explore and experience more fully the potential of this medium. There are many paths to self-awareness. Martial arts are only one and in themselves are not enough. That is why traditionally many masters have encouraged the ideal of the martial artist as a man of learning and culture as well as martial skills.

There are seven aspects or levels of the martial arts experience. However, they cannot be considered as isolated levels, one reached successively after another. Each person develops somewhat differently, and some or all of these aspects may develop simultaneously or successively, depending on the person and on the instructor. The most significant factors are attitudes and motives on the one hand, and openness to change and new ideas and experiences on the other. These factors determine which aspects will be experienced most and whether eventually all levels will be reached.

The first and most obvious level in martial arts is the physical. It involves the discipline of mastering the control and coordination of the body to perform effectively and provide health through physical fitness. This is the foundation for the subsequent levels.

The second level is the combative level. The physical skills of control and coordination learned are now applied to self-defense. Equally important is the mental focus and control required to be strong and effective in self-defense.

The third level is the competitive. The physical skills and self-defense capabilities learned are now tested under limited conditions of rules and regulations. On the one hand, it is easier than self-defense because it is usually much safer than actual combat. On the other hand, it is far more difficult to score to a limited target area skillfully with proper form than it is to stop an opponent in an actual fight where the target area is unlimited and a blow to almost any part of the body, if strong enough, can be effective.

Levels IV & V

The fourth level is the aesthetic or artistic. All prior skills are now used for the purpose of self-expression, through the discipline of balanced and coordinated movement, much as a painter, dancer or other artist must perfect his requisite artistic skills. The martial artist performs not only to stay in shape or compete or to practice defense but for an enjoyable and creative expression of the emotion and feeling we each need to express in some form or other. If he does not practice with this motive, he is a martial practitioner but not a martial artist. It is rather like the difference between technology and true art or science.

Kata, the prearranged symbolic battles used to develop mental focus and physical coordination and agility, can be an excellent vehicle for artistic self-expression as well as for a form of meditation through movement. The difference between kata and kumite (free fighting) can well be compared to the difference between classical and jazz music, both excellent forms of art.

The fifth level is that of meditative discipline, the exercise of mental focusing. In order to do each of the previous levels well, one must have learned great mental discipline in mind/body control through physical discipline, which requires concentration and focus. This is the aspect most related to other meditative disciplines as techniques of focusing, regardless of the goal.

Perhaps the most obvious example of the meditative character of martial arts is tai chi chuan, with its slow, flowing, rhythmic movements emphasizing balance and breathing, which result in a mind/body stability and focus or centeredness. This meditative character can be equally present in other martial arts, which stress balance, coordination and proper breathing, or in any activity where the mind/body must be focused together to achieve some end. The proper motives and ends which make a crucial difference will be discussed below in levels six and seven.

Skilled movement and artistic excellence are achieved through discipline in which the skills are most often learned analytically or by mental imagery, i.e., one must think about and visualize what is correct form, balance, etc. By long practice and observation, one gradually develops an intuition of correct and effective technique which is then translated into movement. Later, all the training culminates in a free and flowing spontaneous execution of technique. This is true of all sports and physical skills.

Martial arts are meditative because focus is necessary to learn them and focus is produced by performing them. This is the initial relation to meditation. As stated above, meditation is not a disengagement from responsibility and practical involvement but rather a discipline that can

produce a state of mind in which responsibility and activity are more effectively engaged in due to a greater alertness.

To do anything well usually takes concentration, that is, total attention to what is at hand. If I am distracted by thoughts of injury while I am sparring or of death while in a real combat, I am not totally concentrated in my activity. This is why the samurai warriors of old sought out the wisdom of the Zen masters, who had learned to be alert. This concentration in turn provides a clarity of thought from which wisdom more readily arises.

Alertness and concentration are not achieved exclusively by just sitting and meditating, but such techniques are a common starting point. Once the practitioner has mastered the basic, alert attitude in privacy, he can carry it anywhere. He need not sit in a corner chanting to achieve this.

Once we have reached some level of proficiency in each of the levels, must we stop there? Is that all there is? Any human enterprise is largely determined by the limitations we imagine it to have.

We are the creators of our own horizons within the vague limits of our humanity, of which there seems to be no exhaustive or completely adequate account. If a martial art is to be a means to greater development of the individual rather than just an end in itself, further levels are to be reached.

Levels VI & VII

The sixth level of martial arts is the philosophic. A person must decide what is most important about his art and how he, as a member of the human community, should use it to improve his own life and the lives of those around him. He also must consider how the practice of his art relates him not just to other persons but to being. He must consider that mind/body is an expression of the universe, that all the slow energy that we call matter is the stuff of the universe of which he is made and that his consciousness is part of the process of the evolution or unfolding of being.

The rational attempt at questioning and expanding our horizons yet maintaining a structure which most adequately expresses our personal and group commitments, given the limitations of thought and language, is the philosophic level. Every human activity has both philosophic implications and philosophic presuppositions, e.g., suppositions about what is valuable and what is real. And these suppositions have direct implications for daily activity.

If martial arts are not pursued on a philosophical level as well as on the other levels, one's use of the arts may very well be misguided and counterproductive with regard to important values and reality commitments. Important insights may be arrived at by questioning our motives and attitudes as they pertain to martial arts.

The final level encompasses all the others. It represents the highest level to which any human enterprise proceeds. This may generally be referred to as the spiritual level. Here the term spiritual does not refer to any literal or dogmatic assertions about man's "true" nature nor to some ethereal substance or entities (e.g., soul, etc.) but rather to that in man which is both actual and potential, i.e., what is and what can be realized and the indomitable spirit or drive or tendency which makes the potential become actual.

In his expansion toward this potential, man is always on the way. His enterprises, such as martial arts or any art, science, feeling, or thought are never just ends in themselves with which he identifies and fortifies his personal needs, but rather are stepping-stones or vehicles. One does not seek new techniques to fortify old habits, but rather for genuine personality evolution. There comes a point at which technique is transcended and it is seen as a stepping-stone or preparation for becoming more fully human and alive. If we stop with the perfection of technique, that wholeness is lost.

At this spiritual level the artist does not just contemplate the philosophic dimensions, but puts these insights into living practice and feels himself as an expression of or creation of the universe, cosmic consciousness, basic energy, being, etc.. This is the most significant level for any human activity. It is not necessarily religious in any dogmatic way. That is, this kind of experience requires no set of given beliefs, but rather a feeling for and an acknowledgement of the obvious interconnectedness and holism that both science and religion have discovered and attempted to express in various ways.

Eugene Herrigel, in his classic, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, expressed the significant relation between all arts and the state of receptive awareness of being more fully alive expressed in Zen:

A swordmaster who had been approached by one of the Emperor's guards for lessons felt that in some way this stranger was already a master and remarked, "Do you fool me? I know my judging eye never fails."

The stranger replied that he was not attempting to fool him. "But still I am sure you are a master of something," the swordmaster said.

The stranger replied, "There is one thing of which I can say I am a complete master. When I was a boy, it occurred to me that as a samurai I ought in no circumstances to be afraid of death, and I have grappled with the problem of death now for some years, and finally the problem of death ceased to worry me."

"Exactly," replied the swordmaster. "The ultimate secrets of swordsmanship also lie in being released from the thought of death. I have trained over so many hundreds of pupils along this line, but so far none of them really deserves the final certificate for swordsmanship. You need no technical training; you are already a master."

D.T. Suzuki said in his introduction to Herrigel's book, "If one really wishes to be master of an art, technical knowledge of it is not enough. One has to transcend technique so that the art becomes an artless art growing out of the unconscious."

To become a master is to become a master through some given art or science of the energies in the universe. There are slow forms of energy (what we call matter) and faster forms (light, cosmic rays and other high-energy particles, etc.). One masters one's life through mental alertness on both the sensing level, being more sensitive to the process of change (in martial arts, sensing the opponent's attack before it is obvious) and on the level of mind aware of but unaffected by sensed process and change.

The highest form of mastery is beyond technique. It is the mastery of one's own self. Mastery of one's own mind and body, through centering and focusing mental and physical energies, precedes

and is prerequisite to this self-mastery. It was this kind of mastery the Zen masters of old exuded and which so attracted the famous samurai to follow them and seek their guidance.

III. THE RELATION OF MARTIAL ARTS AND MEDITATIVE DISCIPLINES

The relation between meditation and martial arts is little realized due to the misunderstanding of both. Meditation is not merely passive navel contemplation, and martial arts are not merely methodological systems of violence or merely sport. They are only reduced to this when practiced improperly and incompletely.

Meditative disciplines, regardless of whatever other effects they may have, are methods of producing a focus and a unity in thought, activity and purpose, in most cases for improving perspective and all aspects of living. This simply means that some stimulus, thought or activity is made the center of attention either to the exclusion of an awareness of distinction or differences in thought or sensation or for focusing in order to merely observe but be unattached to surroundings.

The practitioner becomes totally engrossed in or becomes one with the object or activity of attention and usually does this through some pre-established technique and discipline.

A few examples of meditative activities or disciplines are concentration on a visual object or an imaginary object, on a sound or a mental sound, concentrated movement, breath counting or breath concentration, or even reading.

These activities or disciplines have a variety of effects, but all initially produce one common result: focus or centeredness.

What does the focusing allow? What is significant about it? Such concentration and focus allows the normal mental activities to subside or cease (if the meditation is done well) and allows for "just being here now." This in itself has certain more well-known benefits (e.g. reduction of stress, tension and anxiety; regulation of body functions: lowering of blood pressure and heart rate, to mention a few). But more important is the rest we get from our habits of mind.

What is perhaps most misleading about meditative disciplines are the metaphysical doctrines associated with them. Metaphysical doctrines are beliefs about what is ultimately real and what we ought to do in light of that reality. We find some traditions that use meditative disciplines that say all we see around us is illusion and all involvement in the world of perception and pleasure and pain should be avoided. Others encourage activity and participation in life from a more enlightened point of view than our typical state of mind.

The problem with some of the metaphysical doctrines based on the experience of mystics is that they take mystical language too literally; e.g., reality as void or the sensed world as illusion is taken literally instead of as an expression of the relation of consciousness to the object of consciousness.

One aim of meditation is to experience things directly instead of through our beliefs, to become unattached to our concepts of the world. This does not mean, of course, to give up concepts or activity. To the contrary, it is to use concepts and beliefs for the world.

There is an old Zen saying that we should not mistake the finger pointing at the moon for the moon itself. In other words, we should not mistake our concepts of the world for the world. When

we meditate diligently, we gain new perspectives by "going inward" or by "becoming one with an object or activity." It is something we may do anyway in the normal course of things but not long or deeply enough or with the right motives to get the break of continuity in the normal habits of mind; i.e., we do not break with our normal preoccupation with what captures or plagues our attention. By meditating we can see with new eyes, with a kind of fresh outlook, like waking up in the morning refreshed, but more alert, because we never went to sleep. We were observing ourselves all the while, yet not with the normal habits of mind which are dependent on our preconceived notions and beliefs about the world. This kind of alertness and perspective can also occur following intense intellectual questioning or concentration.

Imbalance leads to greater imbalance unless it is checked with some stabilizing, focusing experience like meditation. But many things can be stabilizing and focusing, like music or reading or physical activity. Yet it is our attitudes and motive which make them more stabilizing and deeper experiences. This attitude usually requires searching, discipline, and guidance to foster and maintain it.

Each of the techniques of meditation cannot simply be put into practice by a novice with proper and immediate results. Although it is possible to be one's own guide at a later stage, as in most other things, it is usually necessary to receive guidance and preparation from one who is already familiar with such discipline and the variety of possible experiences arising from it.

The guide is one who sees the meditative discipline as only a technique for and a stage in the process of self-awareness and growth and that the end result, if any can be characterized, is not an escape from the world of pain and pleasure, but an overcoming of or release from the narrow ways of living and thinking to which we are usually committed. Proper meditation results in more enlightened, focused, and effective activity, not passivity.

Of those who try meditation, many accept too quickly the dogma which may accompany it and idolize the guide or instructor. Equally to be avoided is the rejection of the technique because of the dogma and teacher. The technique can be considered independently and one's own conclusions reached at a later, more appropriate time. To accept the dogma too quickly or to reject the technique can be a great mistake. The first experiences are apt to be rather undisciplined and lacking in focus, as are most first attempts at such things. This is true of martial arts. The student can only encounter his own habits of thought until he begins to progress and change. In the sustained practice of meditation, he reaches the point where intermittently he begins to have quiet moments when he is not thinking, yet neither sleeping nor dreaming, and this state of mind increases with diligent practice just as one's martial art skill deepens with effort and practice. Although one can lose much of the perspective and insight gained by means of meditating (or just being alive), there is usually a residual effect.

Martial arts can be meditative because focus is necessary to learn them and focus is produced by performing them. Any discipline that is meditative can have the effect, if we follow it through well and far enough, of waking us up to life by stopping the normal assumptions and habits of mind long enough to allow a genuine and permanent growth in perspective and sensitivity. Motives and attitudes, however, make a critical difference. If a technique is practiced merely from some motive of personal aggrandizement, the deeper benefits that focus and concentration can bring

are jeopardized. Ultimately, technique can be transcended and life itself is meditation. But here meditation now means living with a fresh, alert, and receptive attitude.

To sum up, there is a focusing and concentration which occurs in meditation that results in a centering and alertness which can lead to greater sensitivity and awareness in our normal activities, provided the attitude and motivation are right. This can ultimately lead to a mastery of self. It does not eliminate all life's problems, but it drastically affects how we deal with them.

A master of meditation is a master of life (and the thought of death). Life itself is his technique of meditation; i.e., he has transcended technique. All of his experience becomes harmonious and supportive to his centeredness, not disruptive, as it can be for those not well focused. Meditation can be the starting point for this kind of mastery.

Legend has it that Buddha was asked,

*"Are you a saint?" He answered, "No."
""Are you god?" Buddha answered, "No."
""What are you?" "I am awake."*

Shihan Dean Pickard, 1979

