

To AJKA-International
AJKA-I of PA
Instructor Trainee's Report #38

Subject: Psychological State and its Effect on Technique

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Being in the most favorable psychological state of mind for the correct execution of karate techniques is the focus of this Report. It is important to consider the correct interplay between two people whether or not any physical techniques come into action. It is the ability to develop the correct psychological state that is the most beneficial part of karate. If one can develop the correct mind through training one can then apply the developed mind to everyday life. As Master Funakoshi stated in Niju Kun, "Do not think that karate training is only in the dojo."

The connection of a person's mind to karate technique is very important. If you want to do something then do it. The ability to act correctly when you want is very important. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. This is the idea behind kime or focus. As Sensei Yaguchi stated, "the mind sees the target then the body takes the target."¹

For a correct psychological state you must make the most favorable conditions for this concentration. One important factor is the cutting off of unnecessary (or negative) emotions so the mind will be clear to concentrate on the necessary subject. The mind must be very calm and clear of emotions, but at the same time ready.

Clearing the mind of all thoughts, and holding it empty, but in a heightened state of readiness, is much more difficult than it sounds. Our brains are not accustomed to functioning in that way. As humans we are used to multi-track parallel processing, that is, thinking or monitoring or making calculations on many levels simultaneously.

For example, while preparing for a sparring match in the dojo we may be distracted by the sights and sounds all around us, changes in the spectators, a comment from the sensei, the temperature, what's going on in the next ring, how we are feeling, who we may have to fight after the present opponent, what strategies worked on the last one, and so on. A person relies not on what they think should be the next move, but what is their trained natural reaction (or instinct) or what is felt intuitively.

True spirit has alertness, mental poise, concentration and awareness and an extension of life force or will. It is very hard to define, but a necessary ingredient. Sometimes as a training way emotional spirit is given then the emotion is cut off leaving a desirable state of mind; thus, the concept of *mushin*.

¹Yaguchi, Yutaka "Power of Concentration"

As discussed in more detail in Report 36, *Mushin* translates into English as “no mind” or “mindless”. It is the mental state into which trained martial artists are said to enter prior to and during combat. Besides combat, karate-kas strive to enter this mental state during their everyday training. This is the point when you do not have to think about what you are doing, it just happens. Your punches, kicks and blocks come automatically.

A well-trained *karate-ka* with good *mushin* and *zanshin* can usually tell if his opponent is maintaining a similar state of awareness. A momentary break in concentration by one party creates an opening called a *suki*, during which he cannot respond fast enough to counter a move by an opponent still in a state of *mushin*.

This shows in the students that are doing free sparring. They can block a technique without knowing what is coming. It is more noticeable when a student successfully uses their knowledge in a self defense situation. Skills need to become instinct to be effective.

It is important to keep calm and to stay focus. In Shotokan we utilize *Yoi* and *Yame* along with *Kokyu* (breathing) to focus ourselves. At the command of *yoi* the whole body of the *karate-ka* moves zero (whatever the mind was focus on other than being in a state of readiness) to a state of relaxed consciousness ready to act instantaneously. The practice of every karate sequence is usually preceded by the command *yoi*. The aim is for the *karate-ka* to focus their entire concentration on the present situation. It is important that interfering distractions, thoughts or emotions are totally eliminated. This allows the *karate-ka* to reduce nervousness

Breathing (*kokyo*) should be coordinated with the execution of a technique, specifically, inhaling when blocking, exhaling when focusing technique is executed, and inhaling and exhaling when successive techniques are performed.

Relaxing the muscles in the neck and shoulders allows the *karate-ka* to move quicker. Also relaxing after the technique is completed allows the *karate-ka* to move onto the next technique much faster then if they muscles were tense.

At the command of *yame*, the *waza* techniques, *kata* or *kumite* is completed. It is at this command that the mind remains with the target or remains in a state of *zanshin*. *Zanchin* is an awareness that in fact the opponent could attack again.

As the mental concentration of the *karate-ka* transitions from zero to *yoi* to *hajime* to *yame* to *zanshin* to *yoi* back to zero. If the *karate-ka* strives to take shoto niju kun to heart then by heeding Master Funakoshi’s maxim of “Karate-ize everything” they will never really be in a state of zero, but will always be ready for an attack.

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