

Fudoshin and Its Continuing Relevance

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Calligraphy of "Fudoshin"

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who is also a prize-winning calligrapher.

Fudoshin: [whenever] someone is faced with a difficult situation, he can do as usual with [an] unshakable mind.

--Inoue Tsuyoshi Munetoshi, 18th Soke, *Hontai Yoshin Ryu*

Sparkling crystal clinked with seasonal good cheer as the revelers toasted each other. Garbed in gowns, suits, and other formal evening wear, the foreign ministers, diplomats, and other VIPs and their spouses basked in the light and warmth of fellowship and bounty at the gala event. Suddenly, an explosion shook the assemblage, and the dreamlike party image became a nightmare. Glass shattered as gunfire erupted stark and loud, and the mass of nearly 400 people dashed madly about amidst their own shouts and screams. Doors burst open and shots cracked over their heads, sending the guests headlong to the floor. Armed and masked guerrillas swarmed through the official residence.

"Everyone down!" came the snarled command, "and don't raise your heads unless you wish them blown off". Screams were nearing hysteria. "Silence!" The shots and shouts subsided, replaced

by an electrified quiet punctuated with stifled sobs. Fatigue-clad men glared ominously over the inert horde, and then leveled their weapons at an unexpected sight: one VIP remained standing, visibly unshaken by the violence and confusion. A rebel moved closer, shoving the still-smoking barrel of his gun towards the recalcitrant's face. "Who are you?" The man faced the gun-barrel and glare without flinching.

"I am *Morihisa Aoki*, ambassador of Japan." His voice was forceful and unwavering. "These are my guests, and they are unarmed. You will respect them and cause them no harm."

Awed, the guerrillas' eyes widened, and for a brief moment fingers tensed on triggers. But, bold themselves, the guerrillas could admire the courage of their captive. The rebel leader nodded. "All right. No one will be harmed." Guns were lowered, and an audible sigh spread among the hostages.

The scene described is based on newspaper reports of the takeover in Peru of the Japanese ambassador's residence by *Tupac Amaru* guerrillas during an evening Christmas party on December 17, 1996. Although I know nothing of the Japanese ambassador's past or training, it is clear that he is a man who has learned to govern his thoughts, words, feelings and actions. He has learned self-mastery, and has applied it strategically and intelligently to help bring an explosive and potentially deadly situation under level-headed control. In doing so, he has exemplified a powerful state of being. A frame of mind sought by the Japanese *samurai* or *bushi* warriors of old: *fudoshin*.

What is *Fudoshin*?

The most famous and articulate source of information relevant to the concept of *fudoshin* is the letter written by the *Zen Buddhist* priest **Takuan** to the master swordsman *Yagyū Munenori* of the famous *Shinkage-Ryu* school of fencing during the first half of the 17th century. The letter is titled in Japanese *Fudochi Shinmyo Roku*, and is variously translated, but carrying the notion of "Divine Record of Immovable Wisdom." "Immovable Wisdom" or *fudochi*, expounded on as it is by a *Zen* priest, is a rather paradoxical concept. As we shall see, in its application the term connotes a mind that is at once firmly in place and yet ever moving.

For help in understanding, we can turn to the translation and commentary on *Takuan's* letter by the late *D.T. Suzuki*, arguably *Zen's* most adept interpreter to the West (see *Suzuki* pp. 95-108). *Suzuki* relates *Takuan's* treatise, which he translates as *The Mystery of Prajna Immovable*, to the *Buddhist* concept of transcendental wisdom (the Sanskrit *prajna*). When applied constantly, it is the mind of *Buddha*, the state of ultimate enlightenment. *Takuan* and *Suzuki* further relate *fudochi* to the *Buddhist* guardian **Fudo Myo-o** (Sanskrit *Acala-vidyaraaja*), the Immovable, who protects *Buddhism* with his sword, rope and glaring fierceness. He is the destroyer of delusion, unaffected by the seduction of worldly attractions. In his unassailable detachment, *Fudo Myo-o* is the steadfast image of the mind unmoved by carnal temptations. Immobility from the enlightened state is accomplished by maintaining a mind that remains detached, that is, a mind

that does not stop or become fixated on any one thing. This *Zen* paradox of immovable and yet unstopping mind is addressed by *Suzuki* directly in a prolonged paraphrasing commentary (p. 108): The main thesis of *Takuan's* letter:

consists in preserving the absolute fluidity of the mind (kokoro; alternatively -shin) by keeping it free from intellectual deliberations and affective disturbances of any kind. . . The Mind in its suchness is at once movable and immovable, it is constantly flowing, never stopping at any point, and yet there is in it a center never subject to any kind of movement, remaining forever one and the same.

Takuan's letter to the famed *Yagyu* master swordsman, official instructor to the third *Tokugawa Shogun*, makes it clear that attaining this unfettered and imperturbable mind is at the core of true mastery. Applied in the context of the *samurai* swordsman, the unmoving and unstopping mind is one that will remain free from fixation on either the enemy's sword as it cuts at him, or by his own cut in defense. In such a state of mind, he spontaneously, naturally and effectively responds, without an instant's hesitation (or in less than a "hair's breadth" of time, in *Takuan's* imagery).



A small image of *Fudo Myo-o* (left) with a carved stone image of a *Vajra*, a *Buddhist* implement symbolizing a thunderbolt, in a small subtemple at *Ninnaji Temple, Kyoto, Japan*.

Achieving Fudoshin

To achieve this mental state and the practiced ability of unhesitating and appropriate response, there is at least one critical prescription, training, dedicated, consistent and ardent training. Such training allows the practitioner's techniques to become expert and natural movements-- movements performed like our everyday motions of walking, eating, or brushing our teeth-- without need for stringent conscious control. Furthermore, while training to attain this state of

technical mastery in which the technique becomes the outward expression of an "artless art," the swordsman learns to confront and ultimately master his fears and doubts. He does so by purging himself in the flames--like those that engulf the image of *Fudo Myo-o*, of hard work, intensive self-scrutiny, and courageous confrontation of his own weaknesses and limitations.

That the immovable, imperturbable mind of *fudoshin* was significant for all *bushi* (hereditary warriors) is suggested by *Nitobe Inazo's* ground-breaking turn-of-the-century work, ***Bushido: The Soul of the Samurai***. Although highly idealistic and at times tending to over-generalize, *Nitobe's* work is nevertheless the earliest English treatise on the important topic of *Bushido*, the encompassing--but unwritten--code for the warrior class that dominated Japan for over six centuries. (While *Nitobe* makes no effort to distinguish any historical development of such a code over the extensive period of *shogunal* or military rule of Japan, formally 1185-1868 A.D., we can assume that the *Bushido* he describes is that idealized for the latter part of this period, with which his own family background and personal history personally familiarized him.)

Nitobe reports that the "tripod which supported the framework of *Bushido* was said to be ***Chi, Jin, Yu***, respectively, Wisdom, Benevolence, and Courage" (p. 94). In his chapter on "Courage" (Chapter IV), he writes in a footnote (pp. 32-3) that:

The spiritual aspect of valor is evidenced by composure--calm presence of mind. Tranquility is courage in repose...A truly brave man is ever serene; he is never taken by surprise; nothing ruffles the equanimity of his spirit. In the heat of battle he remains cool; in the midst of catastrophes he keeps level his mind.

Apparently lacking a discrete term in English for the concept, and avoiding the use of a Japanese term in this context, *Nitobe* is clearly referring here to the mental quality of *fudoshin*. He depicts it as being of quintessential significance to the *samurai*, and reiterates this sentiment later in his chapter on "Self-Control" (Chapter XI, pp. 104-5):

[For the bushi,] calmness of behavior, composure of mind, should not be disturbed by passion of any kind.

This mind that remains unruffled and calm is the same imperturbable, unattached and unfettered mind about which *Takuan* instructs his student, *Munenori*. It is the ultimate mind of mastery, achievable only through rigorous training, and equally rigorous soul-searching and spirit-forging (*seishin tanren*, in Japanese) through the confrontation and overcoming of our own fears and weaknesses.

What is important to understand is that the unattached, imperturbable mind of *fudoshin* can be achieved not only by the feudal swordsman, but by any man or woman who seriously dedicates him- or herself to its attainment. And while confronting both self and other in deadly sword combat served as one context in which to strive for, achieve and apply *fudoshin*, other serious endeavors can also lead us to this enlightenment, including *zazen* (seated *Zen* meditation), ink-and-brush painting, the classic Japanese tea ceremony, or even flower arrangement! (The principles which--potentially or actively--relate these and other undertakings as ways to mastery is the subject of a forthcoming work by the author.)

I do not know what traditional Japanese arts or ways *Aoki* studied and trained in the process of his personal development. But his mastery is evident, and a worthy model for us all. As one freed

fellow hostage was quoted as saying, "In a nightmare of this magnitude, you need a hero, someone with special valor . . . That's what Ambassador *Aoki*. . . gave the rest of us. [He] showed us what dignity meant." (As quoted in the **Louisville, Kentucky Courier-Journal**, Wednesday, January 1, 1997, p. A 7.)

This model of courageous dignity and calm leadership is the direct application of *fudoshin*, and is a model that we who train within traditional Japanese martial and other artistic systems would do well to try to achieve and emulate. It is a model we all need, and not only in such a crisis, but as a model for everyday dignity and rectitude, courage and honor. A model with which to face the moral challenges, personal choices, and interpersonal relations and conflicts of our everyday lives. As *Inoue Soke*, the current and 18th head of the *Hontai Yoshin Ryu*, and my teacher in *jujutsu* and traditional weaponry, explains and applies it, *fudoshin* is the "unshakable mind" with which we should face any "difficult situation." For as long as humans will have difficult situations to face, *fudoshin* will have relevance. The Japanese warriors and masters of old and today, in pursuing mastery of technique and form, recognize that such mastery is inextricably linked to mastering the self. Not only is true mastery in the application of form and technique possible only with a deeper mastery of the self, but it is through the long and challenging process of mastering an artistic "Way" that the self itself can and must also be mastered. Traditional arts, learned in traditional ways--ways that emphasize long and rigorous training, the tempering of immediate wants and needs, the gleanings of sincere self-knowledge, and the internal fortitude to successfully meet and exceed these challenges day after day, year after year--are tried and true paths for mastering technique, form, and self. Such was true in the past, and continues to be true today and for the future.



Stephan Fabian (right) demonstrates a *Hontai Yoshin-Ryu* technique at the *Ryu's* main dojo in Nishinomiya, Japan.

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Editor's Note

Upon *Aoki Morihisa's* return, newspaper reports from Japan noted that career bureaucrats in the Japanese government's foreign ministry were actually embarrassed at the turn of events that led to the freeing of the hostages by Peruvian President *Alberto Fujimori*. In particular, they were upset that *Fujimori* did not consult them about the hostage rescue plans. Seeking a scapegoat, they publicly denounced *Aoki's* performance and from last reports were trying to force his resignation. However, history and not government careerists will have the final say concerning his bravery under fire.

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