

Dreaming and the world of budo

As I was meditating just a few moments ago, I had a vision of how the spiritual practice of meditation and shamanic journeying are closely related to the inner practice of budo.

I will clarify this by example.

So, during meditation, many things are possible. You might recite a mantra, you could concentrate on feelings of peace and compassion, you could contemplate a quality in the adoration of some form of deity for identificational purposes... Meditation is a very broad field, with many forms and a rich variety of inspirations.

Meditation is foremost perhaps the witnessing, the seeing with the inner eye, that which lives in us and makes us move. It may be grief, it may be feelings of revolt. Perhaps it is as well love, or attachment, crying or the sound of thunder. Meditation is being alive very much on the inside, meditation is feeling deep and strong sentiments, without getting lost in acting them out in the outer world. This saves us a lot of misfortune and what might be called, wrong action.

For if we are to act on every impulse, our life will become very chaotic. We make mistake after mistake, and have only regret to live by. Perhaps there are few people who really live this way, most people do have a habit of meditating, of thinking about things, before they act. They turn the attention towards their inner self, and see first, and contemplate.

Meditation is no more than a resolution to think very long, and postpone any action for a very long time. For this, the monk retreats from the world of outer action, and swears by and devotes himself to contemplation alone, until the urge to act itself, goes up in smoke. Then he rises again, from his long and deep meditation, and lives relieved, enlightened as we call it.

For most people however, this is too extreme a design and too impossible an aspiration. Most people do not go the monastery and give up all of their familiar lives. Their family, their friends, their leisure. Most people want to go on living and continue fulfilling their human needs, but they may see benefits of contemplating deeper and longer, and so, may make some form of meditational practice part of their earthly lives.

In so doing, they act out less of their impulses, but, as Shakespeare already told us, the question is still to be or not to be. Whether we let go of an impulse, or follow up on our passion. Nothing is wrong, for sure, as we were made to try and err, the earth was made for man to experiment and grow, and find himself. So in the eyes of truth, you cannot go wrong. But of course, you will want to make the best decisions, and simplify your life to only efforts that bear fruit. You want to be like a manager, making a complicated business sound and sane again. Efficient. Energy friendly. In the best way.

One of my favorite things to do, is journey as I meditate. This is somewhat special, and is mostly called shamanic practice. It can however be seen as a form of meditation, although one is more passionately involved. It entails not only sensing and being open and receptive, but also playing an active role in the inner world. Moving with the spiritual essence.

In shamanism, one will mostly work with elements of nature. One uses the energy of the sun, of a tree, an animal, the sea. One becomes one with the animal, one senses the air, one opens one's wings. Things that are not possible in real life, can be followed up on in a shamanic journey. You cannot bite like a snake or sting like a bee, but you can empathize with these realities through your

imagination if you wish. And why would that be crazy ? And why would that make no sense ? And why not, would that make you master your body and your emotional being on a higher ground ?

For sure, it would make one feel at home more, with all of the abundant reality around. Whether it is real or not, is not the question. The question is, whether it is therapeutic. Inspiring. If it leads to joy and peace.

So the shamanic journey to me is also a form of meditation, and meditation is to me a form of spiritual travel. The two are different sides of the same ribbon to me. Like the Moebius strip that is so often talked about in Lacanian psychoanalysis.

A special aspect of shamanic rite, and a worthy form of Eastern meditation as well, is the aspect of death. Death and rebirth are common denominators in the spiritual world, and the snake is a very popular image of shedding one's old skin.

So how can this benefit the practitioner of the martial arts ?

As I have said before, martial arts without meditation leaves us weak. It leaves us full of impulses that lack coordination and integration. It is as if we neglect an important part of our training.

To the passionate adept of the budo, meditation comes naturally. It follows from the incorporation of technique like a flower from its stem. One starts to dream, one starts to be a child, one starts to play out fights, positions and techniques. One becomes inspired by one's art. The art starts to live within oneself, and one becomes it, like one becomes the stream when floating on a river. One gets carried away, like in all things that one is passionate about.

So to contemplate the inner warrior, is to fight many a fight within. And why not, when dreaming about the victory and the struggle, be inspired by the world around ? Why not add a little shamanic touch with your elements, and start feeling like a snake in fight, or a bull, a deer or an eagle ? All of these emotions may bring us closer to the expression of our passion. All of these images may bring us closer to the language of power and of nature. They contribute to our wild side, to the side that is explosive and surprising. They deepen our inspiration, enliven our ecstasy and surely do expand our true horizon.

I would like to devote a special remark to the topic of death at this point. Mister Hatsumi Sensei has said, that the way of ninjutsu is the way of death. I think he very much means by this, the way of forgetting about the self. The way of having let go of the clinging to survival, the way of having accepted and transcended our lives and their impermanence. For when one is constantly worried about not harming oneself, when one is too focused upon protecting oneself, one starts to panic, and one loses it. One gets too caught up in the world of the self, that one freezes from the ego, and cannot move, and becomes rigid like a statue that isn't hard to beat. But when one is free from the concerns about the mirror-image, then one can move with ease and carelessness. This makes our movement much more efficient.

So to exercise ourselves in this ultimate art of fighting for survival, we can meditate, or make a journey.

We can for instance meditate on our weapons, and see how they chop us up, just as the shaman is killed by his allies. For in shamanic initiation, it is often an aspect of bonding with the spirit animals, to allow oneself to be bitten by them, or eaten, or otherwise deleted, only to revive after that as an aspect of the animal itself. It is as if the trance is telling us precisely what mister Hatsumi is saying, that we are too concerned about ourselves, to notice the outer world, and to be truly and fully alert. Only when the shadow of our being is eaten away and deleted, can the world be within our spirit. Only then are we alive.

So the practitioner of the martial arts may as well find help and inspiration from the tradition of the shaman's rite. He may devote his meditation to an inspired journey and an exploration of his inner genius as to the aspects of the powers of nature. The enlivening, moving, captivating, thrilling, enriching encounters with the animals and elements within. It may in the end make him a better warrior, a more fully capable person. It may add to one's capacities and power, to the extent of one's choice and potentiality.

So to the practitioner of the budo, I would like to make this remark. It is important to forget about yourself, it is important to have died before the battle even begins. Then there is life, then there is the world, and responses will be more accurate, responses will be more apt. You will move with greater wisdom through the confrontation.

Do not let the image of sitting quietly cross-legged upon the cushioned floor restrict your choice of evolution as to your mastery. Why not sit on a comfortable couch, with some drumming on your headphones, while you journey through the inner worlds of nature ? Not only will it teach you about movement, character and power, but it may also help you lose the fixation upon yourself.

And why not see your weapons as an animal, as elements of nature, with a life and personality, with a soul that lives and speaks to you, and why not see, what fantasy may bring ? Why not let your sword just cut you up and move by itself, why not let your tanto do the same, or let your bo smash itself attentively against your head ? What are your weapons saying ?

Like the common housewife that is using some modest form of meditation to become more proficient and efficient in her household life, you may avoid the trial and error of the material world to discover these inspirational aspects of your beloved art. You wouldn't have to smash your bo against your forehead for real, if you could let it move this way in meditation. You could let your weapons teach you as to your sensitivity in silence, in emptiness, in the ocean's womb.

So be a martial artist, be a meditator, be a shaman. Work with the animals, work with the elements, work with your weapons and learn all there is to know about the fight within.

After all, is not all of this just one big way to the many aspects of walking this earth and being truly human ?

Or what is it all about ?