

THE BEST SWORD

NEVER LEAVES THE SCABBARD

GAURI CHOPRA



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A special thanks to my family for providing the courage and creative input in making this project possible. You have been my pillar of constant support and induced hope, strength, inspiration in following my dreams. Thank you for believing in me and lending financial support towards the project. I owe my success to you.

Gauri Chopra

To Silverback Books.Inc,

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Peter Dombrosky, whose collaborative ideas and insightful knowledge, as esoteric as 'Spirituality and Martial Arts' have taken this venture to a brand new level. I laud him for his foresight and broad vision.

In a competitive universe as ours, I'm grateful that my talent has been recognized and given due encouragement to push the envelope, explore new frontiers in creating original art forms that hopefully generate life, depth, intensity and inspiration.

Finally I would like to express my deep gratitude to the city of San Francisco for paving the path and creating a platform to express myself through nature and martial Arts that have consumed me in a potent manner over the last few years.

Gauri Chopra

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Credits

This book explores various nuances of seven selected Martial Art forms by tracing their history and technique through a series of photographs accompanied with some lucid explanation. It further elucidates the grace and philosophy beneath each form, starting from the fluid Tai Chi to the more intricate Akkido.

All Martial Arts emphasize on sharpening and eventually capturing the union of one's spirit or soul. The Way of the Sword goes way beyond sharpening and handling just the spirit of the sword. It is more about sharpening the sword of one's spirit.

Most Martial Arts that we know of today have originated either in Japan or China or the Okinawa District which were deeply influenced by Buddhism. Buddhist philosophy influenced every aspect of their life including Warfare and facets of Zen are evident everywhere in the fabric of Japanese culture. There is grace and beauty, respect and compassion and most importantly emphasis on the building of physical and mental strength in every Martial Art which hence makes it an art form and not just another style of war. All Martial Arts essentially profess peace.

A true follower of the Way of the Sword is also a being of compassion. It is his prime interest to resolve a fight without having to injure his attacker in any way. He has to be exceptionally calm in a situation of violence in order to not draw his sword at all. It is only a highly controlled mind who can succeed thus.

Hence the Best Sword is the one that never leaves the Scabbard.

Insight from the lens...

The book strives to breathe life and visual emotion on each page. These photographs are an interpretation of the photographer's spirit in martial arts and not just the technique. Being interested in spirituality herself, she has brought out the yin and yang in every photograph and has also experimented with silhouette photography and natural light against exhilarating backdrops. Right from the Himalayas in Leh, Ladakh where the highest mountain desert in the world is located, she has captured the enchanting forests of Manali in Himachal Pradesh to the fast flowing pure river Indus to the gorgeous sun soaked beaches of monsoon Goa. The spirit of every martial art truly comes alive through soulful photographs. The photographer herself has also practiced Kung fu for 3 years, Karate for 6 years, Tai Chi for 1 year and is currently pursuing Krav Magga and Aikido.
Deepa Shenoy

My journey to this book.

It all began suddenly one day – when I had a passionate affair with the shadows. Watching the play of light around me stirred within me a desire to be able to capture the moments, the moods and the madness surrounding us through photography.



Author's Note

My love affair with the camera began when my brother gifted a Nikon Fm 10 on my 10th

birthday. Ever since, the pure art of capturing images found its enduring course in my life. Later, while pursuing a course in architecture, I realized all my presentations were mere sketches developed from photographs where light, perspective, depth were captured in perfect harmony. These snap shots merely driven as a hobby led to the possible realization that my true calling in life was photography. I quit architecture and took up photography.

After completing my education, I came back to India and dabbled in commercial photography. However, the lame and trite work did not satisfy my inner craving for capturing spontaneity and miracles in nature. My father being a big devotee of nature himself had always instilled a love of the outdoors. He advocated the idea of weaning nature's secrets and harnessing its esoteric knowledge from trees, rivers and mountains. Nature is all around us and simply a matter of perception. So while I lived in the bustling metropolis of Mumbai, I sought out animals, birds and natural scapes, and captured their images which increasingly excited me.

Publishing this book was one of the ways of expressing my love for the natural beauty that surrounds us.

This led me to my second passion Martial Arts which, I have been practicing for over 12 years. I met Shihan Mehul Vora (my current Krav Maga master) in 2004 and while training for Krav Maga I experienced a fitness level like no other and sensed a discovery of the strong yet hidden aspect of the art – 'The Mind.' Blind folded in the middle of the dojo, I stood alone with 3 seniors waiting to attack where, my test required me to be in the moment and achieve complete awareness. I could gauge the distance of the nearest person and attack accordingly. This art made me flexible and strong both physically and mentally. But my search for a more peaceful approach continued till I discovered Aikido. This art does not emphasize on killing your opponent, but instead encourages using your opponent's energy to defend yourself. There is a lot of 'Mind' at work here.

This inspired me to probe deeper into the subject of martial arts and its great teachers. In the midst of this research I discovered Miyamoto Musashi, a Japanese swordsman who was born a hero but without an understanding of the human mind. Blinded by his ego of being the best, he fought several battles and defeated many masters. Much later, he realized that the true battle was within himself: a constant struggle between the self and the mind.

During my learning, I experienced a similar thrill of retaliation with a composed mind and absorbed much information in that calm state. Martial Arts has become a way of life as I apply and incorporate it in my day-to-day affairs, by conserving energy through meditation and action rather than opposition and reaction.

This book is a fine balance of the manifestations of my inner spirit through photography, nature, and martial arts.

Gauri Chopra



Those who are skilled in combat
do not become angered
Those who are skilled at winning
do not become afraid
Thus the wise win before the fight
while the ignorant fight to win
— *Miyamoto Musashi*



FOR MY FAMILY, MY INSPIRATION AND FOR MEHUL, MY MASTER

●
Achieving Ultimate Balance
Is about making up your Mind

Making up your Mind
Is a matter of balancing all within

Perceiving good
Is a matter of understanding evil

Where Both co exist
It's a matter of identifying the colors

Colors so many
so difficult to distinguish

We perceive life through our five senses
But can we truly trust them

A Mindless Mind for a warrior
A swordless warrior to win a war

Such is the perception of a man
with a Mind

– Amar Sagar



Though there are many paths at the foot of the mountain, all those who reach the peak, see the same stars.

There are myriad reasons for studying martial arts. Be it self defense, physical fitness or spiritual growth, it varies from person to person and depends entirely on the individual's ability to extract from his learning. Towards the end, the student and the master arrive on a common curve. A peaceful mind and a healthy body.

THE BEST SWORD

NEVER LEAVES THE SCABBARD

Miyamoto Musashi

The Way of the warrior does not include other Ways...but if you know the Way broadly you will see it in everything.”
– Miyamoto Musashi

Miyamoto Musashi (1584-1645) was one of the greatest warriors of his time. Being a Samurai without a master, he created history in the mid sixteenth century, by fighting his first duel at the age of thirteen. Later on, he started a school based on the Science of Martial Arts and called it the ‘Two skies’ literally meaning two swords in the hands of one. His teachings were based on the science of warfare but also emphasized mastery over struggle in different facets of life. His valuable insights were relevant to ordinary laymen and bureaucrats alike. People adhered to his guidance and followed his teachings where ever he went.

Between the ages of thirteen and twenty Musashi traveled from province to province, fighting Samurais of various levels without losing a single duel. It was only after he turned 30, he discovered that no weapon was as potent as the human mind. He had discovered the secret to fight the war within and soon relinquished his sword thereafter.

His metamorphosis from a harsh warrior to a spiritual being was an intriguing aspect of his life, for in the years to come Musashi applied his sharp insight to writing, poetry, painting and sculpture among other arts.

He believed that, ‘The way of the warrior does not include other ways...but if you know the way broadly you will see it in everything.’

Musashi claimed in his Go Rin No Sho that ‘When I apply the principle of strategy to the ways of different arts and crafts, I no longer have need for a teacher in any domain.’

In his old age Musashi lived a fulfilled life dotted with artistic creations. He is specifically noted for producing recognized masterpieces of calligraphy and classic ink painting that have left deep impressions on his students and disciples, even today.

Merged into the tree, Mushashi almost looks like a branch or simply a part of this tree. He is one with his surroundings and hence has achieved Ultimate Balance.



The essence of the School called the Two skies is primarily based on water.

Water flows through mountains and does not break or weaken because the nature of water is to be fluid. Mushashi termed it the Water Scroll where in, the mind flows like water, not only in time of physical war but also in the daily momentum of our lives. If you adapt to the quality of water and flow with the current situation, you will acquire a blessed state of mind.





In this book, water has been used as a metaphor to illustrate the adaptive nature of the mind. However, water has no fixed form. It aligns itself to its immediate environment bearing qualities that far transcend its mere function. The most remarkable quality about water is, that it maintains its identity under the most varied circumstances.

Why should we adapt the qualities of water? What does all this mean?

Every human being faces a multitude of obstacles that detain him from thinking straight. But myriad problems can be taxing as we do not have exact solutions. While millions of thoughts may cross the mind, it is important to maintain balance and in doing so, foil the attack successfully.

Similarly in martial arts, every fight is different and every attack has an equal and opposite defense mechanism. If we adapt to the quality of water and flow with the situation, the answers come to us without obstructions. Thus, one should adapt to the qualities of water by keeping a calm mind in every situation.



Life is full of flowing moments but it ceases to be in a frozen mind-----Anand Sagar

Anything that causes an over reaction generally wields absolute control over the being. Acting in haste with the opponent will lead to ineffective results and a premature defeat. This is because we freeze our minds and don't allow the free flow of thoughts. Freezing the mind suggests that we cease to think due to the infinite number of thoughts entering every second and we are left with no choice unless we block them completely. It's an involuntary reaction and the only way to avoid it by developing a fluid mind.

A martial art based on the philosophy of The water scroll in today's world, which truly intrigues me is Aikido.



"The sword has to be more than a simple weapon, it has to be the answers to life's questions"
— Miyamoto Musashi



AIKIDO





Aikido History

Aikido or The way of Harmony of the Spirit, is one of the more spiritual Martial arts and is often referred to as Moving Zen. Originally a Japanese martial art developed by Morihei Ueshiba also known as O Sensei or The Great Teacher, Aikido does not just focus on the destructive moves against the opponent, but also emphasizes on harnessing the opponent's energy to overpower him completely. It does not stress on killing the opponent but rather wearing him out during the fight. Aikido is not a static art but places tremendous importance on the dynamics of movement.

O Sensei emphasized the moral and the spiritual aspects of this art, giving us an insight on the development of harmony and peace. Aiki -Budo was the name given to O Sensei's art but each student had his own interpretation of Aiki Budo and thus different styles of Aikido were born. Some how, this did not change the fact that all these varied forms were firmly rooted in the core concepts, which made Aikido a unique art.

This art is truly intriguing due to its solid structure. In order to apply Aikido in the practical world, it is important to be calm and patient during practice. Attack and Defence in Aikido is most effective when the opponent is equally strong. Aikido is based on utilizing the opponent's energy for self defense. The stronger the energy, the easier it is to defend one self. O Sensei wished to attain a spiritual quest through Aikido. This quest was transformed by three visions. Since then, Morihei Ueshiba devoted every minute of his life refining and spreading Aikido, The Art of Peace.

In 1920 an unarmed Morihei in the middle of the battlefield, defeated a brilliant swordsman, avoiding all his thrusts skillfully. After the battle he stepped into his garden and suddenly the earth started trembling. A deep realization dawned on him.

'The earth trembled and golden vapor walled up from the ground, engulfing me. All at once I understood the nature of creation. The way of the warrior is to manifest Divine Love, a spirit that embraces and nurtures all things. I saw the entire earth as my home and the sun, moon and stars as my intimate friends. All attachment to material things vanished'

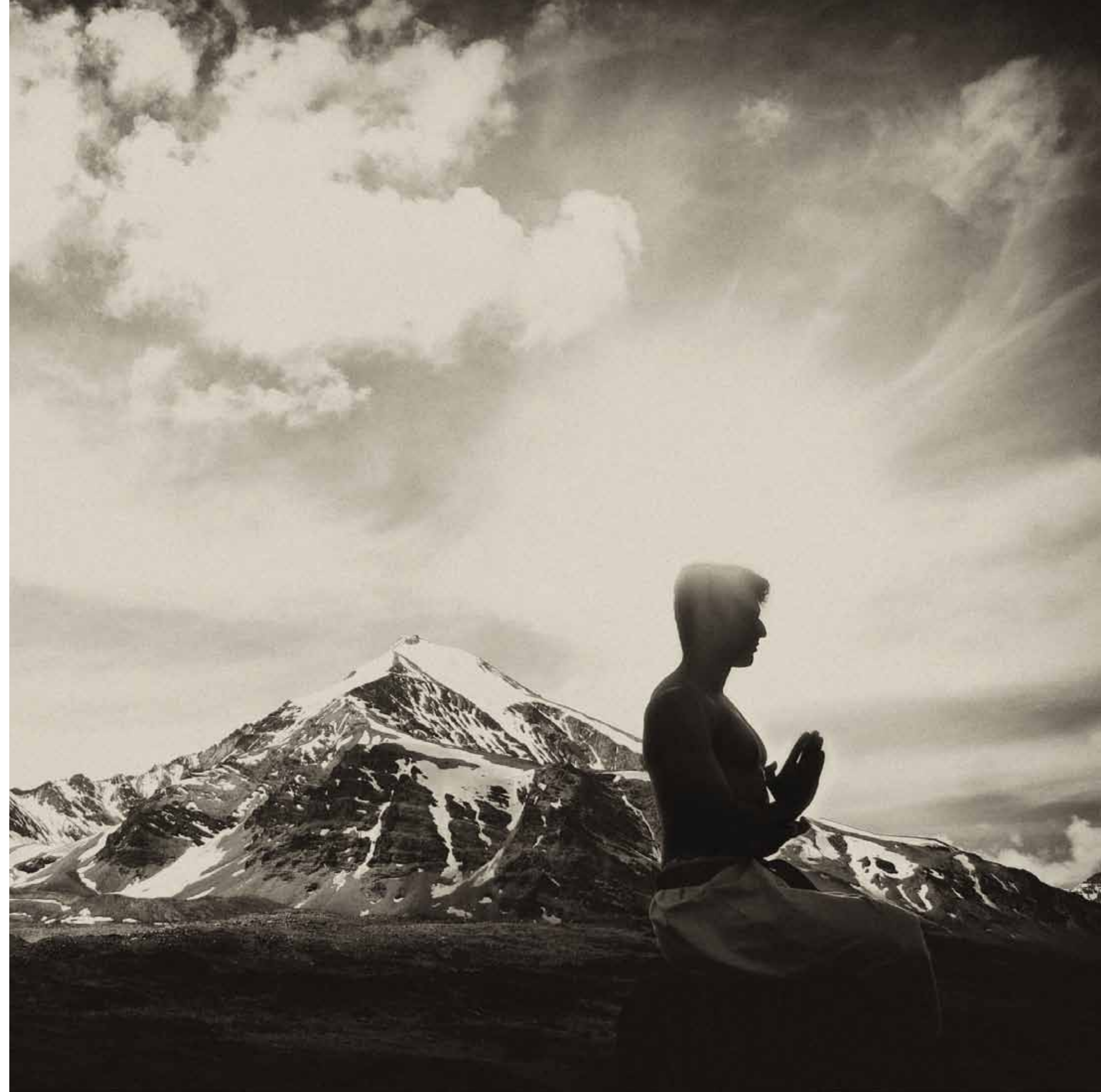
- O Sensei



Second Vision took place in the late 1930's

"While performing ritual purification, at about two o'clock in the morning, I forgot every martial art technique I had ever learned. All of the techniques handed down by my teachers, appeared completely anew. Now they were vehicles for the cultivation of life, knowledge, virtue and good sense. Not devices to throw and pin people".

— O Sensei



Third Vision took place in the early 1940's

In the darkest period of human history, during the World War II, O Sensei had a vision of the great spirit of peace.

“The way of the Warrior has been misunderstood as a means to kill and destroy others. Those who seek competition are making a grave mistake because to smash, injure or destroy others, is the worst sin man can commit. The truth is that the way of the warrior is to prevent slaughter, as it is the art of peace and the power of love”.

– O Sensei





Ki

Kaiso deshi

Aikido makes extensive use of the concept of Ki since it is one of the more spiritual forms of Martial Arts. One of the definitions of Ki states that it is the central principle that governs the universe and the individual, The Cosmic Truth. The Ki can be experienced and perceived through physical appearances, behavior and body language. However the meaning of Ki has various different interpretations and its core essence is firmly rooted in Aikido.

I have practiced Aikido for 2 years with Sensi Mehul Vora. Besides attaining a high level of fitness and health, the spiritual experience has changed my life forever. I have achieved a sense of focus by subconsciously concentrating in every little action, including eating, running, bathing and everyday regular habits. Eating has become a pleasure where I can feast my taste buds on anything that's put on my plate. While finishing projects, I can complete a job in less than half time as usual. My conscience feels alive and vibrant and constantly stresses the need to focus on every little action. My mind has also started flowing like a river without any rude interruptions. Even though I' am versatile with other martial art forms, this is my first step towards controlling the mind. At every step I can sense that I' am harnessing the KI and feel an energy level like no other.

Irimi

Learn to listen to your body. Blend with the movement of your opponent and gracefully slide into the attack.

The Irimi movement expresses the very essence of Aikido. Irimi literally means, Entering the body. The idea of Irimi is to position oneself on the line of action where the opponent is unable to attack whereby controlling his balance effectively. On the physical level, this suggests entering on the side, in order to avoid the attack and on the spiritual level, it means to penetrate and defuse an aggressive force. Most of the movements in Aikido are circular or spiral in nature.

The Ki has various interpretations for each individual. I believe that the Ki is not physical. It is a state of mind where the mind, body and the soul exist in perfect harmony. I experienced the KI while practicing different forms of martial arts. While practicing Aikido and trying to understand Irimi, I discovered the power of concentration, the magical flow of energy, and the power of being one with nature. I could visualize my opponent and gracefully slide into the attack without fear. Harnessing the Ki has taken my training to new heights.





Ukemi

Good Ukemi training will allow you to see the future because your vision will be based on observation and intuition, rather than an arbitrary decision made in advance of the evidence. Good Ukemi represents the same wisdom as that of the fisherman, who through long experience can sense what the coming weather will be.

- Saotome Sensei

An important feature of training in Aikido is Ukemi which is often described as the art of receiving a technique. The safeguarding technique does not suggest avoiding injury, but being aware of the nature of the attack and thereby finding a way to escape. Being a good Uke, or Receiver of attack allows the Nage, The thrower to perform the attack without worrying about Uke being injured. Much emphasis is placed on being flexible, connected and extremely aware of your surroundings at all times.

The art of receiving a technique is one of the most important aspects of Aikido. The receiver must build a connection with the Nage. This requires the harnessing of the Ki where the body communicates with your partner. In the end the Uke and the Nage are the sole receptors of this connection.

Initially, during training, it was difficult to connect with my Nage, but later my body started recognizing and reciprocating to the connection, providing me with the strength and foresight for the correct moves.

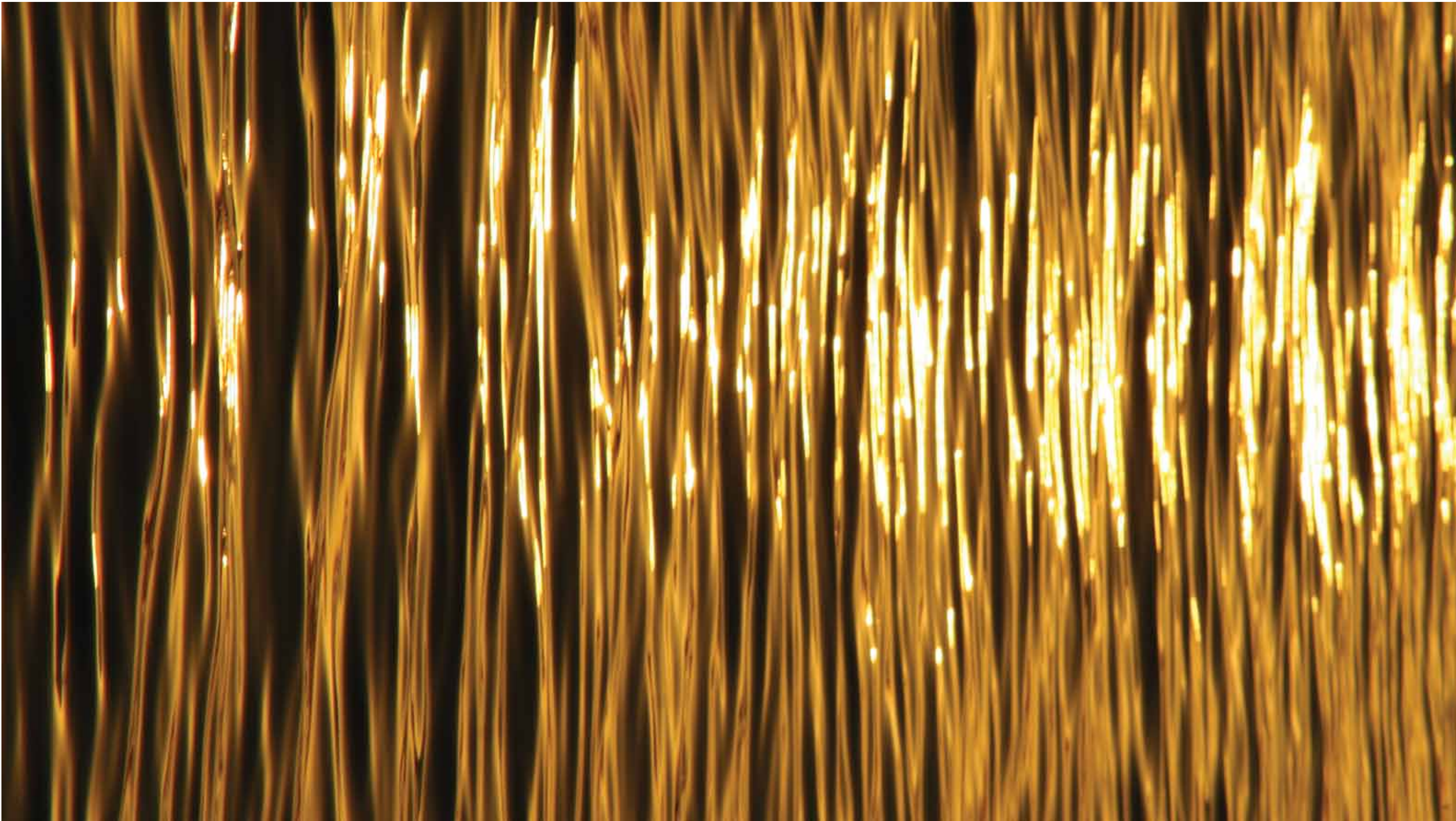
*“Flow with whatever may happen and
let your mind be free.*

*Stay centered by accepting
whatever you are doing.*

This is the ultimate”

– Chuang-Tzu

Overleaf: An early morning photograph of the river Ganges in Haridwar (North India). An expression of the “mind like water ability” that every being possess. The water look as though it is weaving a fabric called “Flow”.



Move Off Line

“Absence of body is better than presence of mind”

Usually, energy flows from the attacker to his intended victim. In simple words, energy flows from one point to another. The line that connects these two points is called the line of attack.

Once a martial artist leaves the ground with a flying kick, there is very little one can do to change the course of attack. One can only move away from the line of attack. Presence of mind is the key aspect to perform this move which comes from patience and foresight.

*Once upon a starry night, as I lay on the grass
And stared into the heavens above
Listening only to the sounds of the wind and the murmuring stream nearby
I saw above and all around me the entire universe in perfect stillness*

*Millions of twinkling lights burning through the darkest of blackness
From millions of miles away
Each obeying the laws of nature and holding its position from billions of years
Enabling a harmony in the universe that depends on each and every of those millions of beings in the sky*

*Questions and realizations dawning upon me
Due to the feeling of immense smallness
Who am I? Where am I? Who are they? Why are they?
Answers kept flashing in and out*

*No longer did I feel miniscule in their presence
But in fact I felt like one of them
Each of us, a part of a bigger plan
Each of us in perfect harmony with the other, enabling a stability*

*That has been cradling the universe for all time
Now they seemed like a million eyes looking down upon me from the heavens
Guiding my every move, helping my every effort
And in turn, me and my actions affecting the world around me*

*A world that reaches beyond my immediate surroundings
Beyond this earth
To the very stars that have been looking upon us from and till eternity
It was just a moment*

*A moment in which I felt the peacefulness of the night sky all around me
A peacefulness which went beyond the night around me and entered inside of me
I closed my eyes and I could still see the stars
They were outside no longer*

*They were inside me moving through my body just as they did in the heavens
I was in the universe and the universe was in me
They were all there
Each and every one of them*

*They were all playing their parts in a miracle called ‘existence’
I was a part of them
And they were a part of me
In that, the most magical of moments, was I*

*A moment that stretched beyond its worldly measure
To encompass all time
And yet it was only a moment
Just one moment*

*Out of the infinite moments that I’ve passed through in just one lifetime
Out of the infinite lives that I’ve lived and will live
But that’s all the time one would need
To feel the magic of being
The miracle of existence*

*One moment
Just one moment.
– Shakti Sagar 2000*

KOBUDO



Kobudo

Ko-Budo or Ancient Martial way is the study of indigenous Okinawan weapons. The story of Okinawa Kobudo is ambiguous and interesting as it is quite different from the knowledge of artillery of other countries because it was developed out of necessity rather than military use.

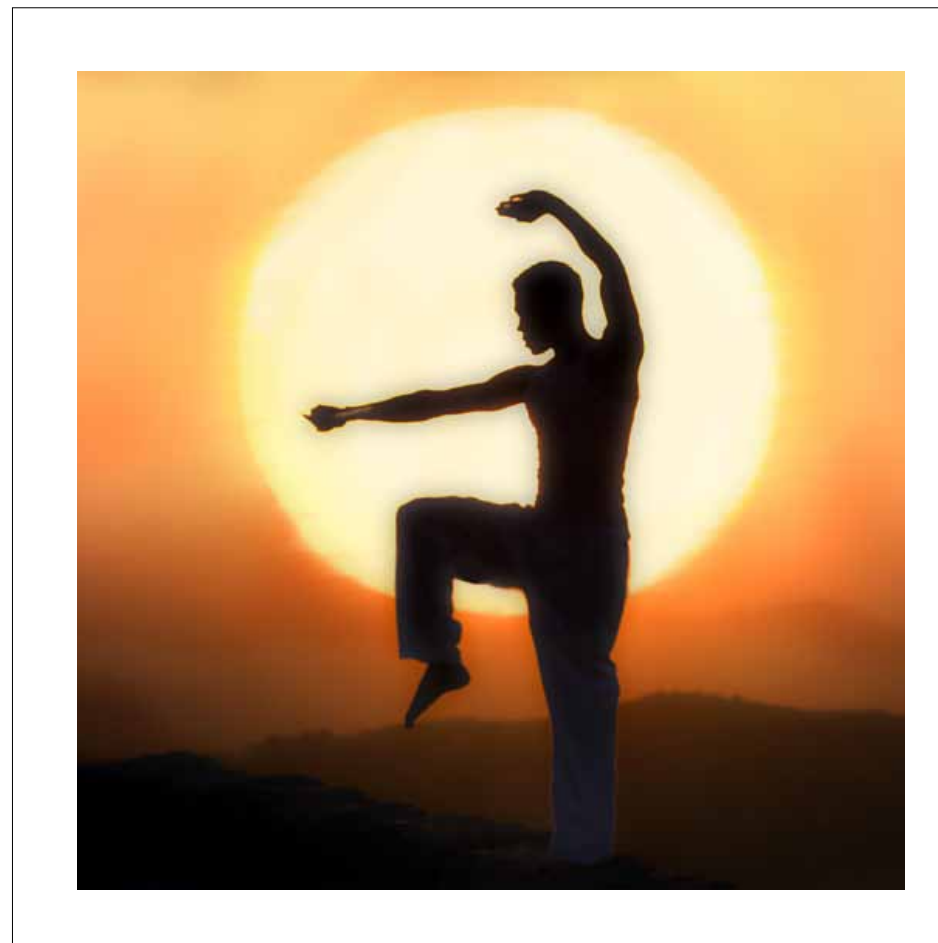
The word Kubudo translates as Ancient stop shield way. The word shield represents fighting but in a passive, non-aggressive manner.

The original meaning of Kubudo is, The ancient stop fighting way. It is the art of peace.

How does the study of ancient weapons and potentially dangerous techniques represent peace?

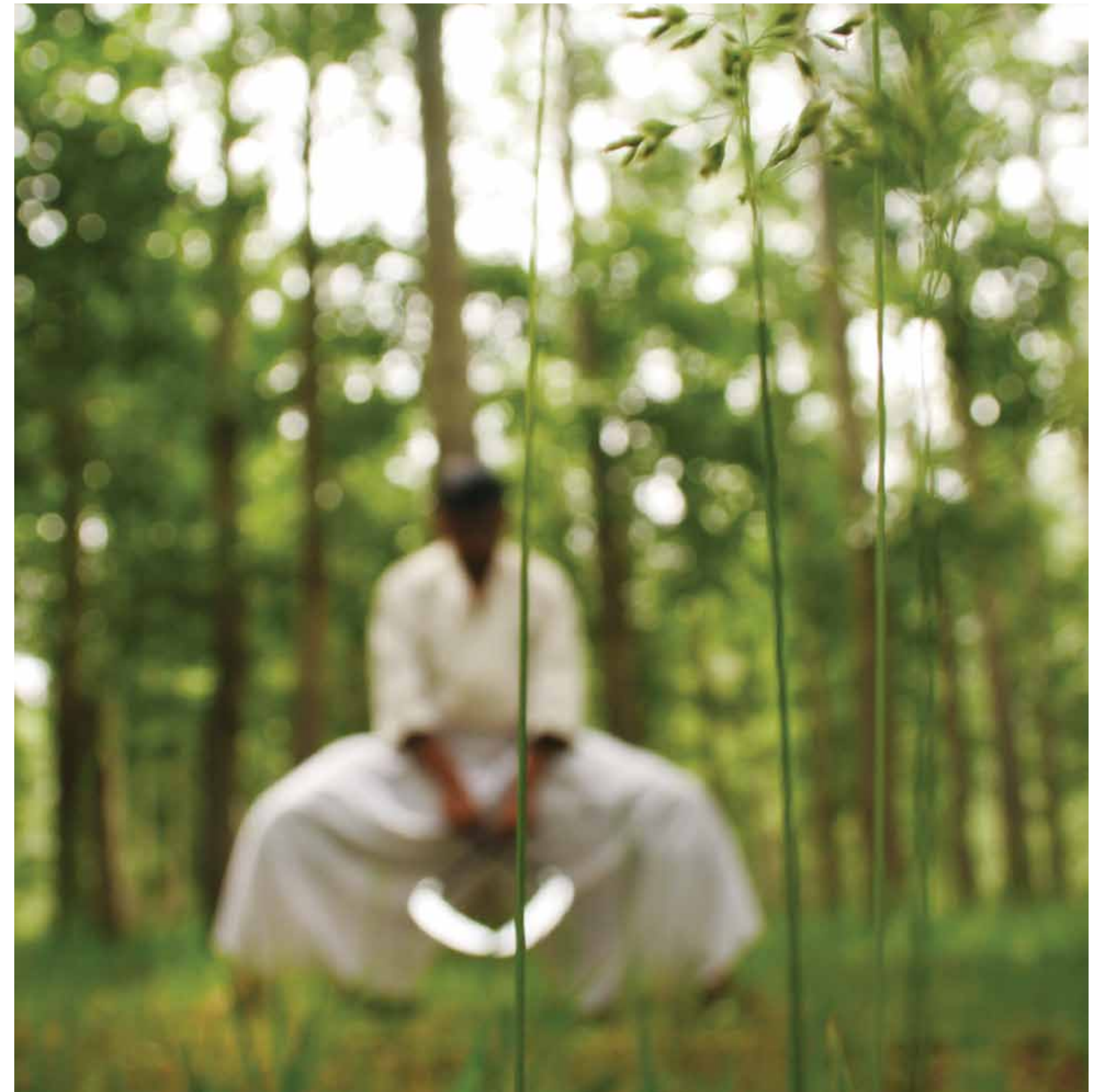
Generally a fight comes to a stand still with the presence of any weapon. If you are being attacked and you pick up a weapon to threaten your attacker, the attacker would most likely be deterred by the presence of a weapon. This is the true essence of Kubodu.

The practice of any weapon is based on the coordination of the mind and body, which are like two separate entities that sometimes lack coordination. Learning to operate a weapon, requires a calm and still mind. Once a student begins to operate weapons, he understands the true meaning of coordination. He must bend his mind in order to achieve every move. Hence the ability to use weapons appropriately helps attain patience and focus which further creates the right frame of mind to pick up any weapon and defeat the opponent.



Kubudo originated in Japan in the late sixteenth century and is believed to coincide with the invasion of Satsuma clan. At that time the ownership of weapons was strictly prohibited to the ordinary farmer and the average Okinawan had no weapons to defend himself against thieves, bandits or the Samurai. Hence, the entire artillery of Okinawa tribe developed out of sheer necessity. When bandits invaded fields to steal their crops the farmers used their sickles (Kama) as weapons to stop them.

In time, the effective self-defense techniques were discovered and these everyday tools were successfully incorporated by serious martial artists into schools for individual weapons. Eventually the individual weapons were integrated together in a system, which became known as Kobudo or Kobujutsu. Over the years, Kobudo and Kobujutsu have undergone less modernization than Karate and still retain much of their original character. This system employs a variety of weapons, primarily the Bo (staff), Sai (short sword), Nunchaku (Flail), Tonfa (handle) and Kama (sickle).





BO

A Bo is a long staff, made of wood or bamboo but sometimes it's composed and plated with metal for extra strength. A full sized Bo is also called a Rokushakubo derived from the Japanese word 'Roku' meaning six, or 'Shaku' a form of Japanese measurement that is equivalent to 30.3 centimeters.

The Bo is merely the Japanese word for a wooden staff and although it is used as a weapon, it was originally designed for non-combative purpose. Prior to being used as a weapon the staff was used to balance buckets and baskets. Typically, one would carry baskets of harvested crops or buckets of water, on each end of the Bo staff.

The martial way of wielding the Bo is Bojutsu. The purpose of the Bo is about increasing the force delivered within a strike through leverage and to benefit the wielder from the extra distance this weapon affords. It is primarily used in self defense. The Bo enables long range crushing and sweeping strikes. It is also used for joint locks and immobilizing a target joint, besides subduing an opponent partially.





Sai

“Sai” meaning “West”

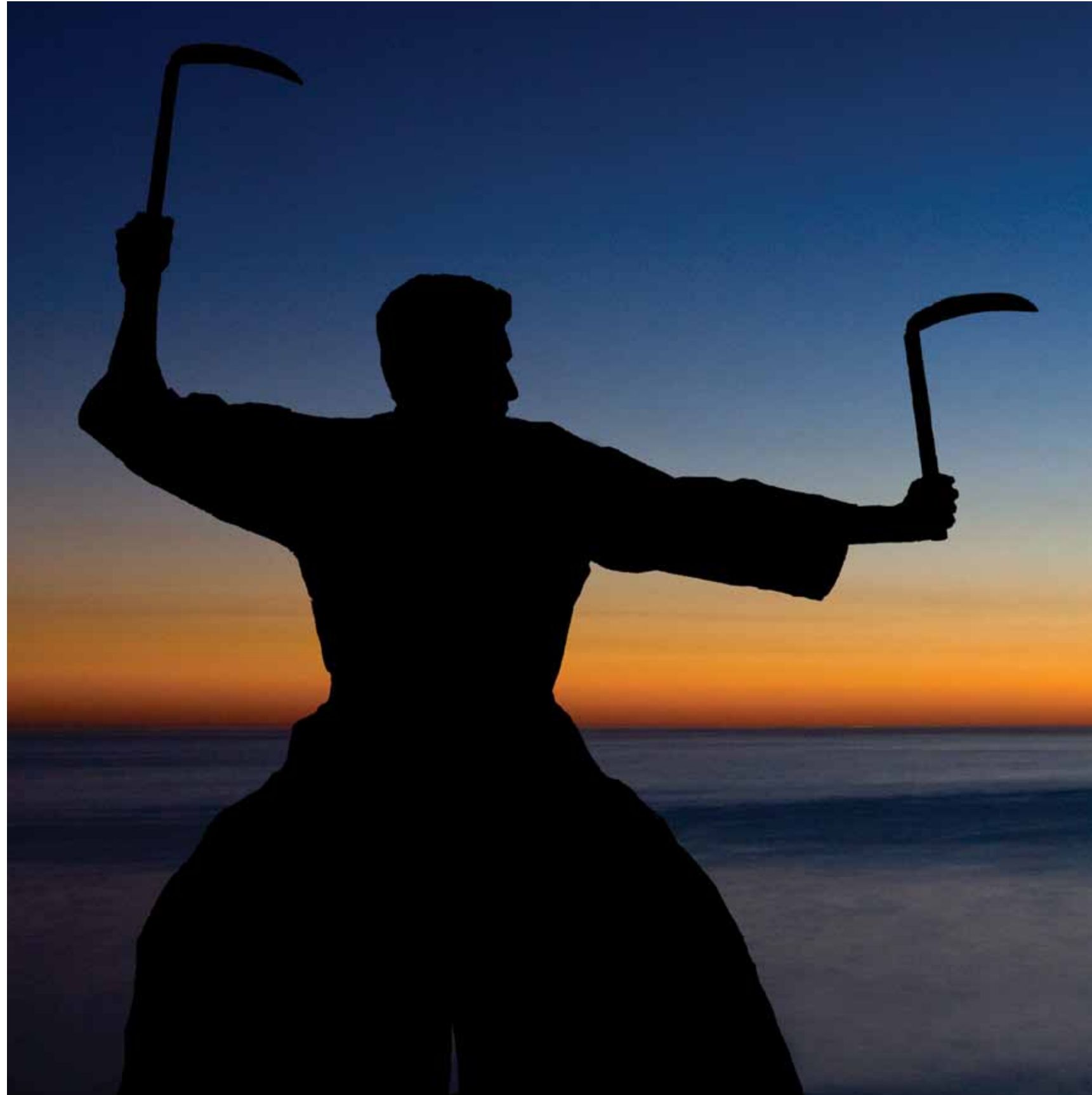
Sai's were originally agricultural tools used to measure stalks, plow fields, plant rice or to hold cart wheels in place. Its basic form is that of a crude dagger with long unpolished projections (tsuba), attached to the handle which is called the knuckle. The Sai is constructed in a variety of forms and while some are smooth, others have an octagonal middle prong. The tsuba are traditionally symmetrical.

The utility of this weapon is reflected in its distinctive shape. With skill it can be used effectively against a long sword by trapping the blade in the Sai's tsuba. There are several different ways of wielding the Sai which gives it the versatility to be used in a lethal or non-offensive manner. Traditionally, the Sai's were carried in three pairs where two pairs hung at the side as primary weapons and the third was tucked behind, in case one was disarmed in the course of a duel.



When the Sai is thrown, it has a lethal range of about twenty to thirty feet. This action of throwing the Sai was used against opponents with swords. Due to the heavy metal component, the Sai could penetrate through any armor.





Kama

The Kama which is similar to the sickle was originally a farming implement used for reaping crops. Later, the sickle was redesigned and called Natagama. The Kama traditionally consists of an inwardly curved blade, mounted perpendicularly on the end of a wooden handle and is generally used in pairs. The handle measures the length of the human forearm. It is an effective weapon for melee combat. The curved blade helps in deflecting the opponent's weapon while its short length can be maneuvered easily than longer weapons like the Bo.

*“Training in martial art is a marathon and not a sprint”
– Sensei Mehul Vora*



*“From where I am looking at it there’s no competition, there never was”
– Sensei Mehul Vora*



“There is fright in everything we do simply because we are frightened of the unexpected. One can threaten by sound or by making the large look small and most of all you may threaten by making an unexpected move from the side. These are basic situations in warfare in which fright occurs. If you can seize the moment of fright, then you can take advantage of it to gain victory.”
– Miyamoto Mushashi



*“ The Art of War is nothing but the art of life and also the art of death”
– Sensei Mehul Vora*



Swiftness

You win battles by knowing the enemy's timing and using a timing that the enemy does not expect.

– Miyamoto Mushashi

Speed is essential. One of the major distinctions between modern and ancient combat styles is that the latter emphasizes on physical strength, speed and swiftness. Sizing up the opponent and launching a quick attack with a barrage of combinations aims at confusing and surprising the opponent. Special techniques can be applied but speed and swiftness is a vital aspect of martial arts with some practitioners aiming to end a fight within ten seconds, using merely three blows.

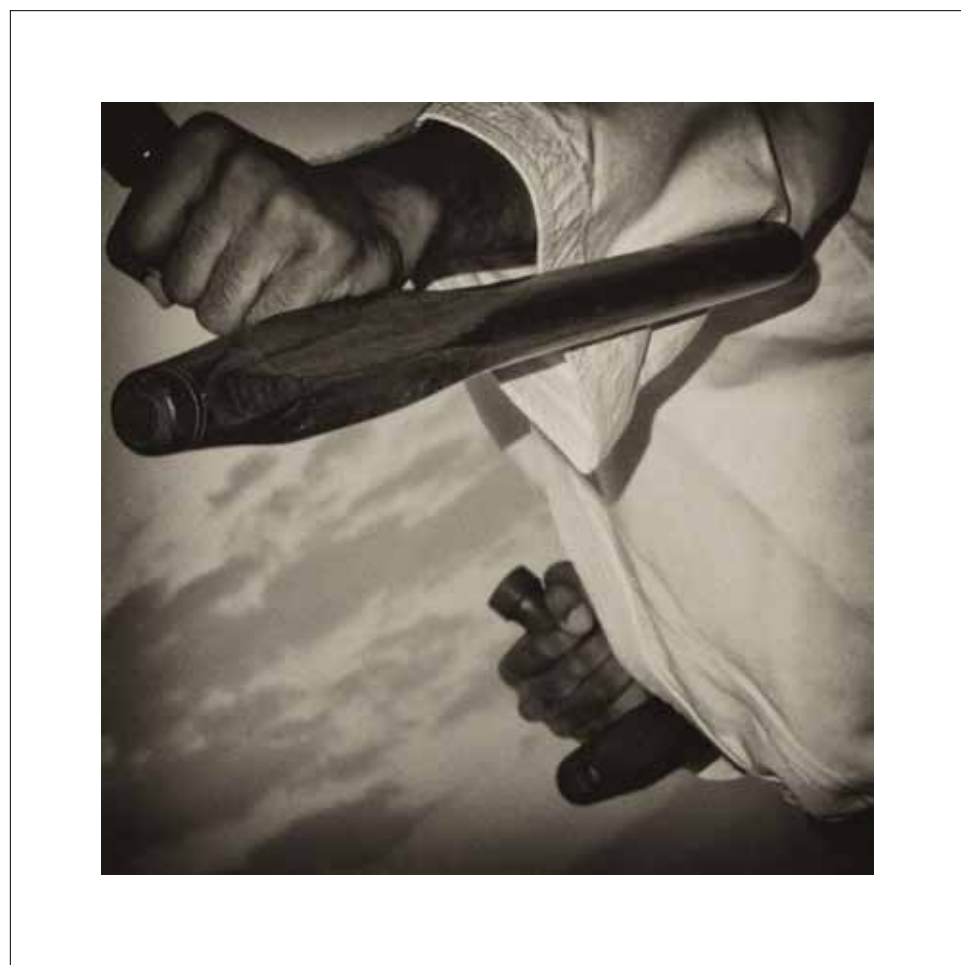
Photograph: Sensei Mehul Vora moving swiftly to change position for attack. While he moves, not one blade of grass bends to and fro.

Overleaf: Sensei Mehul Vora moving swiftly to change position for attack. While he moves, not one blade of grass bends to and fro.



"I know perfection is unattainable but still, lets try to achieve it"
– Sensei Mehul Vora



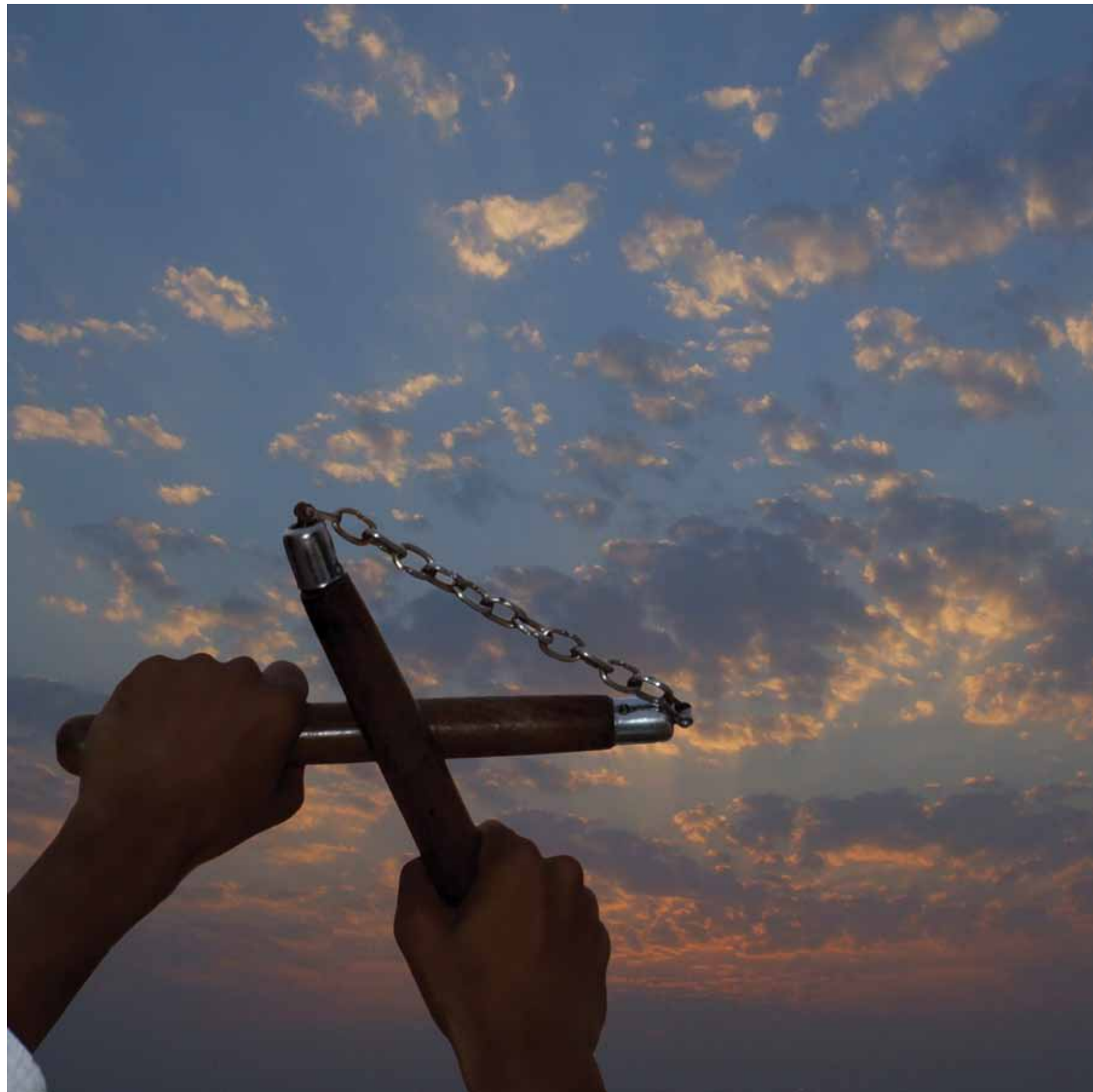


Tonfa

The Tonfa also known as Tong fa or Tuifa, is a traditional Okinawa weapon from which the much modern Police baton is derived. Originally, the Tonfa were used as wooden handles and horse bridles.

The 'Tonfa' traditionally consists of two parts, a handle with a knob and a shaft or board that slides along the forearm. The shaft has a rounded posterior, which is flexible for a firm grip and is usually 20 to 24 in length. It protects the forearm from blows where as the knob protects the thumb. If the shaft is held at both ends, it can ward off blows. The handle can also function as a hook to catch weapons.

Tonfa's were later developed into weapons when the Japanese peasants were banned from using traditional artillery.



Nunchaku

The Nunchaku, Nunchuks or chain sticks is a Dual section staff. It is a Kubudo weapon which consists of two sticks connected together with a short chain or rope.

According to various historical sources the Nanchaku originated in China, though the traditional Nunchaku is made from a strong, flexible hardwood such as oak, loquat or Pasania. This wood was further submerged for several years, resulting in a hardened texture that was polished and rubbed with oil for prevention.

The rope was made from horse hair and powerful enough to block a sword. The chain link version of the Nunchaku is also known to fend off enemies with swords or staves.

Although the Nunchaku may cause injury to its user, it is a very effective close range weapon. In combat the Nunchaku provides the obvious advantage of distance in the reach of one's strike. The chain joint adds the benefit of striking from unexpected angles. The quick spiral motions of the Nunchaku are often found to be distracting by opponents, who may have trouble keeping up with its rapid movement. Once an opponent has moved their weapon or body into close range, the Nunchaku is used to strike vital spots. It is also used to apply joint locks, chokes and other fight control techniques.



Mind the Net

A successful fisherman is one who waits and attains absolute stillness in the atmosphere and within, before casting his net. It is the state of oneness of being.

– Anand Sagar

This philosophy that my father always spoke about was very difficult to understand at first but with the course of time and practice in martial art, I gradually adapted to it. I discovered its true meaning only after a couple of practice sessions.

The Mind is a net which is constantly clogged by its involuntary function of thoughts. When you consciously pass through this net, you reach a space called 'No Mind' where you control every action as and how you want. This net will always be there but the idea is to understand it, so that we can attain stillness in whatever we do.



KARATE



Karate

Karate is a Japanese martial art that believes in competing with yourself and not the enemy. It advocates victory over inner fears, doubts, and indecisiveness by maintaining a neutral state where nothing can surprise you. The one who trains in Karate is never easily drawn into a fight for the reasons mentioned above. The person who practices this art should apply it for a good purpose, for if it is misdirected then the opponent could be fatally wounded in one blow.

The one who trains in karate strives internally to develop a clear conscience enabling him to face life truthfully, while externally developing strength and power. This art was devised to overcome weaknesses and limitations by bringing out hidden and un-noticed potential.



The literal meaning of the two Japanese characters, which make up the word karate is, Empty hands.

Karate originated from Okinawa, an island which lies between China and Mainland Japan. The art was originally known as Te or Okinawa-te, which means, Okinawa Hand. In some regions it is also called the Chinese Hand as it was greatly influenced by the Chinese martial art. Karate was practiced by the Okinawa Nobility and was popular within the royal family. The teachings of Karate were summed into patterns of movement known as Kata. Each Kata contained a complete catalogue of fighting techniques for kicking, punching, stamping, locking, throwing and grappling. When Karate was introduced in Japan it acquired the Japanese Budo culture where forth the person practicing karate wore a white uniform with colored belts.



A popular lore suggests that the Karate belts went from white to black because the original Karate founders never washed their belts. They started off with white belts and after years of training, ended up with a stained black color, that became synonymous with the fact that an old and dirty belt must mean that its owner must be experienced and obviously skilled. Since this art was taught in secret during the beginning of the eighteenth century and much of the training was done at night while the invaders of Okinawa slept at night, it was practiced in sleeping garments that later transformed to its current avatar.



In Karate, Mind like water is a calm surface of still water that acts like a mirror without any distortion. This state allows you to visualize the attack and at the same time respond in an accurate manner. Once you have achieved this particular mind state you are capable of engineering something very special called Insight. This is the ability to foresee, understand and act immediately to handle a problem. Eventually a person is capable of protecting himself when being attacked.

A still mind can stop every drop of thought before it touches the surface



When the mind is distracted, stray thoughts entering would eventually get distorted leading to a wrong judgment of the opponents move. Without clarity it is almost impossible to gauge the attack and defend yourself. Anger too, overpowers some of our daily interactions with each other because we choose to react with an unstable mind. But the one who maintains a stable mind is indeed calm and almost always finds a peaceful way to end the dispute.

A distorted mind gives way to many thoughts and creates momentary ripples



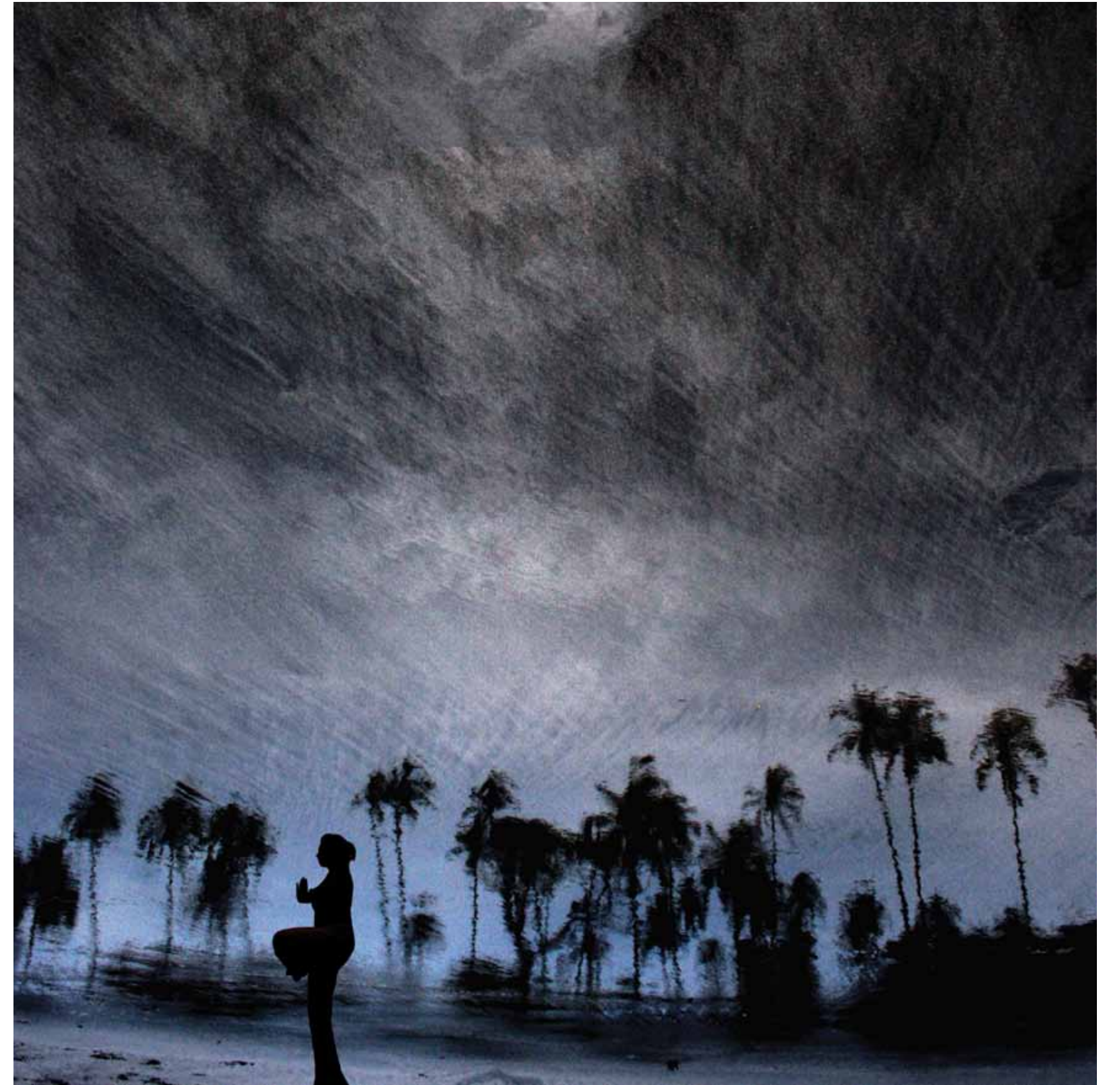


Miyagi Sensei

Do not get hurt by people and do not hurt people, always stay calm as if nothing happened. This is called the Philosophy of safety.~
Miyagi Sensei

Chojun Miyagi was the founder of the Goju Ryu form of Karate, besides being an active teacher in Okinawa and Japan. Miyagi Sensei would often jog by the seaside as he believed that if someone attacked him he could retreat as quickly as possible. He always instructed his students to 'Run so you are always fit. If a problem erupts, react more swiftly than anybody else and thereby resolve the conflict.'

Miyagi's Karate reflects the rich culture and traditions of the land of its origin ~ Okinawa. At the beginning and end of each karate class, the students bow in respect to the sensei and to the ancient masters that came before him. In each class, the feeling that the eyes of the elders are watching over the students is omnipresent. After their training the students must live up to the standards set by the sensei especially to spread a message of understanding and peace.



KALARIPPAYATTU



Kalarippayattu

According to sources from Sanskrit literature, Kalarippayattu is a complete set of interactions between the human microcosm and the divine macrocosm. The word Kalari originates from the Sanskrit word Khaloorika that denotes a place where the training of weapons is practiced. The art of weapon and physical training imparted within the Kalari came to be known as Kalarippayattu, where Kalari is the institution and Payattu the exercise for martial training.

The art of wielding weapons was taught and practiced for the purpose of defending one's self from evil forces.

Many experts claim that the origin of martial training in Kalarippayattu and the weapons in application can be attributed to Dhanurveda, the basic Indian scriptures which advocate weapon training. In the ancient times, one of the chief objectives of Kalarippayattu was to safeguard the cows, Brahmins, sages and the Vedic texts from danger and destruction from invaders.

Kalarippayattu is believed to have originated in Kerala (South India). Legend has it that the land of Kerala was retrieved from the sea by the epic hero, Lord Parasuram, who was a warrior and also had qualities of a sage. He is also said to be the founder of Kalaripayattu and created a series of individual weapons starting from his battle axe.

Most common weapons used in this martial art are sword, shield and spear. Kalarippayattu is similar to its Japanese counterpart, the traditional Bugei or weapons forms. The use of weapons in this form was historically the main purpose of practice.





Kalarippaytu is the study of the interior divine body, assumed to be encased within a physical one. Traditionally associated with Yoga and meditation, the system of training imparted in Kalarippayattu is different from other martial arts schools outside Kerala. A practitioner in this art develops qualities like concentration, confidence, courage and strength. Ancient legend talks about Kalaripayattu warriors like Thacholi Othenen, Aromal Chekavar, Chandu Panicker who never turned their backs on war and embraced death willingly when they were outnumbered by their enemies. Kalarippayattu is the unparalleled art of defense, rendering surprising skills on the trainee giving him absolute physical control besides fueling a sense of discipline from within. Healing, yoga and the Marma Vidya are also part of training in Kalarippayattu. Marma Vidya or the art of vital spots, enables an individual to heal another person by pressing certain nerves on their body. The great master like Chattambi Swamikal used this scientific knowledge and revived patients who were almost declared dead after war. Besides Marma Vaidya Kalaripayattu also incorporates Ayurvedic massage as part of its curriculum.





Aswa Vadivu

Aswa Vadivu — The Horse Pose
The positioning and movements in this pose resemble those of a horse.
This is a fatal attack and is most suitable when a mob is involved in a fight.



Vatta Kaal Chuvadu

Othadii Amarnnu — Feet Together
This position allows the body to attain the shortest size possible for defense and yet it enables the facile movements of the body even after attaining this pose hence the enemies chances of making onslaughts on the body are reduced.

The knowledge of Marma Vaidya faces potential danger for the fear of being misused and therefore the learning is only imparted to a chosen few. It is heavily shrouded by protective rituals and a strong discourse of secrecy. Generally the masters impart this knowledge to selective students, only on their death bed.

The earliest textual evidence of the concept of the vital spots dates from 1200BC where it is documented that the most important vital spots in a human body out of 107 are 64 in number. The knowledge of the vital spots shares the general Ayurvedic principles that health is a state of humeral equilibrium.



TAI CHI



Tai Chi

Tai Chi Chuan literally translates to Supreme Ultimate Boxing or Boundless Fist.

Tai chi or Tai chi Chuan is an internal Chinese martial art, also known as a form of Moving Meditation. The name Tai Chi Chuan is derived from the Tai Chi symbol commonly known as the Yin

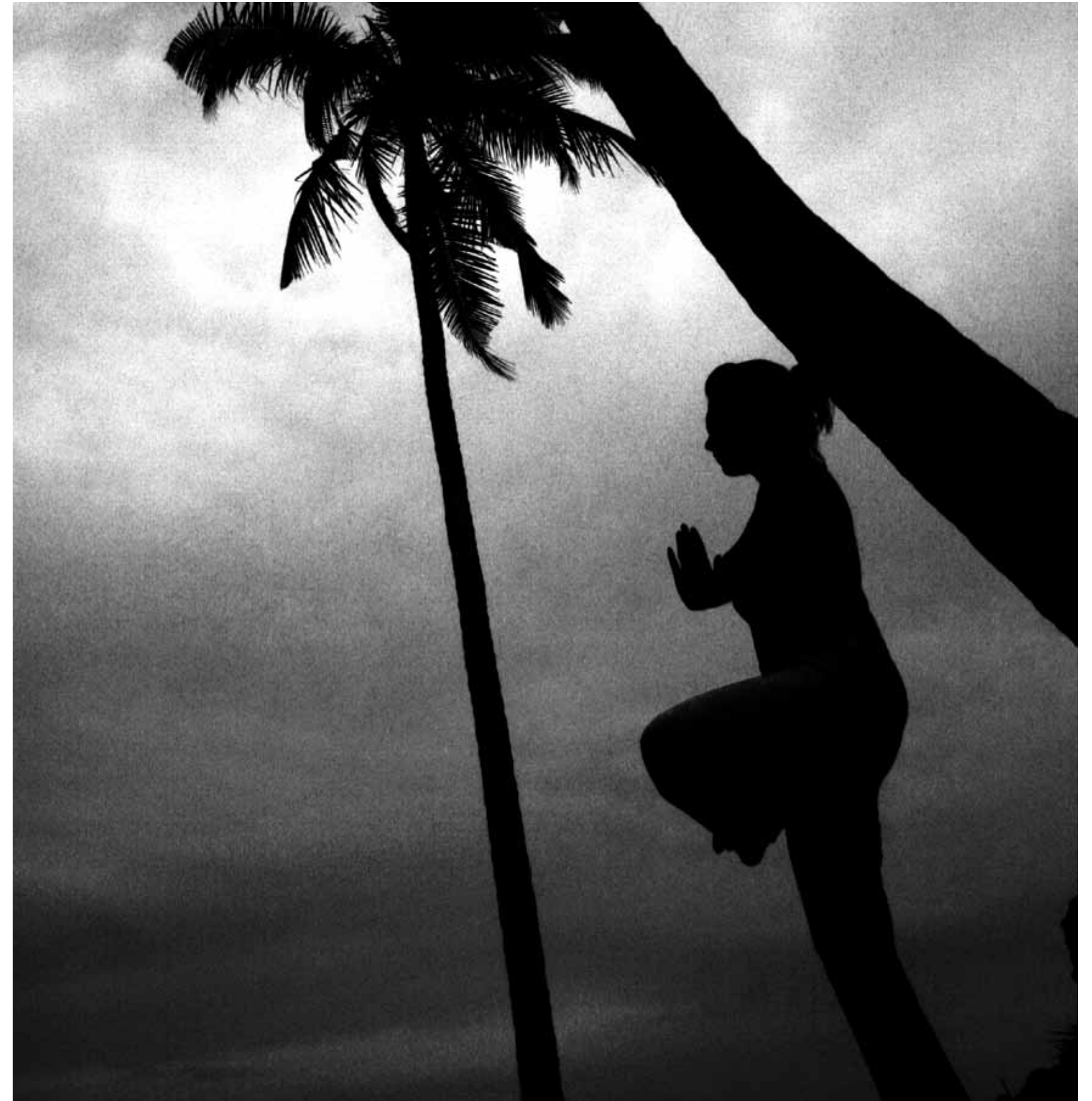
(Receptive) and Yang (Active) respectively and is known to be a study of both symbols in Chinese literature.

Tai Chi's theory and practice evolved in agreement with many of the principles of traditional Chinese medicine. It comprises of soft, flowing movements along with some effective martial art techniques.

Historically, Tai Chi can be traced back to the 2nd millennium BC in lieu with the origin of Yoga in ancient India. During the 13th century AD, a Taoist monk by the name of Chang San Feng developed Tai Chi and popularized this art within a few families in China. The Tai Chi styles that we see today are the offspring of two families namely the Chen and the Yang. The Yang style is the most common form of Tai Chi Chuan practiced today. This style is divided into three different forms, the simplified form, the short form and the long form.

During the time of the Sung Dynasty of China the Taoist monk Chang San Feng was observing a crane very carefully.(The Manchurian crane with its red crest, is an important symbol for the Taoist alchemists).The bird was aggressively stabbing the snake with its beak but the snake managed to neutralize the birds attack with its slow and harmonious actions. At once Chang San Feng understood that the soft, yielding energy could overcome the hard and inflexible. This particular episode inspired Chang San Feng to develop a complex yet integrated system of relaxed movements and postures based on 'Yielding to force and finding strength through softness.' Thus, was born Tai Chi.

Student of Tai Chi blending with nature's design as the Yin and Yang are in perfect harmony.



Tai Chi is designed to provide relaxation by harmonizing the principles of the Yin and Yang. This system was mainly created to cultivate the Chi or internal energy in order to promote health, longevity and peace of mind. Therefore it is grouped as a soft martial art, where strength comes from within and not from an external force.

Unlike the hard martial arts Tai Chi is characterized by soft, slow, flowing movements that emphasize strength rather than brutal energy. As a mode of attack and defense it resembles Kung Fu and is considered an authentic form of martial art. In particular, Tai Chi, 'Push Hands' is an exercise which requires a partner, where in the principles demand being sensitive and responsive to your partners Chi or vital energy. In short Tai Chi enables a practitioner to channel potentially destructive energy (in the form of a kick or punch) away in a direction where it is no longer dangerous.

During my Tai Chi lessons with Sifu Rakesh Menon in the open parks of Mumbai, I experienced mediation in motion where my body felt feather weight and all ambient sounds vanished in the vicinity. It was a truly joyous experience about being one with nature and feeling the harmonious energy flow through your body.



The Tao philosophy advocates that the universe is composed of two opposing but complementary forces which are the Yin and Yang. Yin is passive and therefore empty, cold, still and negative where as the Yang is active and is full, hot, moving and positive. Yin and Yang are continuously interacting with each other bringing about a fine balance which is omnipresent throughout the universe. When the Yin and the Yang are in perfect synch this state of dynamic equilibrium is called 'Tai Chi.' The Tai Chi symbol shows Yin and Yang united in the circle of infinity.

Sifu Rakesh Menon, my Tai Chi master once explained this phenomenon by stating that everything around us is in perfect harmony and because of the presence of darkness we learn to appreciate light and it's the same with good and bad energies. We must learn to balance the Yin and Yang in a complimentary manner.



Photograph: An abstract of the Yin and Yang in the universe. My version of the hard and the soft creating a perfect balance.



The eye of the Master

Master's are those who know more and more about less and less. Use my eyes and you will see the bigger picture.
– Sensei Mehul Vora

Wishing to meet a famous martial artist, a young boy traveled across China. When he arrived at the Dojo of the great master, he was asked to wait till the Sensei would send word for him.

After one hour of waiting the Sensei called for the boy and asked him 'What do you wish from me?' The boy answered, 'I wish to be your student and become the best martial artist in the world. How long do I need to study to achieve that goal?'

The Master smiled and replied, 'Ten years at least.' The boy looked aghast and exclaimed, 'Ten years is a very long time master, what if I studied twice as hard as all your other students?'

'Twenty years' retorted the master.

The boy was further shocked with the answer and questioned further, 'What if I practiced day and night with the utmost hard work?'

The master smiled and confidently said, 'Thirty years.'

A little frustrated and impatient now, the boy beseeched, 'How is it that each time I mention I'll work harder, you start increasing the years.'

The master laughed and said, 'The answer is clear. When one eye is fixed upon the destination, there is only one eye left with which to find the way.'



KUNGFU



Kung Fu

Kung Fu is believed to be the foundation of all East Asian fighting arts. It originated in China in late 3000 BC , though some sources claim that it was brought to China from India along with Zen Buddhism by a man named Bodhidharma around 500 B.C.

The term Kung Fu is generally given to Martial arts of Chinese origin, however people believe that this is a gross misinterpretation, as Kung Fu literally means ability, skill, strength and hard work where the body, mind and spirit are interlinked in unison.

Religion played an important part in the development of Kung Fu and was profoundly influenced by a particular branch of Buddhism called Chan. Followers of Chan or Zen as it became known in Japan, believe that the core of all mental power comes from Tan T'ien, which is about point two and a half inches below the navel. In the art of Kung Fu this is believed to be the place where the Chi energy originates and delivers strength.

Shaolin Kung Fu is another lifestyle art as it enables the Shaolin practitioner in all aspects of life.

It is the study of the body, mind and spirit which are interlinked together and teaches the Shaolin practioner to lead a humble and an honest life. Shaolin Kung Fu fighters consciously do not hurt their assailants as they believe that an effective attack could have serious ramifications on their spirituality in this life or the next. Similar to the Indians, they too believe in Karma.

After Bodhidharma's epic trek across the Himalayas from India to China, he arrived at the Song Shan Shaolin monastery in the province of Hunan where he introduced a form of art designed to enhance meditation techniques practiced by the monks.

Upon gaining entrance to Shaolin, Ta Mo (as he is presently known to the Chinese) realized that the Buddhist monks were weak and were unable to perform the rigorous duties that were expected of them. During meditation they often fell asleep or were extremely restless and failed to achieve inner peace. He then showered new knowledge about breathing techniques and meditation as practiced in Yoga and enhanced their performance by adding a much needed spiritual dimension.

One day Ta Mo came to a staggering conclusion, that the monks were not fit enough to meditate and with this in mind, he started working on a solution. He created three treaties of exercises. The Muscle Change Classic, the Marrow washing and the Eighteen Hand Lohan Shou that marked the beginnings of Shaolin Kung Fu.'

'What is today known as Zen was earlier called Chan and originally Dhyana in Sanskrit. It means Ideation on the supreme.

Much of what was learned about martial arts was passed down from master to pupil, via word of mouth and was very secretive. The ancient Kung Fu masters did not divulge their knowledge and only the most devoted students were able to learn the secret skills of their masters. Infact, the students were required to undergo a sequence of tests to check their sincerity and devotion. This method was an assurance that the selected student could be replaced for their master and that only true knowledge would prevail. This practice was carried forward in the history of almost all martial arts. Even today the secrets are not revealed to every student because the human mind has developed in a different direction.



Once something is out, it can never be recaptured. It can never be the same. Shaolin Masters created order in an extremely intelligent way. They reviewed all the styles and tried to incorporate this into one ultimate style. Years and years of work lead them to the conclusion that it is not possible for one style to suit everyone, everytime for every reason. A multifaceted style was required and so they continued to use the animal Metaphors and from that the 5 Animal style was born.

A strong Taoist influence on the ascendancy of Chinese martial arts proclaims that there is natural harmony that binds everything together in the universe. A key premise of Eastern philosophy is the existence of energy as associated with the human body known as Chi. For thousands of years the Chi has been thought of as a specific force. In China it is referred to as Chi or Qi In Japan it is called the Ki and in India it is know a Prana (the life force). Some perceive the presence of Chi more easily than others but the ability to perceive it is inherent in everyone. As Einstein stated, 'Everything is made up of energy' or as the Chinese state 'Everything is a form of Chi.' Heat radiating from the body is one example of this energy.

Kung Fu sought to harness the Chi and enhance it with Meditation which could be used effectively against self defense. Hence in Kung fu the size of girth of the martial artist does not matter, what matters and measures is the technique and the quantum of Chi he possesses.

Words are not enough to define Chi as it is all about experiencing the flow of energy during practice. It's within all of us and all we need to do is recognize it. Harnessing the Chi is matter of daily practice and is based on focus and self awareness.



*“Mother nature is my only teacher who can never go wrong because she helps me understand myself”
– Sifu Rakesh Menon*



The Leopard Fist



The Crane on one leg



The dragons claw

The depth of Shaolin Wisdom is bewildering and almost unreal for some martial artists. At a relatively mundane level, the Shaolin philosophy explains how we are responsible for our own lives and why the phenomenal world is a creation of the Mind. It explains the existence of I and how the word is a manifestation of our thoughts. Somewhere it provides the answers to our daily questions. At the highest level of Zen the wisdom surpasses the intellect, for its accomplishment depends on a direct experience. This attainment is the direct experience of enlightenment, such as uniting with the great void or returning

to the creator, the main source of energy and what we call God. It is this spiritual aspect which transcends all rituals that best justify Shaolin Kung Fu as the greatest Martial Art. Spiritual cultivation in Shaolin operates at mainly three levels, leading to a morally upright and happy life, enjoying heavenly bliss in the afterlife and attaining enlightenment through Zen.

ZAZEN





Zazen

Zazen literally means, Seated Meditation.

It is a meditative discipline where practitioners gain insight into the nature of existence and thereby receive enlightenment. Zazen is a particular branch of meditation which is unique to Zen, that functions centrally as the very heart of the practice. Zen Buddhists are generally known as the 'Meditation Buddhists'. Zazen is the study of one's self where questions like 'Who am I? Where did I come from and What is my purpose?' are answered to us. No matter what religion we follow these questions haunt every living being and they pursue us as we get older. In Zen Buddhism, what we call Life and death are temporary manifestations of our true nature. We cannot ignore life and death, health and sickness, as they appear in real form. There is another reality even prior to heaven and earth which will never be extinguished. Many of us believe that what we call 'We' is a small corporeal body, a self that disintegrates with our death. Some understand that when we die, the self somehow absorbs into an eternal self. What if, mysteriously enough, the egoistic self and boundless self co exist?

Language can only describe this condition, but Zen urges us to realize this state as our true nature by using this corporeal body and mind. It helps us realize that what we call 'I' might just not exist. It helps us see that the mind and body are knotted together and when we break that knot for a moment, we realize the meaning of merging with the creator.

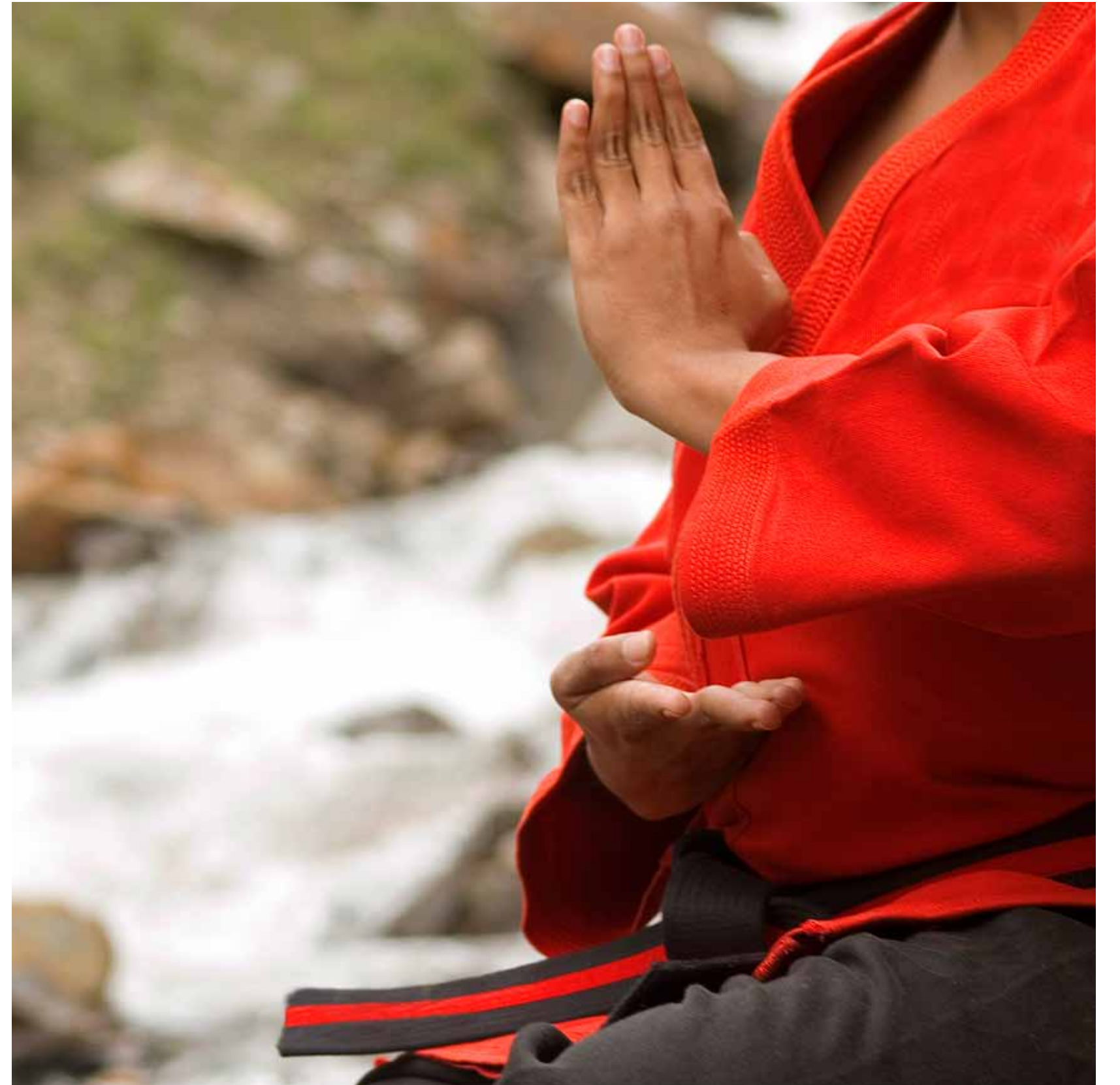
“The way of the sword and the way of Zen are identical, for they have the same purpose, that of killing the ego.”

Learning how to sit in Zazen is the first step in practice. Sitting in an erect position, breathing from your lower abdomen, then carrying that sitting Zazen into active Zazen by paying attention, thinking profoundly, and being generous with time leads to a blessed state of being. We visualize body, mind and breath separately but in Zazen they come together in one reality. The most effective positioning of the body for the practice of Zazen is the pyramid structure for the seated Buddha.

Zazen is closely related to the Indian form of meditation, where the stillness of the mind creates clarity and the body, soul and mind merge together. I have practiced this art with Sensei Mehul Vora and the result is phenomenal. Before starting every class he advises his students to sit in Zazen at least for 10min. The body feels light and after a point you feel weightless and almost become one with nature with silence as a constant backdrop. In doing so, I have noticed that the level of focus increases and the amount of knowledge imparted by the master is almost equal to the amount of knowledge, the student absorbs.



“To Study the Buddha Way is to study the self, to study the self is to forget the self and to forget the self is to be enlightened by the ten thousand things. To be enlightened by the ten thousand things is to recognize the unity of the self and the then thousand things”
— The Great Master Dogen





The Martial Mind never arrives anywhere, it is forever on an endless journey.

The warrior of Life

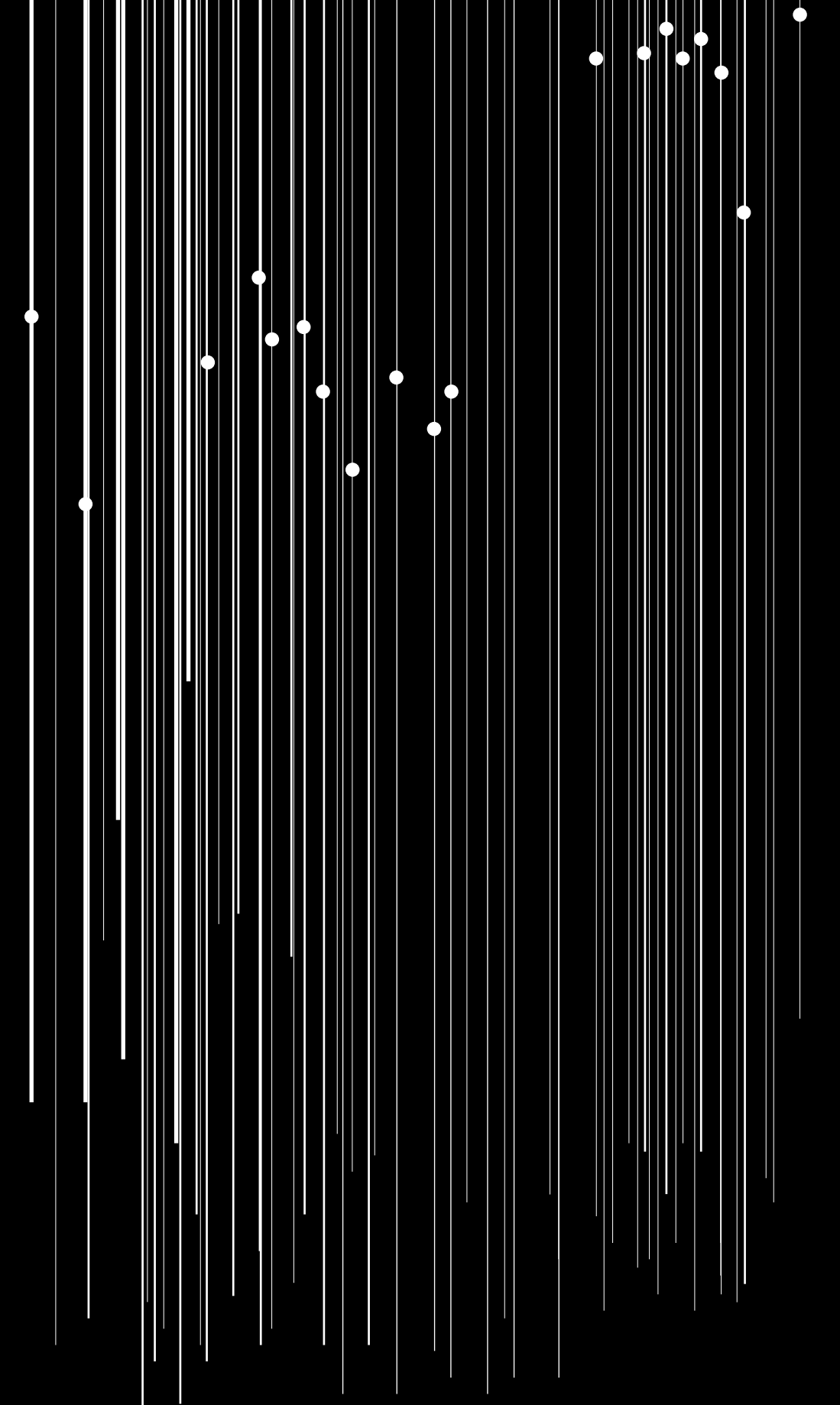
*Trees standing in straight rows
As far as the eye can see
Standing on the lonely shores
Of the almighty sea*

*Is it the challenge of the sea
Who roars with pride day and night
That you hold your head so high
As though to say , you too can fight*

*Storms may blow from unknown shores
Tides may rise from their watery graves
But you just nod and smile
You stand with such Divine grace*

*As though to say you understand
This defiance which comes with age
And the humble tides wiser in defeat
Retreating, kiss your deep rooted feet*

– Sarita Chaudhari





Deepa Shenoy

Deepa Shenoy is a fashion designer who owns a lifestyle store in Mumbai, India and has played a key role in heading the research and concept of this book. She has been practicing Tai Chi under Sifu Rakesh Menon in Mumbai where the Tai Chi teaching and philosophy had a great impact on her and encouraged her to research other martial art forms. Anyway, having a spiritual bent of mind, she chose to highlight the spiritual aspect of the arts to reinstate the face that great fighting is a result of great mind control and spirit enhancement. After reading a couple of martial art stories she realized they were more than mere warrior's battles and were rather heroic tales of untamed minds being captured with practice and meditation Her poetic narration gave birth to the basic concept of the book The Best Swords where her perception was based on the harnessing of the mind and not war within humans.



Mehul Vora

I feel the art is a living thing, and it is alive to a great extent in all its practitioners. I practice with one sole aim that is my art should give all its students a healthy long life. A true traveler has no fixed destination and no intention of arriving. I am an eternal student of martial arts and always will be and I want to promote it in its purest form.

A student of many masters and a master of many students, Mehul Vora has truly given Indian Karate a new dimension by taking it to a higher international level of progress and development. He is a true martial arts phenomenon in all terms, at this young age of 27 years. He has trained in Karate, Judo, Jujitsu, Aikido, Aiki-jujitsu, Judo, Iaido, Kobudo and in other European forms like Wrestling, Boxing, Kickboxing and Krav Maga

Sensei Mehul Vora started his initial training at the early age of 3 years. He was awarded a first degree black belt in Japanese International Gojuryu after 11 years of grueling training at the age of 16 years. His career followed a steady upward graph having gained a second and third degree black belt in international organizations. He was also honored with a fourth degree black belt at the age of 21 years and at the same time was the youngest to head an international karate organization aspresident and sole representative in the country. He had the honor of training under many senior international masters such as Dr. Jose Miguel Gallego 10th degree black belt, Shihan Hirano Osamu 8th degree black belt and Shihan Kazu Inoue 8th degree black belt to name a few. Sensei Mehul Vora has traveled extensively around the world for training and coaching purposes spreading the gospel of the martial arts. He is the only teacher licensed to teach Mugairyu Iai Heido Nichiryu Kai, the Japanese art of swordsmanship,in India.He is the direct student of Shihan Kazu Inoue the 16th generation head of Mugairyu in the world. In addition to being a 4th degree black belt in Japanese Karate and a 6th degree black belt in American Karate he holds a 1st degree black belt in Judo and 1st degree black belt in Kobudo weapons. He is a life member of the prestigious 'United States Martial Arts Association', a pioneer of Women's Kickboxing in India and the President of the Professional Maharashtra Kickboxing

Association. He has trained several national and international champions. He himself was the national champion in the year 1994 and 1995 in 'Kata Forms' and 'Kumite Sparring'. In the year 1998 he was awarded the Best Instructor of the Year Award by the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mumbai. Sensei Mehul Vora heads an organization called NIPPON BUDO SOGO INTERNATIONAL INDIA, which is one of the largest martial arts organization in the country, having over 16 centers in Mumbai city itself, with over 15000 students training in martial arts at any given point of time. This organization is one of its kind as it is the only organization to offer coaching in multiple arts such as Gojuryu, Iaido, Judo, Kendo, Jujitsu, Kobudo, Kickboxing and yoga at the same time.

"This book is one of its kind. Exceptional effort by real life martial artists reveals the truth about martial arts. People will see martial arts in a different light. Gauri Chopra was one of my first female students and probably the only girl in my dojo and may be in India who has practiced many martial art forms. I have given her the title of 'Uchi Deshi' which means Personal

Student. When she came with the concept of Best Swords I was not too sure of what exactly she had in mind. Gradually after a couple of meetings I realized that the book was not a technical book at all, it was all about the subtler yet infinitely more important aspects of martial arts. It truly is something I have not read about till now. No book in my collection comes close in comparison. 'What impressed me the most was the way she interpreted the art. She understood that the mind controls the body. I am proud of my student's effort.'

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The Best Sword touches upon seven different martial art forms. It traces their history and technique through a series of beautiful photographs accompanied by lucid explanations. It talks about the grace and philosophy that lies beneath each and every form, right from the softer teachings of Tai Chi, which is also about fluidity and simple coordination, to the toughest and fastest form of Kung Fu. every martial art has a common thread of spirituality running through it.

*Achieving ultimate balance
Is a matter of making up you Mind*

*Making up your Mind
Is a matter of balancing all within*

*Perceiving good
Is a matter of understanding evil*

*Where Both co exist
It's a matter of identifying the colors*

*Colors so many so difficult to distinguish
We perceive life through our five senses
But can we truly trust them*

*A Mindless Mind for a warrior
A swordless warrior to win a war*

Such is the perception of a martial mind