

Sword

&

Spirit

The Japanese sword, which is actually a mixture of sabre and sword when German nomenclature is used, has, unlike the European one, a strongly pronounced intellectual component. This is due to the special mentality of the Japanese samurai of the Middle Ages, who valued their own lives differently from the Europeans.

And it is due to the samurai's connection to Japanese Zen Buddhism, which offered a way of overcoming the fear of death through meditation and insight.

If we look at the special nature of the Sword Way in relation to the mind, it is good to look at the differences to other forms of fighting.

Karate and similar arts work with the body, very directly, and does not usually cause death immediately even when a hit is made. It is not as radical as the sword, although it requires great technical skills.

Shooting with a weapon - whether bow, crossbow

or firearm doesn't play a decisive role - aims directly only at death and goes over the distance - I don't necessarily get close to the opponent and don't have to evade his attack, so I may not be in danger myself. Also the knightly fight in the European Middle Ages did not lead to the death of the opponent with the first successful prank, because the opponents were heavily armoured and no sword could cut through the armor. In addition they often had a large shield as protection. Iaido against it - the way of the present agreement - comes from the civilian life, not the war, and works without armor. The sword practitioners are completely unprotected and have only the sword at their disposal.

Let us look at the basis of Iaido, the Kata. The Japanese Kata are very ritual, and they require a high degree of self-perception and self-correction. If you want to perform a kata correctly, you have to control every part of your body from the heel to the tip of your nose. You have to know what the individual limbs are doing. Many people have particular problems with their hands, especially their left hand.

Furthermore, the synchronization of all movements is a central practice. But in addition there is an external part, the sword, which has to be moved with a very high accuracy, which is partly in the centimetre range.

In addition there are the eyes, and with the eyes the spirit strengthens. The eyes project the opponent, so to speak. In order to execute a kata correctly, the mind must know exactly where which body parts of the (invisible) opponent are and "grab" the opponent with the eyes (metsuke).

An experienced Iaidoka should therefore be able to see the (invisible) opponent when watching a Kata performance, because he is present for the performer.

Therefore the solo kata is mentally more difficult than the partner kata. Anyway - only endlessly frequent practice and grinding - i.e. the exercise of the mental ability of patience - of the same movements with ever finer observation leads to the fact that one day everything will run perfectly and meaningfully. What happens internally in kata is decisive after learning the outer form, because the form as outer is, mentally seen, above all the expression of an inner process.

What does every Kata begin with? With calmness, with serenity. What is calmness? Rest is a state in which thoughts, feelings and body function brightly awake, synchronously and energy-saving. So without excitement, without planning, without memory, simply "present". In the resting state at the beginning of the kata, either sitting or standing, the flow of the form in the head is no longer repeated internally, one does not prepare oneself for the individual movements, one trusts in the intelligence of the "psychophysical system" that it will run through the form correctly, because it knows what it is doing. The state can certainly be compared to zazen.

In the moving course of a kata nothing actually changes, one perceives, is awake, notices what is going on and how, determines what corresponds and what does not, but without evaluating it, so that it can be changed in peace next time.

And that is serenity, getting involved with the wisdom of one's own functioning system of mind and body.

In partner training you act accordingly, whereby you have to adjust to the variable of the opponent, i.e. you have someone with you who you can only partially influence yourself.

What else can one say about the spiritual side of the longsword? In the German language there is the term "Entscheidung". It describes pictorially that one pulls a sword from the sheath and has thus carried out an irrevocable process. Imagine that two fighters stand in front of each other and one draws the sword, then the death of the other is already completed, especially with the Japanese type of laido, because one cuts while pulling out and thus already kills. There are no long fights and no back and forth, pulling out is cutting and that's it. Dead is dead. Decisions are not reversible.

Quite different from the practice of "deciding" differently today and tomorrow, because it is not a decision if it has no real result. What does this bring us spiritually? It leads us to the energy that is in a decision. Decisions are life junctions, roads, crossroads where and through which endless energy unfolds. For example, the decision to learn swordplay or meditation or something like that can raise the course of life to a completely new and energetically higher level. Having more energy and clarity than almost everyone else for 80 years - just by ONE decision - that's something. And one can decide even more often. A person, on the other hand, who can only decide, today laido and tomorrow Tai Chi and the day after

tomorrow Döneressen - he remains stuck on an unfortunate low-level lifestyle, which he has to mock with a lot of whining, which is illusory. An interesting aspect is shown by the Tameshigiri, the cutting with the sharp sword: These are the inner tensions, which are physically transferred to the cut image. If the practitioner is internally calm and tension-free, the result is a smooth, straight cut. If he wants and can force the cut with mental and physical strength, the result is a wavy cut. If he is not internally convinced and does not believe in himself, he gets stuck.

Tensions during cutting are caused by mental tensions - this can largely be transferred to everyday life. Those who cannot clearly decide, who are torn inwardly, who do not know what they want, remain stuck at an unsatisfactory level of life. But still feel happy to be so unhappy. "Following the Sword" is another discovery we made in our work. If we want to deal with the sword spiritually alive, then it is not very sensible to act only out of ideas, but we can follow the natural movements of the sword, which makes it according to its kind. In case of an attack or a defense there are special movements and directions which the sword prefers almost by itself. Therefore it is good to follow the spirit of the sword, to feel what it wants in a situation. "The killing and the living sword" is a Japanese expression that represents another dimension of the sword and its power. If we only enter into the killing and destructive dimension, as the Japanese kata do, we have not grasped the spirit of the sword. What is a real warrior's life about? It is about spiritual growth. Not only for us, but also for the enemy. When we are really superior in

battle, we always have the power to enable the opponent to have a process of understanding. Whether he uses it or not is not our thing. What does that mean for our everyday life? Sword in everyday life then means that we can and should alternate in "good" and "bad" being, depending on the situation. Since we know that we are superior, we can afford to see and treat things differently. We can face opponents, problems, life situations openly, with a bundle of behavioural possibilities. That is freedom. But that means having as little fear in sword work as in daily life.

In both cases this means to go tried and tested ways, i.e. to be conservative and traditional, but also to go further, i.e. to be evolutionary and revolutionary. Sometimes you have to preserve, sometimes you have to develop, sometimes you have to overthrow.

Because real sword work means freedom in acting, thinking, feeling. The power over life and death in the hands of the warrior forces him to take responsibility for his actions. Only a person who takes responsibility for his actions (and thinking) and never refers to others can be free. The sword separates, thereby killing. The sword transforms the living into the dead. The sword creates consciousness. A conscious mind discriminates, it must discriminate. This is not modern today, but it simply means to distinguish the things of the world, to separate them, with the sword of knowledge, and then to kill the worthless without fear and to make the valuable come alive.

Christoph Jantzen, July 2019, commissioned by my daughter Sulamith Jantzen