

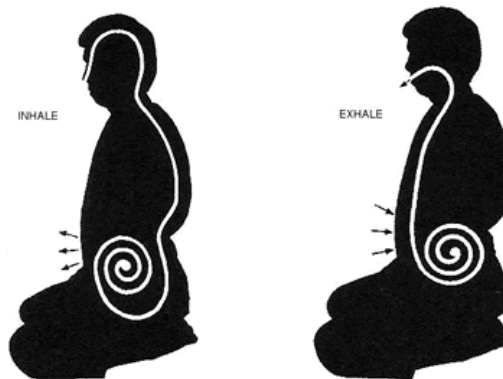
MOKUSO & SEIZA

MOKUSO (Silent Meditation).

To be performed whilst seated in SEIZA (Kneeling Position).

Inhale slowly through the nose, visualising the breath traveling up through the forehead, across the crown of the head and down the back of the skull & spine toward the base of the spine. Imagine the breath collecting in the HARA (Lower Abdomen), winding into ever smaller circles until finally disappearing into a miniscule point. Hold the breath for a brief moment (but not until it becomes uncomfortable) then begin to exhale slowly, concentrating on the breath as it emerges from a single point in the HARA, gradually winding outwards and upwards towards the Navel, through the solar plexus & throat, and finally out of the mouth. Keep the HARA (lower abdomen) relaxed whilst breathing in & contracted when breathing out.

A single breath cycle (In & Out) should take between 10 & 15 seconds. More advanced Students should develop this process as part of their daily stretching & practise. Over time, if used correctly, MOKUSO will enable a Katateka (karate Student) to control the ebb and flow of their emotions.



SEIZA - From SHIZENTAI (Natural Standing Position - back straight, standing tall with your hands held gently by your sides and your feet together)

Inhale & bend your knees, keeping your back straight, looking forward and squatting down onto the balls of your feet. With your hands held palm down gently on the front of your thighs, Exhale as you lower first your left knee to the floor then your right knee. Move your feet from a position of squatting on the balls of your feet so that you sit on your heels with the tops of your feet on the floor. Your back should remain straight and slightly extended, your chin tucked in with your nose in line with your navel, looking directly forwards and towards a point approx. 45cm in front of your knees.

‘If your breathing is wrong, your body will be wrong and your mind will be wrong also.’

Sensei Hirokazu Kanazawa

History.

This practice goes back hundreds of years in both China and Japan.

Throughout history meditation training has been acknowledged as a vital part of the training of anyone wishing to penetrate the depths of the martial arts. Many of the great masters achieved a level of superb technical mastery; their deeds are clouded by time and no doubt have been elaborated over the years. However, if only a fraction of these legends show a grain of truth, the contribution of the meditative aspects of martial arts training cannot be overestimated.

Objectives:

Short term.

At the beginning of a training session : Compose the mind and focus on the task ahead.

At the end of a training session : Compose the mind and focus on what you have learnt.

Long term.

To return to a state of pure thought and action untainted by ill conceived and inappropriate responses.

Training of mind and body.

The mind has to command the body to enable the practitioner to reap the benefits of the practice. A settled and controlled mind as a result of prolonged correct practice can have escalating beneficial effects on the body and boost and retain supplies of vital energy. ("Chi" chinese. "Ki" Japanese.)

How it works.

Posture.

Posture is the first basic principle. Correct positioning of the body centres around the spine, which must be erect, and even when straight must not feel "collapsed".

In oriental thought the human being is the conduit between what they refer to as heaven and earth (The use of the word heaven must not be confused with the Christian understanding of heaven. Heaven in eastern philosophies means, the universe, or the cosmos.)

Mokuso/meditation can be performed in a number of ways, including sitting on a chair, standing or even lying down. (Ohtsuka Sensei endorsed the practice of laying down meditation; he called it Ouchaku Zazen. However the customary way is in traditional Seiza (kneeling) position.

Seiza is convenient, as it is also the accepted way to sit while bowing or resting in the Dojo. There is practical reasoning behind this posture.

Obviously it is a position that enables the hands to remain free. It was also an economical and dignified way of sitting in a Dojo of limited space. It was also safe; if a fellow student were to fall or stumble neither party would be injured.

If students find that prolonged sitting in Seiza is uncomfortable, or painful as a result of injury, then it is permissible to sit cross-legged, but the spine must be erect.

Hands and other considerations.

Again, there are various schools of thought as to the correct positioning of the hands during Mokuso. Traditionally the position adopted is of the Zen practitioner, i.e. the hands in the lap, left hand upturned resting in the right hand. Thumbs of both hands are joined at the tip. (Some say that for women the hand position is reversed, i.e. right hand in left.) The hands must not be in a position that causes the shoulders to lift or cramp.

Also of vital importance is the position of the tongue. The tip of the tongue must rest on the palette just behind the top teeth. The reason for this is that the tongue acts as a connector to the cross over of two meridian channels and without the connection vital benefits of the practice will be lost.

Concentration.

A wandering mind is a hindrance to advanced practice. It is probably a good idea to start by occupying the mind by just concentrating on a mental count of your breathing. By just focussing on the numbers you will prevent your practice deteriorating into just idle daydreaming.

In Zen training the goal is to try and empty the mind to contact your true essence.

Gaze.

Look at the floor about two metres in front of you, with eyes half closed. This prevents unnecessary visual distractions and also discourages the tendency to fall asleep.

Breathing.

Breathing is the keystone of correct practice. Over hundreds of years many techniques have been developed, but they are all based upon a series of central principles.

Correct breathing benefits the body in many ways, but first it must be recognized that our everyday breathing is hindered and restricted by a number of influences, ranging from stress and tension to poor posture.

Observe the breathing of a newborn baby or animals and it is noticeable that the breathing is primarily abdominal, while ours tends to involve the upper chest. Physiologically the diaphragm controls the breathing acting as a pump. It is diaphragm breathing that is used in Mokuso.

It is no coincidence that the all-important "centre", the Saika Tanden is situated two inches below the navel. The Tanden is the reservoir of vital energy. Correct breathing charges and replenishes the store of vital energy.

Breathing Technique.

All breathing must involve long, slow cycles of breath. Inhale through the nose, slowly drawing air into your lungs, but feeling as though you are drawing it down into your lower abdomen. Naturally this encourages abdominal breathing, correct use of the diaphragm and awareness of the Tanden.

Stop inhaling just before you are completely topped up. Don't push it too far, as it will cause tension in the wrong places. Retain your breath for a couple of seconds. Not too long or you will feel faint. Then slowly release the breath through your mouth, again concentrating on the use of the abdomen.

Do not force or squeeze out the last of the breath and do not hold, just allow your natural reflexive inhalation to begin the next cycle of breath.

Establishing a routine.

The Mokuso practice prior to an average training session although it settles and composes the mind will not promote long-term benefits. The serious student needs to establish a routine supported by real commitment.

Do not expect results overnight, it takes a while for the body and mind to settle, but after about a month of sustained daily discipline of only 15 to 30 minutes per day you will notice a difference.

If practice is correct, then the energy boost and feeling of well being will become an indispensable part of a positive daily regime. Obviously you do not have to be a martial artist to practice these breathing/meditation techniques, and not all martial artists are prepared to embrace this discipline. Many think that the short-term paybacks of the "external" aspects of training are sufficient to meet their needs. It all depends on how high you set your goals

We perform at the beginning and end of every training session.