

How Zazen Relates to Karate-do Training

Imagine this: Your Sensei has just encouraged you to register for your first tournament competition. You prepare for months, only to arrive at the event and be told that your division has 30 contestants.

Or this: With Kancho's upcoming visit, your stress level has just increased exponentially because your Sensei has recommended that you attend Dan grading.

What do these two scenarios have to do with **zazen**? Is it really factual that the practice of zazen can greatly reduce levels of anxiety?

You are probably aware that years of research shows substantial proof that meditation can lower your heart rate and blood pressure, calm stress disorders, and greatly enhance emotional health and wellness. But do you know how to involve zazen with Karate-do?

In its simplest form **zazen** (seated meditation) is a recuperative and peace-of-mind posture assumed before and after martial arts training. Zazen can be performed in crossing legs (kekkaфуza) posture or in a sitting (seiza) position while maintaining a *thought-free* mind, yet totally aware of external influences. The level of your awareness (kakusoku) is to awaken from distraction and dullness, not concentrating on any particular object or trying to control your thoughts.

Zazen is viewed as thought without thought, thinking without thinking (hishiryō satori), a division or higher level of thought without thinking, which modern psychologists refer to as consciousness. Zazen is not a form of meditation or mental exercise. Rather, it is the return to what is regarded as the "normal human condition"; a state of mind which is free from the pressures and demands of daily life, and from any goals or desire for gain. The wish to reach any goal by performing zazen will prevent you from achieving it.

In the peace-of-mind posture, you exhale completely and take a breath (kanki-issoku). You relax by breathing calmly while attempting to maintain an empty (thought free) mind. The three components of zazen (posture, breathing, and mental attitude) should be peaceful, stable, and natural. The posture and breathing are easier to learn, and their physical benefits can be immediately felt. However, the proper mental attitude, which is of primary importance, is difficult to comprehend and attain. The pure state of zazen is *freedom of mind* or *peace-of-mind*.

In Japan, seated zazen is traditionally performed on a mat called a zabuton, while sitting on a cushion called a zafu. The common positions used to sit on the zafu are: kekkaфуza (full-lotus), hankafuza (half-lotus), Burmese (a cross-legged posture in which the ankles are placed together in front of the sitter), and seiza (a kneeling posture using a bench or zafu).

It is through the practice of zazen that the Samurai arrived at the perfection of their art. This is why zazen is known as the "religion of the Samurai".

Concepts for your review:

Meditate:	to consider, in deep thought
Thought:	the act of thinking
Think:	to consider, to reason, to surmise

Mind levels during karate movements (from highest to lowest):

Kata:

3 rd Level:	Mushin, not thinking, body moves fast and naturally
2 nd Level:	Thinking sometimes, body still awkward, rhythm and timing are off
1 st Level:	Thinking too much, confused, off balance, uncoordinated

Kumite:

3 rd Level:	Mushin, detached thinking, no thought, body reacts instinctively
2 nd Level:	Thinking produces the four mental blocks; body movement is slow
1 st Level:	Don't know what to do or what to think; the mind freezes

Different Mind Levels:

3rd Level:

Zazen:	Thought-free, yet aware of external influences
Consciousness:	Mentally aware of one's surroundings

2nd Level:

Meditation:	Deep thinking, focused and concentrating
Conscious:	Awake, having all faculties and senses

1st Level:

Daydreaming:	Mind is awake but is wandering elsewhere
Daydreaming & Driving:	Awake but not using senses
Drunk:	Half awake, impaired senses
Sleep (dreaming):	Mind active, body sleeping
Sleep (deep):	Mind and body is inactive

Below 1st Level:

Unconscious:	Out cold, no faculties
Coma:	No brain waves, mind is dead but heart is still beating
Death:	No mind or no body activity of any kind