

“Too many mind” and the art of efficient code.

A skilled, yet junior student of the art of combat faces a more proficient, wiser opponent. Bokken in hand, the student attacks with a fierce downward cut. Quickly his opponent blocks the attack. The student attacks again and again searching for a way through his opponents defences. His opponent effortlessly continues to block the attacks. But the student's time has run out, the opponent neutralises the next attack and throws the student unceremoniously onto his back. The combatants disengage and the Sensei approaches and bows “Please forgive. Too many mind. The student is perplexed “Too many mind?” Seeing confusion in his student's eyes he adds “Mind sword, mind face, mind people watch. Too many mind. No mind!” The student searches for the meaning in this lesson. Struggling to find the meaning he mutters “No mind?” The Sensei bows, “Hai, No mind, you try!” The student turns and heads back into combat. The student pauses and then attacks with a powerful diagonal cut towards his opponent. The attack is blocked with a crash of wood on wood. The student lunges again at his opponent who again sees the attack and blocks effortlessly. The student loses balance and in desperation clings to the back of his opponent. A moment later the student is brought crashing to the ground writhing in a momentary wave of pain and the fight is over. The training session ends.

This, in case you had not recognised it was a scene out of the movie “The Last Samurai”. The lessons of Nobutada within this scene are profound to say the least. They are significant not only to one martial art, but to all. The lessons learnt from this scene also apply to a number of elements of martial arts training of which I would like to discuss one in this article.

You attend your Aikido club and the Sensei teaches a technique in response to a Shomen tsuki (front punch) attack. You face off against your attacker. The moment prior to the attack, what goes through your mind? The technique? The thought of being hit? What other students, Sensei or onlookers may be thinking? Will the attack be from the left or right? For a beginner it may also be the fundamentals to the technique such as the position of the feet and hands. For many it may be the numerous actions that we must all manage as part of our busy lives; must pay the car tax that month, complete the business report by Friday, get the kids to the dentist. These all cascade into our training clogging up our thoughts, given the space to do so. In computing terms we all have a finite amount of cache or memory allocated to transient short term activity. To fill this cache with inconsequential activity impairs our overall performance. However to empty that cache totally is an open request to fill it with something.

Have you ever tried thinking of nothing? It's a tall order. Attempting to think of nothing is to encourage thinking of something. It's as if the mind rejoices in the

space that you have attempted to make in short term memory and celebrates by filling it with 'things'. A way to overcome this is to put one thing in memory, one line of code in cache. The mind seems happier with this and can contain itself (with some effort) from filling it with other things. You may have encountered this in meditation with the suggestion of thinking of a light bulb on a dark background or darkness with a single star. In self defence situations, again in computing parlance, this translates as a single line of code in cache such as "avoid" or "kote gaeshi" or "irimi". With these single commands, the rest of the allocated memory is available to use as you wish. So how should it be used?

Essential information to aid in the safe outcome of an event is there for us all to see and use should we wish. This in part relies on us clearing our minds of clutter (non essential things) to give us the time and the space to analyse them. This could be facial evidence of the attacker's intent, information with regard to other dangers or risks such as a second or third attacker or a concealed weapon for example. Over and above this, less information to process equates to high performance. These factors result in seemingly fast reaction from the experienced practitioner that the less experienced can sometimes find difficult to comprehend. This lack of comprehension is understandable as they are processing information as quick if not quicker than their more experienced counterpart, what they fail to realise however is that they are processing more information, information which is unessential to the outcome and therefore will always be slower as more information to process will always equate to slower performance.

Fear you will also find has the inordinate ability to fill this precious area of memory with information which will ironically increase the risk to life and limb. Fear writes lines of code in your cache questioning your chances of survival. As your mind actions these commands you become more and more unable to quickly execute a task which will move you out of harms way. Instead you will move too soon, execute moves badly or simply exude fear which is exactly what your attacker is hoping for. The only way to avoid this is to face fear itself. Say to yourself "OK, I may be hit, so what!" With this acceptance you can keep this memory clear and continue your training. Whole books have been dedicated to this subject and so will not attempt to discuss this further here. Needless to say this is a lifetime's challenge to achieve, but an achievable one never the less

It is also true to say that the mind often betrays itself by physically enacting its thoughts such as intent to move which can be seen in the movement of the eyes or a slight change in weight distribution dependant on the intended direction. This self betrayal can be removed by reducing ones thoughts to a minimal set of items essential to the effective outcome of a situation and that in reality is a rather small list of things. Thus "Too many mind" perfectly encompasses how to improve ones effectiveness as a martial artist by actually thinking less. This in itself is a constant challenge that requires practice. Do not lose heart with the fact that as a beginner your cache is full of lines of code detailing everything you need to do to defend

against a particular specific attack; which leg to place forward, which arm is lower and which is higher, when should you move etc. As your experience increases the lines of code you require decrease. I would surmise (as I do not know) that a master may well only have one line of code and one command "Breath"

Therefore to reach this goal one must practice diligently aiming to purge ones cache whilst rewriting ones code with a set of ever decreasing basic commands. If only all code could be written in this way!

Sensei Hall