

Mokusô (黙想)

Mokusô is generally translated as “silent meditation or contemplation” and is usually performed at the start and end of each training session. In Karate it is done in *seiza*, where one sits erect on the heels with one’s legs folded under. The hands rest palms down on the thighs.

“The back is kept straight and extended with the nose positioned in line with the navel and the eyes half open, focused on a point on the floor approximately 45 centimeters (18 inches) in front of the knees” (Kanazawa 2006: 45).

Kanazawa Hirokazu then gives detailed instructions pertaining to breathing and breathing cycles (15 to 20 seconds per inhalation and exhalation). As long as you breathe as naturally as possible though, no time frame has to be kept. Breathing should be done in an abdominal fashion by gently manipulating the diaphragm. The length of *mokusô* can vary from about one to a few minutes.

The eyes are half open or half closed (in Japanese it can mean both: 半眼 *hangan* literally means “half eye”) and the gaze should not be fixed but can be slightly blurry and is directed obliquely in front of the sitting person (the Japanese love precision but there is no ruler needed). Buddhist statues often show the Buddhas or Bodhisattvas with their eyelids in a lowered position and *hangan* is the preferred method when sitting in meditation Zen-style (座禅 *zazen*). It is said to prevent drowsiness and helps you to stay fully awake, since your brain receives a stimulus from the perception of dim light.

Mokusô as meditation

Mokusô as meditation in Zen-style can be described as awareness of oneself (one’s Self), of one’s consciousness and everything therein. It is being conscious of being conscious,

which is described as meta-cognition. This is arguably a unique faculty of the human mind. Meditation does not mean to suppress thoughts or emotions. It means to observe them without judgement. Thoughts are not pursued, not pushed away, they can come and go. It is popularly compared to looking at clouds in the sky. You just watch them drift by without any kind of intervention. It is not a thoughtless state. One is just not affected by thoughts passing by. Pure observation brings about total awareness, a state of mind in which you are completely here and abide in the now. This is also the ideal state of mind in combat. It is the Zen-mind.

Mokusô as contemplation

However, *mokusô* does not necessarily preclude discursive thinking. *Moku* means “silence” and “*sô*” is read in Japanese as “*omou*”, which means “to think”. Thus *mokusô* can also be interpreted as “quietly pondering over something”. In this sense you can actively create an attitude of getting physically and mentally ready for training at its beginning. Whilst doing *mokusô* after training you can foster an attitude of thankfulness for having had the chance to boost your health, calm your emotions and enhance your spiritual well being. This is exactly what the activity in a Dôjô is meant to be for. *Mokusô* therefore is a sort of short *rite de passage*. *Mokusô* helps you to mentally switch from the outside world into the serene atmosphere of the Dôjô and also serves as a threshold to step back into the profane everyday life.

Regardless of how you practice it – as Zen-like meditation or contemplation/deliberation – *mokusô* should be the cornerstone of every training session.

Reference:

Kanazawa Hirokazu: *Black Belt Karate. The Intensive Course.*
Foreword by Masatoshi Nakayama. Translated by Richard
Berger. Tokyo, London, New York: Kodansha Intl. 2006

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