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## **Group Discussion on Takuan Soho's "Fudochishinmyoroku"** **by David M. Valadez**

### **Deshi 1: Peace and the Path of Peace**

Deshi 1: Sensei and all, I would like to ask a question that has come to mind after beginning the reading. Why is it that we train as we do? Meaning, the translator talks about how these letters are written to schools that trained warriors for the Shogun or people who were involved in life and death type battles. The recipients of these letters lived a reality that had them facing life and death struggles in battle. Our lives are not nor will they ever be as severe as the recipients of these letters. Therefore, what is it that draws us to train and/or why should we bother training? Cannot a person live their life without this hard, painful, and not always pleasant type of training? Can we not find something that does not require so much dedication but that offers as much? Moreover, what about the "happy-go-lucky" types, those who do not train, are they worse off? Would not Yoga do the same and yet not hurt so much or bring up so many fears? On a related note, why is it that we have difficulty viewing the dojo environment as nurturing? Why do the dojo and our commitment to it so often come to us as "pressure" or as a "loss of free time?"

To expand upon this last set of questions: I have heard the dojo environment referred to as "pressure." People relate to the dojo as something that they "have to do" vs. something that they are choosing to do. I have heard the dojo's etiquette and protocols referred to as a "pressure" placed on a person. In such cases, a person holding this view does not see that pressure as good or needed. Instead, they feel it is something attacking them, something making them not feel good or good enough. Under such viewpoints, one cannot embrace the dojo as a nurturing element, one trying to change us for the better. At best, the dojo is understood to be more of a drill instructor that is trying to force us to change. However, to change our physique, for example, we apply stress in the form of lifting weights or cardiovascular exercise, and our body adapts to the new stress and begins to change. In the same way, is not the "stress" applied to us by the dojo nothing more than an attempt to create a change in us – a change that we are seeking but that we simultaneously seem to fight against. Why, through the ins and outs of training, are we so resistant to change, to the "pressure" that brings about change? Why are we so attached to our current identity and our ego? Why can we not accept this "pressure" as a method of the change required?

Senshin Center: Let me thank you for bringing this up. While not part of the text itself, it is a subtext to what we are studying here today. It is the big “WHY?” of things. That kind of question is something that will always be a part of our training, even though it must be something we must in the end reconcile. Toward that, I would like to redirect folks to a link that I feel is relevant to this type of subtext. The rest of this reply here will be addressing those aspects of your comments that I feel are more related to the text itself, though I will of course be forced to overlap both issues in my response. Because of this, it is not necessary for the reader to have to read the following link in order to understand my position here. The link is to the Budo Contemplation, [“Why Do We Train?”](#)

Continuing onward... I think before we address these questions, some context, both philosophical and historical, is in order. First, the philosophical context: Budo, which is what we train in, has always carried within it a dual purpose. On the one hand, Budo is meant to address the spiritual cultivation of the human being. By spiritual cultivation, it is implied that one is working toward a perfection, or a fulfillment, or a completion of Self or Being. On the other hand, Budo is meant to address a type of martial prowess. At first glance, these things may appear to be contrary to each other. Alternatively, they may appear to be in some sort of causal or linear relationship to each other. Though it is common to understand these two aspects of Budo in these manners, such understandings can in no way be deemed accurate and/or truthful.

The best way to describe the relationship between these two aspects is to posit them as paradoxical to each other or to say, at most, they are incidental to each other. By suggesting that we are dealing with a paradox we at least hint at the idea that any first glance (which will generally include notions of contradiction and/or of linear-causal relationships) is going to be incorrect. By suggesting we are dealing with incidentals we note that primacy cannot and/or should not be given to one aspect over the other. Using an analogy: We can say that spiritual perfection and martial prowess are like a boat and the river upon which the boat floats. Without the boat, we do not float. Without the water, we do not float. With the boat and the water, we are able to float across the river. We can reach the other shore where these two aspects can come to be more accurately understood for what they are and for what they are not. Most of all, we come to understand their interdependency.

I mention this because it seems that the base of the position you are offering for us to consider lies in the assumption that if we have no immediate need for martial prowess, the kind that is at the level of constant “life and death” situations, we have no need for Budo. Such an assumption gives primacy to only one aspect of what Budo is and/or can be: martial prowess. However, because we should not separate spiritual perfection from martial prowess, such an assumption begs the following questions: Is Man in no need of spiritual cultivation simply because his or her exposure to war is limited or next to nothing? Is our material self, our selfish self, our angry self, our depressed self, our violent self, our egocentric self, our inconsiderate self, our prejudicial self, our neglectful self, our prideful self, our ignorant self, our self that is filled with hate, with fear, with jealousy, etc., in no need of purification simply because war is not on the horizon for us as individuals? Are our friends and family, our fellow Man, no longer needing us to possess a soul that they can depend upon, a soul that is nurturing, a soul that is humble, gracious, courageous, honorable, steadfast, and loving, simply because we do not meet upon the battlefield everyday? And the children of the world, are they so satisfied at every level of their being, brought about by the supposed absence of constant warfare, that they are without need for a parenting that is founded upon all that is sacred in the Universe? Is this world so perfect, is our life in this world so complete, is our experience of this lifetime so fulfilled, simply because we are without the daily threat of violence and/or warfare? I would think not. My point: When we approach Budo in this way, which is the correct way, it becomes almost irrelevant for us to point out that we are today not slave to the battlefield. For the fact remains, that we are still slave to a great many things, things, to be sure, that often support the need for battlefields, but

things that also keep us from nurturing ourselves and our loved ones, things that keep us separate from the Divine, and thus that separate us from the most complete experience of our humanity and of all Creation.

When one questions the validity of Budo or the applicability of Budo, one cannot question one side of Budo's nature and not the other. Therefore, to question the need for martial prowess is to question the need for spiritual cultivation. Equally then, and relevant to Budo, to question the need for spiritual cultivation, is to question the need for martial prowess. Naturally, this, as you have done in your questions, forces us to wonder if other Paths are not equally valid – if Budo cannot be substituted by something else. This is valid reasoning. Please, allow me to address this in a bit, after I have brought some of the historical context to the forefront.

Let us realize that Takuan was no warrior. He was a Zen monk. He began his monastic training at the age of ten years old. His letters are not of one man who faces death on the battlefield to another man who faces death on the battlefield. Though he was born of a samurai family, his eyes were not filled with the distant stare of combat long experienced. Let us also note that Munenori, the recipient of the letter we are currently reading, being fencing instructor to the Shogun, was a samurai of extremely high ranking, and thus was himself not continuously exposed to the realities of the battlefield – certainly not on any kind of regular and/or direct basis after he adopted such a position. Let us also note that Takuan's letters, which today are at the base of nearly all Budo praxis, were written at a time when Japan was in a state of relative peace (using the word “peace” cautiously here). Rather than big battles in which huge armies were pitched against other huge armies on a regular basis, the Edo period, which is a major period of modern Budo's actual development and the period in which this text was written, is more marked by “police” work – work that was more aimed at increasing or popularizing the notion of a unified “Japan” than it was at crushing enemies in a kind of Machiavellian fashion.

This is important to note. It alerts us to the fact that while martial arts had long preceded this time of relative peace, that while martial arts had long been associated with various religious and/or spiritual elements prior to this time of relative peace, modern Budo proper was born not on the battlefield, but was rather born away from it. After all, the warrior in the midst of battle, then and still now, is facing a different kind of practicality. He or she is facing a practicality that makes it difficult to move beyond the apparent immediacy of the body and its preservation. Thus, it is paramount to realize that the sophisticated spiritual praxis that is Budo is not hindered by peace, by the lack of a battlefield. Rather, as it was for its genesis, what is required most by Budo is a time of peace and/or of relative peace. This remains true no matter how martial we must be in our training. How then can we discredit Budo by saying, “But today, there are no battlefields”? Answer: We cannot. In truth, as we are still in a time of relative peace, we are in prime or fertile soil in which to cultivate both Budo and ourselves through Budo.

That said; let us address your other question of alternative Paths and/or substitutes to Budo. To be sure, there are many. However, we should not feel that these Paths are around every corner – especially today in the modern world or where the world has become modern. In a place like the United States for example, where the common form of religious practice is dominated by weekend participation in rituals that are often void of deep and/or truly meaningful types of experience (the kind that can transform the Self), one is not likely to find an equally viable form of spiritual cultivation without some serious looking. However, out of all the truly viable forms of spiritual cultivation that are indeed out there, not one of them will provide a path clear of pain, free of suffering, without loneliness, absent of fear, void of hardship, and lacking in moments of doubt. There is no viable path to spiritual cultivation that will not require of us that we have faith, that we are courageous, that we possess endurance, that we are strong, that we capable of both discipline and commitment.

In addressing your specific example: Legitimate Yoga is indeed a valid system of spiritual cultivation. However, finding a valid Yoga education is nearly impossible in this world. It is a dying tradition and it is more alien to the modern world than Budo is. Thus, more than likely, such a path would make Budo training appear to be a cakewalk in terms of easiness. Let us remember that the Buddha, whose teachings are at the heart of Budo and at Takuan's writings, rejected the path of the yogi as a path that is too extreme – too intense. Hence, Yoga is not the alternative one should look for in order to “bring up less fears.”

Yet, if on the other hand you are referring to what is now passing for “yoga” (here in the States for example), the answer is a clear “no.” No, this type of “yoga” cannot act as a substitute to Budo training. Why should it? It is just a reinvention of stretching. It is merely a re-packaging of the “new exotic.” It is just the latest trend that beats with the same heart of material gain and satisfaction. To be sure, flexibility training has its place in Budo training, but stretching will not ever make us one with God. Being flexible in body will not allow us to be flexible in heart or in mind – especially when life seems to be “pressuring” us to be otherwise. Feeling good about ourselves will not help us to be good toward others – not when others will need it or deserve it most – not when times are truly trying.

It is like this for Aikido as well – should Aikido training be reduced to the mere repetition of waza. When a path is reduced to its most superficial elements, when a path is with no need for a full investment on the part of the practitioner, when a path does not “pressure” us at the deepest levels of our being, such a path is no Path. It is merely hobby, merely activity. If we run to such activities, knowing that they can never truly be Paths, particularly after we have seen the light of Budo, after we have felt its forging heat upon our body/minds, then we must realize that we are not running to such activities, nor are we even running away from Budo. Rather, we are running away from ourselves. We are running so that we do not have to reveal ourselves to ourselves. We are running to where we know we can hide ourselves from ourselves. Such an act then is not the simple act of picking something more akin to our liking. Such an act is favoring only what allows us to ignore what we hate most about ourselves. Spiritually speaking, such an act is merely an act of cowardice. Spiritually speaking, it is us forfeiting our chance at cultivating fearlessness. Thus, spiritually speaking, it is us forfeiting our chance of ever really cultivating the capacity for practicing true Love in our lives. At every level of our being then, it is the greatest of losses we can ever opt to take. Moreover, it is not only us that come to feel this loss. It is a loss that will be felt by our friends, by our family, by our spouses, by our children, and by our fellow Man.

Takuan writes, “It must be said that the enlightening of one's mind depends on the depths of one's efforts.”

## **The Empty Center**

Deshi 2: Sensei, I was hoping you could expand upon the following paragraph found on page 20 of my book:

"If you place yourself before your opponent, your mind will be taken by him. You should not place your mind within yourself. Bracing the mind in the body is something done only at the inception of training, when one is a beginner."

There is also a passage in the Introduction (page 15) that is discussing the three letters and reads:

"Individually and broadly speaking, one could say that *Fudochishinmyoroku* deals not only with technique, but with how the self is related to the Self during the confrontation and how an individual may become a unified whole."

Could you please expand on the Self vs. self concept.

Senshin Center: Please let me first respond to the first passage you cite. In doing so, I would like to share with you a conversation I am having with another instructor of Aikido. The main answer to your question is found at the end of the discussion. The conversation is concerned with the "hara" or the "center" – its location and how we should come to experience it, think about it, relate to it, etc. It is the hara, or rather the technique of placing one's mind at one's hara, that Takuan is referring to with this caveat. Placing one's mind at one's hara is a common way of utilizing one's imagination in order to foster a deeper sense of grounding and/or of directional harmony in one's movement. It is a technique found throughout East Asian martial arts.

Our conversation began after I made the following comment – attempting to caution some folks for equating the "hara" with the "center of gravity." I said:

"'Hara' only overlaps with the 'center of gravity' in terms of meaning here and there. In my opinion, it does not serve one too well to only think of the hara as the center of gravity. There are many more connotations associated with the hara that are not associated with the center of gravity. In addition, the center of gravity is not a specific location in the body. It is dynamic by nature and is in a constant state of flux. This is because movement, which affects the positioning and balance of the body, is always in a constant state of flux.

When I first started training, I was always told things like "move from your center," "use your center," "concentrate on your center," etc. As a teacher, I realize that if you do not have your center already, these phrases are meaningless since there is no common point of reference being used - no shared context. I have only found them to be useful in terms of getting a student to grasp the concept that there is more to know and do than they already know and can do. For me, phrases like these have only become truly efficient when I combine them with some basic exercises that work to establish a common reference and/or context regarding "center."

For example, it is important to realize that the center of anything can only exist because there are at least two peripheries. It is also mandatory that these peripheries be in a relationship with each other - a co-dependent one. Thus, if you want to find your center, particularly before you know what that is and/or before you experience what that is, seek to establish a co-dependent relationship between the two peripheries that are the very things that mark and define 'center.' In particular, and most commonly, be sure that your head and feet are in a constant and co-dependent relationship to each other. When they are, you will have established centered movement. When they are not, you will have lost center. This is why awareness must not only go to some point abstractly located proximate to your navel, awareness must travel the length of one's body (from head to toe) - then center will be manifested naturally, almost of its own accord."

This sparked the following reply from another instructor (henceforth referred to as "XX"), and thus our own conversation began:

XX: I agree with what David Valadez has said here (and on his web site by the way). To expand on that a bit, I would say that when students have no common point of reference [in regards to 'center'], it is much better to talk about maintaining your posture and moving from where your legs attach to the trunk of your

body (as the center of your movement). That will help people ensure that their "head and feet are in a constant and co-dependent relationship to each other," resulting in somewhat centered movement. Several really good sempai have explained to me that 'hara' is 'emptiness.' That has been making more and more sense to me lately (in terms of feeling). It helps me work on keeping things intimate and not personal.

I (henceforth marked as "Senshin Center") replied by attempting to find that part on our web site that XX was referring to. I offered this, from the Exchange, "Center." The Exchange reads:

Deshi: How does one become the center of the technique?

Sensei: to become the center you must in every way be worthy of the center. Lack but a little, and your moment as center is at best short-lived. To hold the center is to hold the workings of the Universe. To support that burden you cannot be found wanting.

As it turned out, XX was referring to another writing.

XX: I was referring to something I read on your site about Aikido being the reconciliation of all paradoxes, or something like that. It was well said and I cannot do it justice.

I comment on it here, because that is how I see "center" too. Center exists between unification and separation, between tension and release, between moving and rest, and between holding in and pushing out. Also, if you model your Aikido technique after the kotodama (like O-sensei), then you never stop expanding during Aikido technique. Since your arms (etc.) have a physical limitation to how much they can lengthen, to continually expand, you have to continually move your center (and consequently uke's center) to allow this to happen. I have a lot more work/research to do in this area!

About the center, the thing that eludes me is how to recognize where to make space, such that the feeling of center-contact is maintained along with the direction you have set (and are maintaining). I can do an okay job of this in basic waza (because someone already did a good job mapping out the general choreography), but I do not have much experience doing this in free waza yet (not on purpose). The center of that seems to exist between desire and aversion (closer to the aversion side than the desire side) -- so it is not the "exact center." I've been playing around with the balance of this, being that Uke has to balance this out by behaving a bit closer to the desire side than the aversion side for this all to work out as a system with a center. However, what does that say about doing Aikido with the "kamikaze" type attackers? The question, "Where's the hara?" has difficult answers.

Senshin Center: Please, let me ask you to expand a bit more on this notion of desire and aversion (and the 'in-between' of those things). I believe I have a sense of what you are referring to, but I would want to make sure I am thinking of the same things before I attempt to add anything more to what you are saying.

Let me say this now however: Your position reminds me of something I have been studying in the Heart Sutra of late - which also relates to your mentioning of the concept, "emptiness." In particular, your notions of desire and aversion remind me of the line in the sutra that reads, "no attainment and no non-attainment." However, let me hear more, please, before I go on.

XX: I can explain what I mean regarding desire and aversion in the physical sense easily enough. When you move your body close to your partner's body and bend your arms a bit to get even closer - to get more control - you are way on the "desire" side. When you move or keep your body at arms length (or more) from your partner - to have more safety - you are way on the "aversion" side. I find I need to set things up by starting with a little extra "desire" and then move away (or maybe I should say "expand away"), so that

my arms are almost 95% extended - so I can keep the center-to-center connection. If I were to get to 100% extended, I would be totally in "aversion."

I think you can describe the feeling of emptiness better than I can, so please feel invited to elaborate. My limited understanding of the Heart Sutra is that it speaks to the very sophisticated idea of how the "absolute" is relative to the relative - absolutely. (Kind of like recursion!) This kind of monistic-dualism or dualistic-monism (however you like to think about it) is certainly the heart of the issue for going beyond the typical Aikido practice.

A whole lot of this is murky, because of translation issues. For instance, the idea of separation and unification is a little confusing in that when American's say "separation" we mean, "100% cut off in all ways", and the Japanese words we are translating more have a sense of, "separated from the whole in some way(s), but still connected to the whole in some other way(s)". However, I am way out of my league in articulating this kind of thing.

I suppose I would sum this all up by saying that my hara is located around intestines that move somewhat freely. My physical hara is generally empty. Maintaining a very tangible feeling of emptiness is a good tool to help me move in an optimally connected and reflexive way. That is what hara means to me, now, at my current level.

Senshin Center: If you will allow me to work my way through my own thoughts, using your ideas/terms...

I think I may get what you are saying. Definitely, it is very interesting and it has certainly made a simple question (i.e. "Where is your hara?") that wanted so badly to stay at the level of anatomical locations take notice of itself – forcing it to become more than it ever thought possible.

I think at one level you are using a binary logic (e.g. desire and aversion) to demonstrate a tactical optimum – one particular to the maai necessary to maintain both connection and a center-to-center relationship between Nage and Uke. At this level, which is deceptively simple, it almost seems as if your position is making use of a philosophy of balance and/or of middle ground. In particular, you are suggesting that one cannot be "too close" or "too far," that one must be "just right" (in between "too far" and "too close"). Since we are talking about "center" here, or even "hara," we are to understand that this "just right" is interdependent to both having a sense of center and an experience of center. That is to say, to speak of "hara" or of "center" (which we may or may not want to equate), but to not understand either one as part of an interdependency is to miss something huge about "hara" or "center." If I may, I would say, to be stuck on the anatomically positioning of "hara" or "center," such that we lose track of this interdependency, is to be stuck at a very mundane or embryonic level of understanding and experience regarding "hara" or "center."

Your position also asks us to realize that any sense of "hara," or of "center," should include a correct notion of body/mind. That is to say, we cannot find "center" by physical means alone – absent of spiritual, mental, and emotional considerations. While theoretically, it may seem very possible to "locate" one's "hara" or "center," in actual practice, where "hara" or "center" is most needed and most presumed, simply knowing where one's "hara" or "center" is on or in one's body amounts to little. Such an attempt opens one up to Korzybski's critical statement of, "A map is not the territory."

If we look at your examples of desire and aversion, we can see that we are indeed looking at things of the mind – things that do have an affect on the body. For example, often we are too close or too far because we are anxious, or too insecure. It is rarely the case that we are just "too close" or just "too far." There is usually an emotional content to our physical expressions. For example, depending upon our personal

history and make-up, our insecurities can have us attempting to smother uke's actions, rather than letting them complete themselves. Lacking in faith, we force techniques hoping that some sort of application of Target Creation will suffice in meeting our perceived idea of "success." "Success" mistakenly being understood and experienced as an end to one's feelings of insecurity. As a result, we stop relating to the whole of the situation, we come to neglect the interdependency that exists between our center, uke's center, the center of the technique, the center of the encounter, and the center of the Universe. All that lies at the "center" of things is our insecurity and our attempts to quell it, but this "center" is no center since it negates all else that is in relationship to it. It is egocentric, and by that we mean that it is neglectful even of its own periphery. Thus, it is an anti-center, of sorts.

The same would apply for being too much on the side of aversion – it too may be seated in insecurity and anxiousness. That is to say, a particular state of mind can easily affect our physical use of center in the direction of either extreme. If we are of a personal history and make-up that has us more fleeing than smothering when we attempt to alleviate or address our fears, it is quite possible that we will lose the center of the technique, and the tactical center of proper body mechanics, simply because we adopt the anti-center of egocentricism (as we attempt to find ourselves a new "secure" state of body/mind via pushing or keeping Uke away).

Therefore, it would seem to me that you are quite correct in suggesting that our notion of center could have, or even should have, these notions of "just right," of body/mind, and of interdependency. I think these elements are definitely important and do indeed seem to be some of the major things missing when we instructors say to students, "Use your center." That is to say, and referring back to an earlier comment I made, it is the absence of these things that leads to a loss of mutual context or point of reference, which leads to a lack of understanding and/or immediate availability of center – which leads to the (practical) meaninglessness of such phrases. My early attempts to get students to focus upon the interdependent relationship that should exist between their head and their feet (and thus the center of those two peripheries) is my effort to get folks to realize that there is more to "hara" or "center" than mere location (as on a map). It is my attempt to get them to realize that there are also these other things involved: "just rightness," body/mind considerations, and a law of interdependency.

At another level, one born out of your use of interdependency, your position is extremely complicated, but also extremely sophisticated. Earlier, I mentioned the center of Uke, the center of Nage, the center of the technique, the center of the encounter, and the center of the Universe. We may want to understand these things as permanent and individual entities. However, because of the law of interdependency, we have to acknowledge that these things do not exist until they all exist. Yet, equally, we must say, because that is so, because they have no independent nature of their own, these things do not exist. Because the latter is what we may misunderstand the most, we may be better serving ourselves by understanding center not as some thing or some things we should gain but as some thing or some things we should lose. I can acknowledge that to some, particularly those who train only or mostly in Shu level training and/or in Kihon waza, this last statement is absurd and even irrelevant. However, equally, I can recognize that to those who are fulfilling the Shu-Ha-Ri model and/or doing a lot of spontaneous training, pointing to a place on your body and saying, "Use that," is equally absurd and irrelevant.

XX: I agree with your line of thinking almost entirely. I admit that the majority of my class is Kihon Waza - but what I am researching is certainly not "basics for the sake of basics." I have read several papers on Shu-Ha-Ri, but I think I do not have it well understood. My assumption is that the Shu level is like the Shoden level, the Ha level is like the Chuden level, and the Ri level is like the Okuden level, but that is just my guess from trying to figure it out from context.



I love the idea of “egocentric” being an anti-center - in the way we are thinking about center. My thoughts are that ego is what separates you from your true Self (the true Self you are supposed to be working on manifesting by means of Aikido practice). I suppose I consider my true Self to be the center of how my mind and hara form an interdependent relationship, and therefore my ego can never truly be “centric.” The term “ego-centric” seems to consist of antipodes.

When you say, “because of the law of interdependency, we have to acknowledge that these things do not exist until they all exist.”

My thoughts to add about this are:

- a. I think I call this the principle of correspondence. (As above, so below, as it is below, so it is above). Basically, all principles are meta-principles of that one.
- b. I guess I feel that my center, and the center of the Universe exist, and the center of the technique, and the center of the Uke all exist, even if the Uke is unaware that any of these centers exist.

So, while I see no disagreement here, I am not convinced about “understanding center not as some thing or some things we should gain but as some thing or some things we should lose.” Maybe - again I am a bit dense. But I see it as you probably have to gain a few things as well as lose a few things for center. It is not very easy to give some things up.

Senshin Center: All of this stems from the direct experience of witnessing aikidoka who appear to be quite skilled while performing Kihon Waza and/or institutionally approved types of Jiyu Waza or Randori, but completely fall apart under what in comparison has to be called truer spontaneous conditions. Basic things go right out the window – things as basic as the capacity to clear the line of the attack, or enter into shikaku (especially when it is at the back of the attacker); even things as elementary as tenkan-ashi seem to be beyond the practitioner’s access. Undoubtedly then, something as essential, and as sophisticated, as “center” is also most often absent. Under such conditions, the problem does not seem to be one of “Where is my center?” as much as it is “How do I gain or maintain access to center?” The former question is going to have us looking for places on the body. The latter question is going to have us concerned with those things that prevent us from maintaining and/or gaining access to center. Thus, more than physical location is going to become significant. Naturally, then, we are going to have to simultaneously look for mental, emotional, and spiritual components, since these things very often make us lose or have no access to our center.

In my opinion, this is a problem for both the instructor attempting to lead others to true spontaneity with the art, and this is a problem for any student of the art attempting such an accomplishment. I would not say that this problem is universal or even that we should make it universal – not everyone will or will want to train toward such aims. However, for those that do, the absence of center within spontaneous training environments and the reasons why it becomes absent are significant issues. With these concerns comes dissatisfaction with the usual discourse (e.g. “Put your mind in your center.” “Use your center.” Etc.). This is because under such training conditions, putting your mind somewhere is not the problem, is not something you are not doing. The problem is that you are putting your mind too many places, that too many things are fettering it. To put your mind in any place, it is quickly realized under such training conditions, is to lose center. We lose center when we put our mind in any place because our mind (and thus our body) becomes captured by the place where we allow our mind to rest. This is basic Takuan, but I feel it is still applicable and thus definitely remains insightful. Moreover, within intense spontaneous training conditions, the mind being captured by various places, things, feelings, etc., is readily visible. That is to say, this is a real problem. So maybe there is indeed something to Takuan’s caveat when he says, “You should not place your mind within yourself. Bracing the mind in the body is something done only at the inception of training, when one is a beginner.”

If we look at the examples of desire (i.e. too close) and aversion (i.e. too far away), and note how these things may very well be related to the egocentric or the anti-center of having to address our own fears and insecurities and thus being reduced to acting or reacting in a habitual manner, we can see that it is our mind (emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, etc.) that is being captured by our fears or our insecurities. The thing with spontaneous training environments, in contrast to Kihon Waza training environments, is that they have a way of reducing us very quickly to our most habitual selves – which almost always has us related to the world and others via our fears. When that happens we lose “center” because we are allowing our mind to “rest” in our emotions or in our subjective and habitual experience of reality (i.e. “I’m afraid, must smother” or “I’m afraid, must retreat or keep at bay”). When our mind (and thus our body) rests in the anti-center, for whatever reason, we lose touch with our Uke, with the engagement, and even with ourselves. But what does it mean to be in touch with ourselves, with the engagement, and with Uke? What does that mean in terms of center? Answering this, I feel, will bring us to this notion of interdependency and why we might gain more by understanding center as more akin to emptiness than to an anatomical position on or in the body.

When we ourselves are centered, it is assumed that we are centered in relation to our own body AND in relation to what action we are performing or attempting. This is what makes our sense of center practical (i.e. able to be employed under spontaneous conditions). When we understand “center” in this way, we understand that a center-to-center connection with another person warrants that any sense of center must include a notion of being multi-relational and/or harmonious with multiple centers. That is to say, if I am moving in a “centered” fashion in regards to my own body mechanics but my own body mechanics is not in harmony with what my opponent is doing, then my sense of center will quickly falter and become extinct or false the second I engage my attacker. This is a way that we can understand being “too close” or being “too far” – too stuck in desire or too stuck in aversion: our center is out of synch with Uke’s and the center of the engagement.

However, in relating the center of our being to the center of someone else, because we are addressing the issue of possessing a practical sense of center, we are also relating these centers to the center of a tactical architecture. In the same way as before, when I am not connecting to the center of the tactical architecture, or when I am not using the properly “centered” architecture for how I am opting to relate my center to the center of uke, my center again falters and becomes extinct or false. For example, when I am too close, my center becomes too stressed and my posture may break; when I am too far, I may have to overextend in order to reach my attacker, etc. In the same way, this architectural center relates to the center of the engagement, since the center of the engagement determines the “rightness” of the tactical architecture. Continuing onward, the center of the engagement is itself determined by the center of the universe and/or what we might want to consider the natural laws of the Universe. Thus, as an extension of the same reasoning, if I lose one center, I lose them all. If I have only one center, I have none. I must have them all in order to have any of them.

When I do not have my center, when I am not moving in a bio-mechanically efficient manner, I am weak and inefficient and my attacker easily dominates me. When I am moving in a bio-mechanically correct manner but doing so irrelevant to what my attacker is doing, my movement becomes awkward and inefficient and my attacker easily dominates me. When I have my center, and I am relating that center to the center of my attacker, but I am not relating these things to the center of tactical architecture I am opting to employ, my technique becomes forced and inefficient and my attacker easily dominates me. When I have my center, and I am relating it to the center of my attacker and to the center of the tactical architecture I am opting to use, but I am not relating it to the center of the total engagement, my awareness becomes

staccato or too narrow and my movement becomes inefficient and my attacker easily dominates me. When I have my center, and I am relating it to the center of my attacker and to the center of the tactical architecture I am using, and when all of these things are being properly related to the center of the total engagement, but I am out of synch with the center of the Universe, Nature's laws regarding movement, energy, the transference of energy, and even Chance, work against me and my movement becomes inefficient and my attacker easily dominates me. In short, I can fall from center nearly anywhere, and when I do, I fall from every center. Moreover, if it is the case that my emotional experiences can pull me off center and toward the anti-center of egocentricism, then it is obvious that I will have to drop a great many things like insecurity, fear, anxiousness, etc., in order to remain centered.

In the end, I am suggesting, it is the dropping off of things that will probably lend itself more to having a practical sense of center within spontaneous environments than anything else. If the problem is the abiding mind or the fettered mind, giving such a mind one more thing to locate and/or to think about might be doing the very opposite of what we wish. This brings us right back to Takuan's caveat. Having fewer things to be fettered with, or more accurately, having more capacity to be unattached to such places, things, emotions, etc., might be the answer. It may be that by losing more we may gain everything.

On your second question...

The translator is positing that the text in question is more than a martial arts manual. That is to say, the text in question pertains to more than mere strategic and/or tactical considerations. Alternatively, and perhaps more accurately, we can say that the text is working from the position that the apex of strategic and/or tactical considerations can only be achieved via the perfection of Self. Perhaps we can even suggest that the source for the perfected Self and for perfect strategic and/or tactical considerations is the same. Hence, Takuan suggests, the things that plague the perfection of Self and the perfection of strategic and/or tactical considerations are the same. This is why he speaks of "abiding in ignorance," of "delusion," of "the fettered mind," and of "stopping." The translator understands the notion of Perfection of Self as the unification of the two selves – self and Self.

The idea of "two selves" has made its way in and out of Buddhist thought throughout history. In the end, however, it is something that has to be rejected or at least reconciled. It is important to note that such a concept is indeed a beginner concept – this is true no matter how its presence has been philosophically justified. Thus, it is a position that can only be considered as necessary as it equally remains something we should move beyond. Generally, the notion of two selves suggests that there is our everyday/mundane self, and that there is a higher and/or truer Self. Sometimes these are referred to as the "small self" and the "True Self." In this case, they are being noted with lower and upper cases. Other times they are noted as the "lesser self" and the "Greater Self." Sometimes they are equated with "ego" and "Buddha Nature." There are many variations on these themes, but, generally, they all amount to the same thing: our self that is stuck in delusion, and our potential self or true nature that is free of delusion.

When these ideas are used, the notion of "unification" is often also used. The notion of "unification" is used to note the reconciliation of these two aspects of our being. It should be noted, sometimes this notion of reconciliation is understood as "two becoming one," but at other times it is even understood as "two becoming none." Together, the notions of lesser and greater selves, and the notion of unification, reveal that while these ideas are found here and there within Buddhist thought, they are really pre-Buddhist and part of the pan-religious culture of India – particularly both Vedic and Brahmin. (India being the birthplace of Buddhism.)

In fact, the Buddhist tradition actually arose out of rejection of these ideas. For the Buddha, there was no self – no lesser self, no greater self, and thus no need for unification. The Buddha's notion of "no self"

(trans. anatman) was grounded in the idea that true existence required true innateness. Therefore, because nothing can be said to exist in and of itself, that is to say, because nothing in the universe can be shown to exist outside of a relationship it holds with at least one other thing, nothing in this universe is innate and thus nothing in this universe, including the self, can be said to exist. For the Buddha, reality was grounded upon emptiness. This was important to the Buddha because he suggested that all of Man's sufferings could at some level be traced to the delusion that things exist. Takuan's writings are an extension of this aspect of the Buddha's teachings.

Thus while it is sometimes common to hear of two selves in Buddhist thought, it is really out of place. This is true particularly in those Buddhist schools that are based heavily upon the Heart Sutra (such as Zen – of which Takuan is a monk). In some ways, the Heart Sutra offers a position even more alien to the notion of two selves than the Buddha's original position. Before the Heart Sutra, the notions of self and no-self were brought to a very sophisticated level of thought and practice. The Heart Sutra is a re-evaluation of all of these ideas. In the sutra, while it of course repeats the Buddha's position that there is no self, the text also goes on to imply that one cannot even say there is no-self. For Zen then, there are not only not two selves, there is also no no-self – there is no self and there is no no-self. Interestingly enough, for many, such a position made it again philosophically possible to talk about two levels of truth, and thus two levels of reality, and thus again two kinds of self.

### **Deshi 3: On Meng Tzu**

Deshi 3: Sensei, could you explain what Takuan Soho is speaking about in the quote and sentence below. The quote is from page 38.

“SEEK THE LOST MIND’ - This is a saying of Mencius. It means that one should seek out the lost mind and return it to himself.”

Senshin Center: Meng Tzu is one of two Chinese thinkers who had their name Latinized. The other is Kung Tzu. Individually then, in the West, these men are often known respectively as Mencius and Confucius. The Latinization of their names is related to how “nicely” their ideas on morality, the nature of Man, the nature of the universe, and the nature of society, etc., corresponded with many of Europe's own understandings on these things – especially within the Church's point of view (particularly, the Jesuit point of view). Jesuit missionaries Latinized the names of “Master Meng” (Mencius) and “Master Kung” (Confucius).

Meng Tzu was born in the area now known as China in the fourth century, around 370 BCE. He came after Kung Tzu, and is greatly responsible for further developing the thought of Confucianism. Today, many scholars hold that were it not for Meng Tzu, the Confucianism that we know today would be known as something completely different. Many scholars say that Meng Tzu brought greater sophistication and depth to the thought of Kung Tzu.

The thinking of Meng Tzu is pivotal to nearly all East Asian traditions. In China, and thus in countries that were greatly influenced by China, like Japan, classical learning involved the studying of four great works. These four works were: “The Great Learning,” “The Doctrine of the Mean,” “The Analects” (which was said to be written by Kung Tzu), and “The Book of Mencius” (written by Meng Tzu). Anybody who underwent a classical education, which for a great time meant, “anybody who was

educated,” had to know these works inside and out - memorized. This is why we see Takuan, a Japanese Zen monk, quoting Meng Tzu in his letter to Yagyu. Interestingly, and I will come back to this later, Osensei, was also educated classically, and thus his own thinking is greatly influenced by Meng Tzu as well. My point here: The thought of Meng Tzu is at the core of East Asian philosophy. Thus, Meng Tzu finds his place firmly in both Budo and Aikido.

Before I go on to elaborate upon the quote directly, I would like to give a bit more background information on the thought of Meng Tzu. I think we will all find this quite relative to our own training and even to our reading of Takuan. Although the warrior traditions of Japan are often solely associated with Zen and/or with various elements from the Shinto tradition, Meng Tzu’s thought, as all Confucianism, should really be understood to form much of the base of Bushido and Budo. High-ranking warriors like Yagyu Munenori were undoubtedly educated in Confucianism – which as we will see is one possible reason why Takuan felt it necessary to address the thought of Meng Tzu. As such, whatever physical skills and/or spiritual cultivations Yagyu was to nurture over his training life, he would, like nearly any other warrior of that time, ensure that he would not contradict or violate the thought of Master Kung and Master Meng. This is how prominent a role Confucianism plays in the warrior traditions of Japan by the time Takuan was writing his letters.

Meng Tzu lived during a time of transition in Chinese culture and civilization – as Osensei lived in one following Meiji and WWII. During the fourth century BCE, various models of control – under which states were being divided into administrative districts - were gradually replacing the feudal systems of government in China. Land could be sold and purchased, and taxes could be levied. Though the thinking of Kung Tzu was known, Legalist philosophies were often adopted and aimed at producing centralized governments that were supported by highly productive agrarian economies. Legalist philosophies stressed the submission of the individual to the state and emphasized the importance of law in maintaining state control. Through such changes and through such policies, various states rose in unequal gain and power. During the time of Meng Tzu, this all came to mean a time of frequent wars. This period is known as “The Warring States Period.” It was a time when regional warlords sought to annex the smaller states around them in an attempt to consolidate more power. As a result, seven major states rose to political (i.e. military and economical) prominence. A side note: For those of you that have seen the movie “Hero,” that movie is said to be taking place during that time. The Jet Li character is an assassin from one of the smaller states that had been taken over by the King of a larger state. The King he is attempting to assassinate is the ruler of the state that centralizes all of China under a single government. At that time, war and Legalist philosophies made it easy for cynicism to prosper when it came to considering the nature of Man. In a time when Man was mostly understood by how his/her egotistic drives could be manipulated via various systems of reward and punishment, Meng Tzu further developed the thinking of Kung Tzu and said that Man was a moral creature. In profound disagreement with what was all around him, Meng Tzu posited that Man held an innate capacity to be good, wise, moral, humble, honorable, and truthful. For Meng Tzu, a human being was closet to his/her nature, was acting in harmony with his/her nature, when he/she acted morally and/or virtuous. Meng Tzu also equated this with being in tune with Heaven – at a personal level. What does it mean to be in tune with Heaven?

By the time the fourth century rolled around, a political rationale for the legitimacy of state was well in use in China. This political rationale was called “The Mandate of Heaven.” In very simplified terms, the Mandate of Heaven suggested that a given government could rule and/or had a right to rule because it had the support of Heaven, and it had the support of Heaven because it was ruling in accordance with Heaven. Man knew Heaven’s accordance via his/her study of Nature, his/her application of Yin/Yang theory, his/her investigations into various forms of divination and shamanism, etc. This position on how

one knows the will of Heaven changes very little over the years – which is one reason why we still see such understandings in the thought and practices of Osensei. This is also one reason why in both the thought of Meng Tzu and Osensei we see several appeals made to Nature and/or to various aspects of the natural world.

A state was thought to have lost Heaven's Mandate whenever it began to rule according to the self-centered desires of its rulers. Hence, we can deduce, that natural order of things sought socially proactive aspects over egocentric proactive aspects. Transitions in political power were thus understood as fluctuations between egocentric drives and drives to act in accordance with the (greater) natural world. In a way, Meng Tzu took this political rationale and superimposed this philosophy of political legitimacy upon the individual. Meng Tzu sought the "legitimacy," or the "soundness" of the individual, and he grounded it in the workings of Nature and the greater Universe. Osensei's thinking rest greatly upon this idea.

For Meng Tzu, key Confucian virtues, such as benevolence and righteousness, etc., came to denote a distance from egotistic drives and thus proximity to Heaven and/or to Nature. In the same way that a state could distance itself from egocentrism, and thus come into more accordance with Heaven, so too could an individual. Because of the intimate relationships between Heaven, Nature, and Man, moral virtues, at least at the level of our potential to act thusly, came to be understood in a similar fashion. Our potential for moral virtue was natural (i.e. innate); our accordance with moral virtue put us in accordance with Heaven and with our inner humanity. Without these ideas, there would be no Aikido.

Meng Tzu suggested that the Confucian virtues (things that make one moral, wise, honorable, loyal, etc.) found their base in the heart/mind. "Heart/Mind" is the word "kokoro" or the "shin" of "Senshin." As you can see, our dojo also has a connection to the thinking of Meng Tzu as well. "Kokoro/Shin" is the word that Wilson has translated with the English word "mind" in your text. For Takuan, this translation is not so bad, especially since Takuan goes on to discuss another aspect of the mind in the paragraphs that follow. However, when discussing the ideas of Meng Tzu, it is important to imply that some measure of the English word "heart" is relevant. For Meng Tzu, the natural potential for living a virtuous life, one in accordance with Heaven and/or with the Universe or Nature, can only blossom through the cultivation of one's own heart/mind. More specifically, our moral/human/spiritual potential, can only blossom as we cultivate within us the capacity to keep and/or maintain a heart/mind that is in accordance with Heaven. For Meng Tzu, the purpose of training, of education, of learning, etc., is to increase our capacity to go after our heart/mind when it has strayed from Heaven or Nature's course. The "Book of Mencius" reads:

"Mencius said, 'The trees of the Ox mountain were once beautiful. Being situated, however, in the borders of a large State, they were hewn down with axes and bills. Is it any wonder then that today they do not retain their beauty? With the respite the trees get in the day and in the night, and the moistening by the rain and dew, there is certainly no lack of new shoots coming out, but then the cattle and sheep come to graze upon the mountain and thus even these young shoots disappear from the landscape. This is why today the mountain is stripped and bare in its appearance. People, seeing only its baldness, now think that the mountain was never finely wooded. However, is this bareness the true nature of the mountain? And so also of what properly belongs to man -- shall it be said that the heart/mind of any man was without benevolence and righteousness? The way in which a man loses his proper goodness of heart/mind is like the way in which the trees are denuded by axes and bills. Hewn down day after day, can the heart/mind retain its beauty? Though a man may get a "respite in the day and in the night" and though he may feel "nourished by the effect of the morning air" on him, and thus the heart/mind may come to feel those desires and aversions which are proper to humanity, if the feeling is not strong [but is instead like young shoots], virtues are fettered and destroyed by what "takes place during the day." If or when this takes place repeatedly, the restorative influence of the night or the morning fresh air will not be sufficient to preserve

the proper goodness of the heart/mind...However, does this condition represent the feelings proper to humanity? Hence, be it tree or man, given the proper nourishment, there is nothing that will not grow. When the proper nourishment is deprived, there is nothing that will not decay away. Kung Tzu said, 'Hold it fast, and it remains with you. Let it go, and you lose it.' It is of the heart/mind of which this is said!"

To hold the heart/mind fast is to prioritize it in our lives. The heart/mind is to be given priority over other aspects of our being because it is the heart/mind that marks us as human, and thus marks us as most in harmony with our true nature (i.e. Heaven's accordance). The "Book of Mencius" reads: "Mencius said, 'A man loves all parts of his being without discrimination. As he loves them all without discrimination, he nurtures them all without discrimination. This is inevitable. There is not one foot or one inch of his skin that he does not love, and so there is not one foot or inch that he does not nurture. However, in wishing to examine ourselves further, is there not a way to determine if we are wise in how and in what we decide to nourish? The parts of our being differ in value and importance. To be wise, we must never harm the parts of greater importance for the sake of those of smaller importance, or the more valuable for the sake of the less valuable. He who nurtures the parts of smaller importance at the cost of the greater is a small man; he who nurtures the parts of greater importance is a great man. Look at the gardener: If he tends the common trees while neglecting the valuable ones, then he is a bad gardener – he is unskilled at his craft. A man who takes care of one finger to the detriment of his shoulder and back, without realizing his mistake, is a man little above a rabid beast (i.e. a man that is not thinking). A man who cares only about his appetites, only about food and drink, is despised by others because he takes care of the parts of smaller importance to the detriment of the parts of greater importance. If a man who cares about food and drink can do so without neglecting any other part of his person, then his mouth and belly are much more than just a foot or an inch of his skin.'"

It is through the heart/mind that Man recognizes his/her distinction from the other natures of the Universe – such as the nature of animals. The heart/mind marks Man's nature by providing him/her with the capacity to experience and reflect, or think, or contemplate, etc., simultaneously. It is because Man can think/reflect/contemplate, etc., that he can distance himself from egocentric drives, or from those drives that distance us from being in accord with Heaven, or from those drives that have us at the mercy of the objects we desire (i.e. the material world). The heart/mind, which is the source of our potential to act in accord with Heaven, is the lifeline through which we can distance ourselves from the trappings of the material world. The other aspects of being, such as our senses, we share with the animal world. Beautiful sights attract the eyes; the ears are attracted by beautiful sounds; etc. These organs cannot reflect/think, and thus they are pulled to the objects of their desire. These aspects, but for Heaven's gift of the heart/mind, are at the mercy of the objects they desire. These aspects of our being are, but for the redeeming quality of the heart/mind, determined by the objects of our desire or by our desire. The "Book of Mencius" reads:

"A disciple asked Mencius, 'All are equally human, but some are great men and some are small men – how does this discrepancy occur?'

Mencius replied, 'He who is guided by the interests of the parts of his being that are of greater importance is a great man; he who is guided by the interests of the parts of his being that are of smaller importance is a small man.'

The disciple pursued, 'Though equally human, why are some men guided one way, toward that which is great, and other men guided another way, toward that which is small?'

Mencius replied, 'The senses of hearing and sight are unable to think/reflect and can thus be misled by external things. When one thing is exposed to another, as a matter of course, it leads it away. However, the heart/mind can think/reflect and thus it need not be led astray as a matter of course. Still, it should be

noted, the heart/mind must be active in its capacity to think/reflect. By thinking/reflecting, the heart/mind will come to realize the right view of things; by not thinking/reflecting, the right view of things will not come to be realized. The capacity to think/reflect with the heart/mind, to realize the right view of all things, is what Heaven has given to Man. Let a man stand fast and firmly in the parts of his being that are of greater importance (e.g. his heart/mind), and the inferior parts (i.e. aspects of his being unable to think/reflect) will not displace him from what is right and wise. In this way, one cannot but be a great man.”

As we have read, the potential of the heart/mind, the capacity of the heart/mind, and the priority of the heart/mind are all intimately linked with our humanity, Nature, and Heaven. As such, the heart/mind is also linked with virtue, morality, and even the cultivation of the spirit – what we can call the “complete fulfillment of our being.” In Meng Tzu’s thinking, the heart/mind is further divided into four incipient tendencies and/or aspects. These are: the heart/mind of compassion; the heart/mind of shame; the heart/mind of courtesy/modesty/servitude/complaisance; and the heart/mind of knowing right and wrong. The heart/mind of compassion is the seed of the cultivated state of benevolence. The heart/mind of shame is the seed of the cultivated state of righteousness. The heart/mind of courtesy/modesty/servitude/complaisance is the seed of the cultivated state of propriety. The heart/mind of knowing right and wrong is the seed of the cultivated state of wisdom. For Meng Tzu, these virtues and their seeds mark our very humanity. That is to say, they define what it is to be human.

The “Book of Mencius” tells us, “...whoever is devoid of the heart of compassion is not human, whoever is devoid of the heart of shame is not human, whoever is devoid of the heart of complaisance is not human, and whoever is devoid of the heart of right and wrong is not human.” Meng Tzu posits that Man indeed has these four seeds as he does indeed have four limbs. What is not given is whether a man or a woman will indeed opt to cultivate him/herself accordingly – whether or not he/she will instead choose to “deny his/her own potentialities and cripple him/herself.”

The following notions from Meng Tzu have a firm place in Budo and in Aikido praxis:

1. The notion that the perfected Self is a cultivated state of being.
2. The notion that Man has the innate potential to be cultivated.
3. The notion that the perfected Self marks the true nature of Man.
4. The notion that the true nature of Man should be prioritized above anything else.
5. The notion that the perfected Self, or Man’s true Nature, is in correspondence with Heaven (or the Universe or the Larger Nature).

Moreover, these ideas are common to nearly every spiritual tradition. For example, these notions are shared by various traditions within the Christian faith – though the terminology may change. It is for this reason why the Jesuits offered to Latinize the name of Meng Tzu. Those missionaries saw their own spiritual exercises, those founded by St. Ignatius Loyola, in the writings of Master Meng. In the “Book of Mencius,” they saw similarities in their own efforts to individually develop a practice whereby one could to discover and/or discern the will of God, and to gain the energy and courage necessary to follow that will – without being swayed by the ego or the material world. For example, as Meng Tzu spoke of the relationship between the proximity to Heaven and the distance from one’s own egocentric desires, so too did St. Ignatius. Here the founder of the “Company of Jesus” (as the Jesuits are known) writes: “Let each one remember that he will make progress in all spiritual things only insofar as he rids himself of self-love, self-will, and self-interest.”

As another example marking similarity, here in a prayer recommended to penitents, we can also see the saint sharing the position that Heaven’s way (which he noted with the word/concept, “God”) should be prioritized above all else:



“Receive, Lord, all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will. You have given me all that I have, all that I am, and I surrender all to your divine will, so that you dispose of me. Give me only your love and your grace. With this I am rich enough, and I have no more to ask.”

Such a prayer is very different from the usual “genie-wishing” we today often associate with the act of praying. It is, as Merton says, “something much more than uttering petitions for good things external to our own deepest concerns.” Lastly, in the following quote by St. Ignatius, we see the correspondence that Meng Tzu felt existed between moral or virtuous behavior and Heaven’s mandate. The saint writes: “The more universal the good, the more it is divine.”

In Osensei, we also see such similarities. In the following quote, we see Osensei repeating Meng Tzu’s notions that Man has a potential to be cultivated, that Man’s perfection marks his/her true nature, and that Man’s true nature is in correspondence with Heaven. Osensei is quoted as saying:

“Everyone has a spirit that can be refined, a body that can be trained in some manner, a suitable path to follow. You are here for no other purpose than to realize your inner divinity and manifest your innate enlightenment.”

Here the Founder touches upon Meng Tzu’s caveat against following our ego at the cost of Heaven’s Way. We can also note the primacy or the prioritizing that affords primacy to Heaven/God. Osensei is quoted as saying:

“Aikido is medicine for a sick world. There is evil and disorder in the world because people have forgotten that all things emanate from one source – from God. Return to that source and leave behind all self-centered thoughts, petty desires, and anger.”

Here Osensei again touches upon Meng Tzu’s caveat against egocentric behavior:

“Aikido is not easy. It is a fight to the finish, the slaying of evil desires and all falsehood within.”

Here Osensei makes use of Meng Tzu’s ideas on the relationship between the heart/mind and the other senses. He writes:

“The only cure for materialism is the cleansing of the six senses (i.e. eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and heart/mind). If the senses are impure, one’s perception is stifled. The more one’s perception is stifled, the more contaminated the senses become. This creates disorder in the world, and that is the greatest evil of all. Purify the heart/mind, free the six senses and let them function without obstruction, and your entire body and soul will glow.”

Lastly, here we see Meng Tzu’s notions that to abandon the cultivation of our potential to follow Heaven’s Way is to abandon our humanity. We can also see Meng Tzu’s notion of corresponding Man and Heaven. Osensei writes:

“Life is growth. If we stop growing, technically and spiritually, we are as good as dead. Aikido is a celebration of the bonding of Heaven, Earth, and humankind.”

As you can see, Meng Tzu was a very powerful and influential thinker. It is perhaps mostly for this reason why Takuan feels he needs to address a famous passage from the “Book of Mencius.” It would not be presuming too much to suggest that while writing to Yagyū of discarding the mind, as he does in the immediately preceding paragraph on page 38, knowing that Yagyū was classically educated, Takuan felt his letter up to now would raise Meng Tzu’s dictum in the mind of his reader. Trying to head Yagyū off, Takuan interrupts his classic Zen stance on the nature of the Mind and its relationship to spontaneity, and speaks briefly of Meng Tzu’s Book VI Part A-11. The whole of this passage by Meng-Tzu reads as follows:

“Mencius said, ‘Benevolence is the heart/mind of Man, and righteousness is the path of Man. Sad it is indeed when a man gives up the right road instead of following it and allows his heart/mind to stray without enough sense to go after it. When his chickens and dogs stray, a man has sense enough to go after them, but when his heart/mind strays, he often do not seek for it. The sole concern of learning (education/practice) is nothing else but to seek for the lost mind.’”

In order to appease the “classical” Confucian critiques Takuan felt Yagyū might raise and/or might be concerned with, he acknowledges that he agrees with Meng Tzu. Thus, Takuan writes, “This (i.e. seeking the lost mind) is certainly most reasonable.” In a way, Takuan is saying, “Yes, when the heart/mind, the ‘master of the body,’ the master of the other senses, has strayed from the path of Heaven, has ‘gone off on a wicked path,’ we must ‘seek after it and restore it to ourselves.’ That makes sense and I agree with that.” In order to further appease the reader of any other Confucian critiques he might want to hold against Zen’s position on the heart/mind, Takuan goes on to cite the Neo-Confucian thinker, Shao K’ang-chieh. In Shao K’ang-chieh, Takuan finds a similar position to the one he is presenting when Shao K’ang-chieh writes, “It is essential to lose the mind.” On page 39, Takuan goes on to suggest how these two Confucian thinkers can actually be in agreement with each other – and thus how his own position can be in agreement with the classic one offered by Meng Tzu.

In doing so, Takuan offers the classic Zen rebuttal to such counter arguments by suggesting that the controlling (or the restoring) of the heart/mind is something you do in the beginning levels of training and that the losing or discarding of the mind is something you do in the latter stages of training. Hence, he writes, “When one is in training, it is good to keep Mencius’ saying, ‘Seek the lost mind,’ in mind. The ultimate, however, is within Shao K’ang-chieh’s, ‘It is essential to lose the mind.’” This is how one should understand the mentioning of Mencius on pages 38 and 39.

Personally, I do not agree here with Takuan’s understanding of Meng Tzu’s thinking. I believe the two are speaking about different aspects of the heart/mind altogether – particularly when it comes to how those aspects are dealt with via our own practice and/or training. While we can indeed point to the fact that beginning levels of training do indeed include notions of restriction, form, control, etc., as in Shū training and/or as in the beginning stages of zazen practice, and while we can indeed mark more advanced stages of our training or practice by the presence of various degrees of spontaneity, it does not follow that Meng Tzu was referring to such matters at all. Takuan’s understanding of Meng Tzu here is more fueled by the polemics of his day than by accurate comprehension.

If one were to apply Meng Tzu position to Takuan’s position, one would not posit it as merely dealing with the initial stages of training. Rather, if Takuan were suggesting that the true nature of the mind is unfettered, then Meng Tzu’s statement would direct us to seek out the unfettered mind. Nothing more, nothing less. To be sure, Meng Tzu can, as St. Ignatius can, recognize the need for imposed and/or artificial restraints in the beginning of one’s practice. These “restraints” however are not imposed upon us so that we can finally come into some sort of accord with Heaven or God. Rather they are the negative energy that is often necessary in Man’s quest to spiritually mature. It is not by these artificial constructs that we are able to co-opt some sort of existence that in essence remains foreign to us, but rather it is by these types of negative energy that we can free ourselves from the obstructions that keep us from obtaining and experiencing what is most natural in us. That is a huge difference; one I feel Takuan has missed entirely here. Osensei is a lot closer in his application of Meng Tzu’s thought regarding this difference, especially when he suggests things like the following:  
 “Now and again, it is necessary to seclude yourself among deep mountains and hidden valleys to restore your link to the source of life.”

Though Meng Tzu is compassionate enough to feel sorrow over the man or woman that will look for his/her livestock but fail to seek their most inner humanity, he does not suggest that our inner humanity is something that is forever foreign to us and thus beyond true spontaneous action. If Takuan is opting to use non-form as an ideal over and above the form he sides with Meng-Tzu, then even according to Zen

tradition, Meng Tzu shows more awareness that ultimately there should be no difference between form and non-form.