

Samurai Meditation: The Warrior Zen Practice

Samurai Zen meditation is a useful tool for creating harmony between your mind and body. You gain more awareness of your surroundings without allowing thoughts to cloud your judgment. With practice, you may be able to keep a level head in stressful situations.

If you want to learn more about this warrior Zen practice, here is what you should know:

To understand samurai meditation, it helps to know a little about the history of the samurai.

Who Are the Samurai?

The samurai were elite warriors during the pre-modern period of Japan's history. These legendary warriors eventually became the most powerful group in Japan, thanks to their mastery of martial arts and skill with the sword.

Samurai followed the code of bushido, which is the "way of the warrior." The code included a strong focus on self-discipline and ethical behavior. The samurai were also heavily influenced by Zen Buddhism as it swept the nation in the 12th century.



Who are the Samurai?

At the time, much of Japan was ruled by independent landowners. The landowners hired samurai for protection, especially as the major Japanese clans began to clash.

By the end of the 12th century, the Minamoto clan had established control of Japan and chosen Kamakura as the capital. This was the beginning of the Kamakura period, which lasted until 1333.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, the country was again at war. The samurai were instrumental in the battles that divided Japan into dozens of independent states.

When the country was reunited near the end of the 16th century, the samurai were at the top of the social caste system. They would

continue to rule until 1868, which marked the end of the feudal period of Japan and the start of the modern era.

What Is Samurai Meditation?



Samurai Meditation

Samurai Zen meditation offers a way to clear your mind of all thoughts and find inner calm. The origins of samurai meditation can be traced to the late sixth century in the Himalayan foothills. The Buddha was born around 563 and his teaching eventually spread throughout Asia. The doctrines of Buddhism include the Four Noble Truths. The fourth truth outlines the Eight-Fold Path to enlightenment.

Mindfulness and concentration are two important parts of the Eight-Fold Path. Achieving total concentration of mind and body through meditation can help lead to greater awareness and control.

Samurai meditation draws from these principles. While samurai meditation was used by warriors, it offers many potential benefits for people today:

- **Relieve stress and anxiety**
- **Achieve greater inner peace**
- **Gain greater clarity and focus**
- **Attain harmony between mind and body**

Two major forms of meditation developed from early Buddhist teachings. Mikkyo meditation involves the use of mantras and meditations to clear blockage inside the body and promote the flow of energy.

Zazen is the traditional samurai meditation technique. It promotes the development of “Mushin.” The concept of Mushin was important to samurai, as it requires a mind that is free from thoughts of fear, anger, and ego.

With Zazen meditation, you sit in an upright position and focus on your breathing. Three forms of Zazen meditation can be used for meditating like a Samurai Warrior. **Concentration, Koan Meditation, and Serene Reflection.**

Most Zen meditation practitioners start with concentration. They sit and focus on their breathing, allowing thoughts to drift through their mind. This is comparable to modern mindfulness meditation.

When practitioners can successfully practice concentration meditation, they begin meditating on a koan. A koan is a type of paradoxical riddle that requires deep reflection.

Serene reflection, which involves just sitting, is the final phase of samurai Zen meditation. It requires the practitioner to remain in the present moment and be fully aware of their surroundings and thoughts.

Did Samurai Practice Meditation?

The samurai warriors of feudal Japan practiced Zen meditation after the spread of Buddhism in Kamakura. From 1185 to 1333, Kamakura was the capital and political center of Japan.

The monks in the region already had considerable political influence. Many monks were already on the Shogun's council, limiting the need to spread their teachings to the warrior class. However, the samurai in the capital chose to embrace Zen Buddhism.

Zen Buddhism was the perfect complement to the martial arts training employed by the samurai. Zen meditation focuses on spiritual strength, which leads to greater willpower and fortitude.

Zen meditation enhanced the personal strength of the samurai by teaching them to let instincts rule their actions instead of relying on thought. The no-mindedness freed the samurai of fear and doubt. The calm state produced by Zen meditation allowed them to focus more clearly on what is right in front of them.

How to Meditate Like a Samurai Warrior

Anyone can learn how to meditate like a samurai warrior, as Zen meditation does not require any special equipment. However, meditation does require practice. If you want to meditate like a samurai warrior, follow these steps.

Samurai Zen Meditation

Start by finding a quiet, comfortable place that is free of distractions. Choose a comfortable seat, such as a pillow. The traditional seat for zazen is a round cushion called a *Zafu*.

Select a Sitting Style to Meditate like a Samurai Warrior

The preferred posture is a seated position with legs crossed and hands folded over the lap. The spine should be erect but not stiff.

There are four common sitting styles:

- **Full lotus (Kekkafuza)**
- **Half lotus (Hankafuza)**
- **Burmese**
- **Kneeling**

The full lotus involves placing each foot on the opposite thigh. However, some people may find this pose difficult. The half lotus involves placing one foot on the opposite thigh while tucking the other foot under the thigh.

The Burmese pose is a cross-legged position with the ankles crossed over the calves instead of the thighs, which may be even easier for those with limited flexibility.

A kneeling position may also be used but is not recommended for beginners. You may find it difficult to maintain a comfortable posture when kneeling compared to sitting.

Concentration Samurai Meditation

After choosing your sitting position, you may begin practicing zazen, starting with concentration meditation.

Breathe from the center of your belly and keep your eyelids half-lowered. You should be aware of your surroundings without focusing on them. Allow thoughts to enter and pass through your mind without judgment.

During your first few sessions, you may struggle to let thoughts drift through your mind. Many practitioners count breaths to aid the meditation process. As you inhale and exhale, continue to count upward.

Continue meditating and counting for five minutes. Keep your initial sessions short. With practice, you should find it easier to focus on your breathing and free your mind of thoughts. When you can successfully meditate for five minutes without distractions, increase the duration of your meditation sessions by a minute.

Gradually work your way up to 30-minute or longer meditation sessions. Continue to count each inhalation and exhalation. Meditate until you reach a state of complete tranquility and calmness of the mind.

Koan Samurai Meditation

Zen Buddhists eventually move on to koan meditation after mastering concentration meditation. Koan meditation involves focusing your thoughts on a koan.

A koan is a type of riddle that is not solvable using intellectual reasoning. It requires you to explore reality beyond your thoughts and intellect.

The koan may be a statement or a question. Over the years, Zen scholars developed more than 1,700 different koans. The most well-known question is, “What is the sound of one hand clapping?”

Some koans are expressed as a question and an answer. A common example is, “What is Buddha?” The answer is “Three pounds of flax.” The answer makes no sense, which is designed to force greater introspection and reflection.

Serene Meditation Reflection for Samurai Warriors

Serene reflection is the final stage of the three meditation Samurai techniques. It is only achieved when you can sit and meditate without thinking. You do not count breaths or focus on a koan. You simply sit while thinking of not thinking, which is the true art of zazen.

The samurai and other Zen Buddhists refer to this form of meditation as “Shikantaza,” which translates as “just sitting.” You are actively aware of your consciousness and surroundings but do not think about them.

When thoughts and sensations arise, you recognize them while remaining aware of the environment and your body.

As you practice just sitting, you may eventually reach a state where your mind becomes one with the surrounding environment. This is the goal of samurai meditation and may take many years of practice.

Final Thoughts on Samurai Meditation: The Warrior Zen Practice

Samurai meditation could be the key to achieving greater control over your mind and body. It allows you to free your mind and clear your thoughts.

The samurai used Zen meditation to improve their clarity in combat. Instead of letting fear or anger drive their actions, they could remain one with their surroundings and opponents. This enlightenment helped make the samurai legendary warriors.

If you want to enjoy the benefits of this warrior Zen practice, start small. Meditate for up to five minutes per day and gradually increase the duration of your meditation sessions.

Before you know it, you will become more connected with the present moment and less anxious about the past or future.