

*What is my understanding of Shugyo?*

Shugyo seems to embody the Japanese concept of austere, disciplined and/or martial style training to deeply hone and temper the character and skills of the person engaged in the training. Many cultures and groups use similar concepts including asceticism, stoicism, trial by fire and voluntary hazing to accomplish similar goals. In shugyo, training is often focused on a particular skill set, but it is intended to infuse the spirit of the person across all aspects of their life. Proper shugyo also would seem to require constantly testing or pushing against perceived or real limitations. Routinely performing menial or unpleasant tasks is considered an important part of shugyo to help teach humility and avoid arrogance. Above all, doing everything in a committed way defines shugyo.

Comfort has long been considered an enemy of training. Being comfortable and choosing a well-known, repeatable way is perfectly sensible when actually performing a skill in an important situation. Performing a skill well under pressure can be a pleasant, comfortable feeling all on its own. But choosing comfortable ways over new or difficult ways of doing things can be a serious obstacle to learning, discovery and improvement. Many groups and individuals subject themselves to significant discomfort periodically, routinely or even constantly to harden the body and mind against discomfort and to cleanse the spirit.

Physical and mental improvement is almost impossible to achieve without experiencing discomfort. The highest achievers across all endeavors are often the ones who have learned to tolerate the most discomfort. But care, preparation and constant review must be taken to avoid overtly dangerous or deleterious activities masquerading as simple discomfort. For the prepared individual, the discomfort might just be a minor annoyance, but for some one not yet ready, the discomfort could be extremely destructive. If the goal is improvement, the path of discomfort needs be chosen carefully otherwise it can turn into a path of destruction.

Testing skill and poise under pressure is a time honored way of discovering whether training has produced the desired outcome. Sometimes the tests are designed, scripted and planned. Sometimes the tests are merely accidental, unscripted and unexpected. Both are challenging in different ways and can build confidence in different ways. Of course, certain types of accidental tests can

produce highly undesirable outcomes and so probably should be avoided whenever possible.

Exploring, understanding and testing limits are an important part of growth and development. Many folks like to proclaim that there are no limits or that there is always room for improvement. The Laws of Physics have a nasty tendency to expose that limitation in thinking in very unpleasant ways. Infirmities cannot be merely wished away. Real physical, mental and financial limits exist and must be respected. Yet, the sentiment is probably in the right place when understood as hyperbole. Imaginary limits and overly conservative perception of real limits can place serious constraints on growth and development. The trick is testing, expanding and exploring limits as safely as possible. Sacrificing life or limb to provide an object lesson in real limits may lead to lasting fame but can hardly be recommended.

Performing a regular measure of menial chores is a well regarded means of staying grounded and building character. It is also a good way to get things done that need doing. Since most menial tasks, almost by definition, don't require a high degree of mental effort, the time spent can be used for serious thinking and musing. The concentration and focus required to think and complete the given task efficiently, carefully and safely is an additional level of training all its own. Physically strenuous tasks can provide a routine means for getting some exercise. No one should feel like menial chores are beneath their dignity nor should anyone expect others to do their chores for them except for the usual inducements of love or money. In the past, the privileged elite had servants do their dirty work; today almost everyone in the modern civilized world are the privileged children of technology that has eliminated the need for people to do many of the most dangerous, time consuming or just menial tasks. Despite need, doing a few menial chores oneself is beneficial if just for the routine exercise and thinking time - and hopefully character building.

Being fully committed to training and generally any activity is often cited as deeply important. It is almost impossible to develop a sufficiently deep understanding of any skill or ideals without a highly committed approach. Half-hearted efforts give a ready excuse for failure. The committed approach means to live in that moment and every moment. It means to show up and do. Hopes and dreams are important in deciding what to do but without doing they are meaningless. Once identified, a task needs to be done with full attention and

purpose to that task. It might be described as the ability to be conscious or mindful of all aspects of an activity without letting that interfere in its doing.

Arrogance comes in many forms. There is the unearned arrogance of privilege, youth and entitlement. There is the mixed arrogance of wealth, power and success that are derived from some combination of luck and skill. Then there is the earned arrogance of experience, knowledge, and discipline. Humility born of life experience usually tempers or eliminates the first form. Being charitable, understanding the importance of good fortune and knowing that people are more willing to assist the humble can often keep the second form at bay.

The earned arrogance is the hardest to temper. Amusingly, training programs designed to create high performing individuals like professional schooling, sports and the military/martial arts often breed arrogance despite a routine emphasis on humility in such programs. Even the humility training produces a form of arrogance. An egalitarian spirit of kindness, love, sharing and tolerance is probably one of the better antidotes for this form of arrogance. Humility can come from the continual practice of being merely one among equals who treat each other fairly and forgivingly regardless of status, importance or accomplishment.

I believe a life of discipline and dedication to improving oneself is a reward far greater than status, power, success or wealth. I believe that every day, even the darkest, should be viewed as joyous. Discomfort is not suffering to me unless it is unwilling or unproductive. Discovering limits and exploring new ways of doing always brings me joy despite the discomfort and pain it entails sometimes. Dirty work is just that. Nothing more. Do your own and for others as you can and don't complain or crow about it. I believe in showing up and doing in a committed fashion or why bother at all.

I strongly attribute my success as a manager and leader in the workplace to an egalitarian spirit, constant discipline, stretching the limits of the possible and willingness to do the dirty work. The I use the same principles in my personal life - if not more so. When I fail in a skill, it just means I lack talent or training and so I just shrug and try to improve. When I fail as a person, it is usually because I am being arrogant and patronizing instead of being kind and helpful as I intended. Needless to say, that is very disappointing and hopefully that discomfort leads to improvement which turns into joy.