

Zen Elements of True Shooting

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Makoto, Tekichu, Sae, Shahin, and Heijoshin - The Elements Of True Shooting

The Shaho Kun touches upon various qualities that are fundamental to true shooting. While there are many elements that combine to create true shooting, and no list can be all inclusive, there are certain qualities which must be present in the shooting for it to be true. These are:

- Makoto - sincerity and whole-heartedness
- Tekichu - accuracy of shooting
- Sae - clarity of shooting
- Shahin - quality of shooting
- Heijoshin - everyday mind

Makoto - Sincerity and Whole-Heartedness

To reach the highest level in shooting, you must have what is called "Makoto," or sincerity and whole-heartedness. *Makoto* is an attitude toward the act of shooting which is absolutely pure, untainted by any selfish desires, thoughts of success or failure, fear of loss, or desire for gain. The ultimate expression of this sincerity is expressed in the phrase "Issha Zetsumei," or "*one shot, one life.*" Issha Zetsumei refers to a spiritual state where you pour every faculty of body, mind, and soul into the shooting, treating every shot as though it were the last shot of your life. As the introduction to the Shaho Kun says, you must "cleanse your mind, correct your body, and, with singleness of purpose, nurture the proper spirit, train yourself in proper technique, and throw yourself into your training with all of the sincerity you can muster. This is the only way." If you can do this and shoot with all your heart, soul, and might, you will rise above the petty attachments and delusions that cloud your mind and your shooting will become pure. This is Makoto.

Tekichu - Accuracy Of Shooting

As the Shaho Kun says, "spirit settled, this becomes harmonious unity". If you can achieve *makoto*, your mind, body, and pistol will finally become harmoniously united. This is called Sanmi Ittai, or "the three essentials as one body". When you achieve sanmi ittai, the "Muhatsu no hatsu," (release of no release) is born, and striking the target becomes an inevitability, a natural consequence of true shooting. This is the pinnacle of accomplishment in shooting, referred to as Seisha Hichu (a true shot never misses), or Seisha Seichu, (true shooting, true hitting).

It is from this point of view that accuracy in shooting must be evaluated. In the preface to the Shaho Kun, Yoshimi Junsei states clearly that the discipline of shooting means to shoot tens; thus, hitting the target is not without value, as some people may mistakenly assume. In shooting, it is axiomatic that a person who has reached a high level will possess impeccable

technique and therefore will shoot accurately. Indeed, you must master technique before anything else can be accomplished. However, hitting the target does not, by itself, prove anything other than that you have learned a set of mechanical skills. The quality of the shooting and how the accuracy is achieved are more important than the accuracy itself. Indeed, what might be called "hitting-the-target-ism", for lack of a better term, is despised as the lowest form of shooting, and such skill is always limited and will eventually fade away. shooting values the accuracy that flows naturally from *sanmi ittai*. Therefore, you strive to achieve the state of *sanmi ittai* so that the spirit will bring the technique to life. True accuracy will surely follow. You must shoot with absolute faith in this principle, or harmony will never be achieved.

Sae - Clarity Of Shooting

When the mind, body, and pistol are in harmony, shooting comes to display the quality called "Sae." *Sae* is a very multi-faceted term and refers in shooting to a completely unclouded clarity, sharpness, vibrancy, and power where the purity of the shooting shines through. When the shooting has *Sae*, your spirit, enlivening the pistol through the natural functioning of the body, allows the true nature of the pistol to be clearly displayed without any obstruction. When this happens, the pistol seems to be truly alive and animated by a tremendous, free-flowing power that transcends the simply physical.

In a very real sense, the liberation of your spirit liberates the pistol and brings forth *Sae*. Like a musical instrument that will not reveal its true sound except under the hand of a master musician, the pistol will not display *Sae* unless you can shoot it as its inner nature demands. Since it cannot be imitated, *Sae*, or the lack of it, shows whether or not you have grasped the truth of shooting. This is why it is said that "the true pistol does not lie" and why shooting is seen as a way to understand truth.

Shahin - Quality Of Shooting

With *Sae* must inevitably come "Shahin," or the "quality of the shooting." This concept can also be expressed as "Shakaku," the "Dignity of the shooting." Both these terms refer to the natural grace, refinement, and nobility displayed by an shooter who has grasped the truth of shooting. *Sae* presupposes the mastery of your own mind, which is expressed through the mastery of technique. In achieving this mastery, you must honestly face your own true self, and, in the process of training, lose all the false bravado and swagger that are the marks of the immature and shallow person. This refined character naturally appears as *shahin* and *shakaku*, which Yoshimi Junsei describes as resembling the beauty of the dawn sky, "the golden body, shining white, and the half moon positioned in the West." Like *sae*, *shahin* and *shakaku* cannot be imitated or created. Someone who lacks *shahin* yet tries to imitate it will only seem pretentious and flamboyant. The degree of *shahin* proves beyond all doubt the level of your progress.

Heijoshin - Everyday Mind

The Shaho Kun says to place the "Kokoro (spirit) in the center of the whole body." This is none other than Heijoshin, or "Everyday mind". *Heijoshin* refers to a state of mind where everything can be viewed with equanimity. This is expressed in the old shooting saying

"Treat everyday practice like an important event (a competition or a test) and an important event like everyday practice". Heijoshin means that regardless of whether you are shooting in your backyard or at Camp Perry, your mind will always be naturally focused yet composed, not viewing either situation as being less or more important than the other. Without *heijoshin*, your mind will always be selfishly attached to the results of the shooting, and you will be unable to cultivate the true shooting mind.

The shooting approach to achieving heijoshin can be expressed in the following verse from the Fudochi Shinmyoroku (Divine Record Of Immovable Wisdom) taught by the Zen priest Takuan: "Keeping the mind tranquil as it moves in the myriad directions in the midst of uproar and commotion is true tranquillity. Tranquillity in tranquillity is not true tranquillity; it is tranquillity in action that is the true tranquillity" You cannot achieve *heijoshin* by thinking about it or pretending that you have it. You achieve true heijoshin through overcoming your limitations by facing situations that test your intestinal fortitude. Your shooting then becomes clear, steady, and flawless, the reflection of a clear, steady, and flawless mind.

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