

2011

# Lutherans in Need of Self-Discipline: Japanese Shugyō and the Art of Sanctification

Jeffrey K. Mann  
*Susquehanna University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholarlycommons.susqu.edu/reli\\_fac\\_pubs](http://scholarlycommons.susqu.edu/reli_fac_pubs)



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

“Lutherans in Need of Self-Discipline: Japanese Shugyō and the Art of Sanctification” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, 50, 3 (2011): 271-279.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religious Studies Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact [sieczkiewicz@susqu.edu](mailto:sieczkiewicz@susqu.edu).

**Lutherans in Need of Self-Discipline:  
Japanese *Shugyō* and the Art of Sanctification**

“He who would have a person do good works must not begin with the works but with the person who is to do them.” Martin Luther<sup>1</sup>

Growing up, self-discipline was a virtue that was strongly encouraged by my father. The merits of self-control and hard work were promoted as being essential for a boy to achieve his potential as he grew to be a man. This self-discipline was supplemented and cultivated by coaches, teachers, mom’s expectations, and my father’s mantra, “If something’s worth doing, it’s worth doing right.” Thus, when it came to academics, sports, and various summer jobs, I was well equipped for the good work required to succeed. Unfortunately, the strength of character that we in the West seek to foster in our children is almost entirely focused on secular matters – and generally limited to childhood. Very rarely do we encounter Christians, let alone my fellow Lutherans, who speak of the importance of self-cultivation for the sake of one’s spiritual life, folks who exert themselves to grow in faith and moral virtue throughout their lives.

This year the world witnessed both the terrible tragedy that befell Japan, as well as the awe-inspiring response of the Japanese people. There was strength of character that caught many in the world by surprise. Stories of the disciplined Japanese people who worked together unselfishly, stoically, and with remarkable efficiency amazed us all. One foreigner living in Japan in the immediate aftermath reported from the train station, “The platform is overcrowded. Actually, many can’t even get onto the platform and are waiting outside the ticket gates. But there is order. We are forming perfect lines. There is no partition rope but we leave room for people to walk through. Everyone is following instructions given by station staff. There is absolute order and calmness here, almost surreal in this situation. I am amazed by these people’s mental strength.” While we do not want to caricature who and what the Japanese people are, there was indeed a mental strength on display, leaving many people to wonder from where this virtue comes. And wouldn’t the world be a better place if there was more of this quality throughout the globe?

Unfortunately, I cannot help but see a striking lack of personal discipline within the Lutheran tradition, even though Martin Luther insisted that believers fight against the old Adam, for the sake of their own faith as well as the welfare of others. Perhaps the time has come to look outside of our tradition for some assistance and guidance. I believe that a great deal of good could come out of a careful examination of various Asian religious practices. There is substantial material in Confucianism, with its cultivation through social ritual. We might also look to Daoist disciplines, where harmony with the True

---

<sup>1</sup> WA 7,33.

Way is sought. For the sake of this article, however, I will look at the Japanese notion of *shugyō* that developed out of the Buddhist tradition.

### **A Legacy of Listless Lutherans?**

While there have been some tremendously heroic Lutherans through the centuries, my denomination is not really known for moral rigor. We have a reputation for being a bit quietist, waiting for the Spirit to work in our lives. Good works are a result of faith, and it is Jesus who takes care of faith, so I'm not going to be so presumptuous as to try and do his job. Also, trying to be a good person can too easily become trying to earn my salvation, and we certainly do not want to go down that road. This portrayal, of course, may be an exaggeration. Folks disagree as to how libertine Lutherans truly have been, and if cultural factors play a role, but it should be beyond dispute that we are far from our potential in living the Christian life. Rarely do we pursue excellence, far preferring a standard that is just "good enough."

I do not ever recall hearing a Christian remark that, having difficulty paying attention through the entire Divine Service, she needs to develop within herself a greater facility of concentration and focus. Indeed, how common is it for any member of the Church to explore a method of self-cultivation for the sake of becoming a person of greater integrity, compassion, courage, refinement, composure and level-headedness – not for the benefit to her career or personal happiness, but simply for others. Such an undertaking could be of tremendous value. How disappointing that we regard such work as unimportant.

For Lutherans in particular, our fear of anything that smacks of works-righteousness has led to wariness when attending to the life of sanctification. As Carter Lindberg famously suggested, Lutherans may shout "justification" but we whisper "sanctification." Moreover, any form of personal religious discipline seems quite foreign to us, something for pre-Vatican II papists perhaps, not Lutherans luxuriating in their liberty. Meditations on the sufferings of Christ, fasting, acts of physical rigor, all seem out of place in a Lutheran context. Unfortunately, I believe it is reactionaryism to Roman Catholicism, rather than Lutheran theology, which generally precludes such activities.

Lutherans recognize, of course, that they need to be concerned with the life of sanctity. This is not for the sake of attaining or maintaining the gracious acceptance of God, but for the sake of the world. Luther believed, "On the last day he will ask you whether you have done any deeds not for the sake of yourself being justified by them but for the sake of your neighbor being served."<sup>2</sup> My personal piety, which includes my efforts to improve the lives of my fellow human beings, is a *response* to God's gift of salvation, not its *condition*. And while Lutherans have been known to neglect such matters from time to time, it has always been understood in our tradition that sanctification is an essential aspect of the Christian life. We may not do it all that well, but we understand that we have a calling, what Søren Kierkegaard called a "requirement," to act for the sake of the poor, oppressed, and suffering.

The motivation does not come from the desire to create or sustain a right relationship with our Creator; God has already taken care of that. Rather, it is a response of gratitude. Given all that God has done for

---

<sup>2</sup> WA 11, 94.

us, despite our unworthiness, how can we fail to act when God asks us to care for others? It is a reaction as natural as fire producing heat<sup>3</sup> or a healthy tree bearing good fruit.<sup>4</sup> Genuine faith necessarily expresses itself in love.

Of course, we all realize that our good works do not measure up. Most of the time we are not living lives worthy of the calling we have received. Why not? That one is easy. The effects of original and actual sin, combined with our weak faith, are responsible for us being rather despicable people. The more important question is, I believe, “What can we do about it?” Presumably, our spirit is willing but our flesh is weak. What we want to do, we do not do. And what we hate, we do.

Typically, the response of Lutheran theologians, and indeed Luther himself, has been to focus on strengthening faith. Through Word and Sacrament, God comes to us. We encounter Law and Gospel, receive the forgiveness of our sins, and are nourished in our faith through the very presence of God. Our awareness of sin stifles our pride, and our embrace of God’s mercy and grace produces tremendous gratefulness. When God informs us that this gratitude should not be directed toward doing nice things for Him, but for our neighbor, we do so gladly.

This Lutheran approach to slaying the old Adam and growing in the active life of faith, then, focuses primarily on transforming ourselves internally, through faith, to become the men and women that God wants us to be. There have been those who have sought to complement this – with a third use of the law, the heartfelt convictions of the Pietists, or costly grace. However, in each case the goal was the same: to deepen the personal appropriation of law and/or gospel in order that the transforming power of genuine faith would express itself more profoundly in the sanctified life.<sup>5</sup> This is Lutheran theology and it is a splendid thing.

However, as Luther recognized, the effects of Original Sin are substantial. They are not overcome by our feeble faith. Our nature does not simply have a sinful inclination, but is, as St. Augustine wrote, “perversity and lack of order.”<sup>6</sup> The effects of this corrupt nature are profound. As Augustine explained, “My will was the enemy master of, and thence had made a chain for me and bound me. Because of a perverse will was lust made; and lust indulged in became custom; and custom not resisted became necessity. By which links, as it were, joined together (whence I term it a ‘chain’), did a hard bondage hold me enthralled.”<sup>7</sup>

For Augustine, and later Luther, humanity’s inherited sinful condition is not only corrupt at the start, but we move from sin to sin, inculcating vicious inclinations, habits, and lifestyles. Neither the root cause of our depravity nor the damaging effects to our psyche are wiped out by saving faith and the presence of Christ in one’s life. For Luther, the regenerate remain complete sinners; at the

---

<sup>3</sup> WA 17<sup>2</sup>, 275.

<sup>4</sup> WA 10<sup>3</sup>, 285.

<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that such efforts have always been without their theological problems. For a detailed analysis of how such efforts have both compromised and enriched Lutheranism, cf. my book *Shall We Sin? Responding to the Antinomian Question in Lutheran Theology*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> *De Div. Quaes.*, I, ii, 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, I, xvi, 34.

same time they are declared righteous by God. (This may be contrasted with Augustine, who saw the redeemed as being part sinner and part saint.) Thus, beginning one's life anew, governed more and more by gratitude, is how the Christian life unfolds, for Luther. However, the effects of a lifetime of sin are not easily overcome. The Old Adam is not readily dispatched. We need all the help we can get.

### **A Lifetime of Discipline**

Protestants in general tend to look askance at many practices of religious discipline. Much of it seems "too Catholic," I suppose, and brings to mind hair shirts, caricatures of Opus Dei, or Filipinos crucifying themselves during Holy Week. Even less extreme practices, like meditations on the suffering of Christ or strolling through labyrinths find little room in Protestant communities.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that the acts of personal discipline found in the Roman Catholic tradition are ideal. In fact, I am talking about something much more distinct. Roman Catholic practices of this nature are typically focused on deepening the personal relationship with God. In this, they are not all that dissimilar in motive from Protestant efforts to develop a more profound faith through Bible Study, sharing testimonies, or, for our Pentecostal and Charismatic friends, speaking in tongues. What they have in common is the desire to strengthen one's own connection to the Creator. What they are rarely about – at least directly or consciously – is making me into a better human being so that I may be of greater service to my neighbor.

For most of us in the West, I believe the idea of undertaking personal discipline to become a better person, a greater contributor to society, is something that applies only to children and adolescents. I want my son to experience and learn industriousness, teamwork, respect, and sportsmanship, so I sign him up for baseball, karate, and Cub Scouts. I recognize that he will get the discipline he needs to become a stronger person, both for his own sake as well as his future contributions to the world. Typically, however, we view such activities as being for kids alone. Once they reach the age of 13, or so, we rarely think of their activities in such terms. This is not to say that Americans fail to mature and develop their personal character throughout their lives, but that we rarely find them taking a formal approach to doing so. We generally do not find adults in the United States talking about how they undertake some activity with the intent of becoming a person of greater integrity or moral uprightness.

The one exception to this may be the military. But here again, we often speak of a troubled teenager who joins the Army and learns self-respect and respect for others, returning to civilian life after some years in the armed services as a new person with greater moral fiber. But the idea of a lifelong discipline for the sake of character development? That finds little place in our society.

This is not the case, however, in much of the East, especially those areas influenced by Chinese thought. Reaching the ideal of a true “gentleman,” or even a “sage,” is understood to require a lifetime of effort. In Japan, there are a host of varied disciplines that one may undertake in order to cultivate the self. This nurturing of the individual is not merely for the sake of the person himself, but for the sake of the community, and indeed the whole world.

Dr. Jigoro Kano, the founder of judo, saw his own martial art in this light. For him, the lessons and skills learned in the dojo (literally, the “place of enlightenment”) must be translated into one’s life in the world. The physical aspect of the art is only the beginning. According to Kano, “[T]he actual techniques as a form of fighting occupy the lowest level of judo – the base. According to this logic, the final stage of utilizing one’s skills and strengths for the benefit of society constitutes the highest level of judo. This leaves the actual training of the body and mind as the middle level.”<sup>8</sup> He goes on to say that developing oneself as a human being, but then failing to contribute to society, leaves one’s life devoid of meaning. “Regardless of how wonderful a person the individual practitioner becomes, or however physically strong and dexterous, if they should perish without putting their attributes to greater use, it is somewhat comparable to a rich man dying without opportunity to spend his fortune.”<sup>9</sup>

### ***Shugyō***

Within Japanese culture, it is recognized that an individual may undertake a particular discipline for the sake of self-cultivation. Such an undertaking may be referred to as *shugyō*. It can be an overtly religious activity, but is typically something that others would consider secular. Among the most common are calligraphy (*shodō*), the tea ceremony (*chadō*), flower arranging (*ikebana* or *kadō*), and martial arts (*budō*), although a great many different activities may be *shugyō*. (Notice that the suffix in these art forms is *dō*, meaning “way,” a reference to the spiritual path that we may tread as human beings.) While we in the West may speak of a person’s chosen hobby or weekend activity, a *shugyō* is much more significant. It is an austere mental and physical discipline that one pursues for decades, if not a lifetime.

The word was originally used in Buddhist training, although it does not necessarily carry a distinctly religious connotation today. In Zen circles, much the same meaning is captured in the word *kūfu*, which has been translated, “employing oneself assiduously to discover the way to the objective.”<sup>10</sup> We in the West often imagine people in Japan devoting themselves to their chosen discipline with the intent of attaining “enlightenment.” Certainly, Eugen Herrigel’s *Zen*

---

<sup>8</sup> From Murata Naoki, “From ‘Jutsu’ to ‘Dō’: The Birth of Kōdōkan Judo,” *Budo Perspectives*, Ed. Alexander Bennett (Auckland, New Zealand: Kendo World Publications, 2005), 150.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 157.

*in the Art of Archery* contributed greatly to this perception. However, while there are individuals who do aspire to a Buddhist notion of *satori*, or awakening, through their chosen *shugyō*, the majority do not have such an obviously religious objective in mind. In fact, the suggestion that their *shugyō* is a religious undertaking would strike many of them as odd. At the same time, it is easy to see cultivation of oneself for the benefit of humanity as an essential element of spirituality and religion.

So, how is it that arranging flowers, shooting an arrow, or putting brush to paper constitutes a life-transforming, spiritual discipline? In typical Japanese fashion, the idea has been expressed quite succinctly: “*Ichigei wa mangei ni tsūzuru.*” That is, one art corresponds to ten-thousand arts. The individual who dedicates herself to attaining perfection in a particular art form must nurture her own patience, industry, attention to detail, indomitable spirit, and imperturbability of mind. However, she is not simply working to become a master of the bow or brush, but a master of herself. As a person of such abilities, she is of far greater service to her neighbors.

Consider, *chadō*, the “Way of tea.” This famous Japanese ceremony requires a tea-master who has spent decades nurturing a skill of utter refinement. Far more than the art of making excellent tea, the tea-master must have the aesthetic refinement to create an environment and atmosphere perfectly in keeping with the Japanese values of *wabi* and *sabi*, i.e. a rustic naturalism shorn of any pretentiousness. The elaborate choreography of the ritual must be observed with the utmost attention to every detail. All of his movements, words, and gestures must communicate unqualified grace. His mind must be fully present in his preparation of the tea and interaction with his guests. “Thus the tea-master [strives] to be something more than the artist, – art itself.”<sup>11</sup>

In the end, what is sought is not only an ideal in the practice of serving tea to one’s guests in the ceremony itself, but cultivation of oneself that translates into every action in one’s life. The same discipline that allows our tea-master to be mindful, attentive, and disciplined is not limited to the particular practice of tea, but extends to all of life. The renowned scholar of Zen, D.T. Suzuki, explained, “[I]n fact of all the arts as they are studied in Japan and probably also in other Far Eastern countries, ... they are not intended for utilitarian purposes only or for purely aesthetic enjoyments, but are meant to train the mind; indeed, to bring it into contact with the ultimate reality.”<sup>12</sup>

In my favorite story involving a Japanese tea-master – and there are many – we find the “Teaman of Tosa” pressed into a duel by a thuggish samurai. Unfortunately, our hero has no knowledge of sword fighting, and so this contest will surely mean his death. Not wanting to

---

<sup>11</sup> Kakuzo Okakura, *The Book of Tea* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2006)

<sup>12</sup> Introduction to Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery* (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1953), 9.

embarrass his lord by fleeing or acting dishonorably, and knowing that he cannot fight, he prepares himself to die. He calmly proceeds to remove and fold his jacket. He ties up his sleeves, gathers his pleated skirt, and raises his sword overhead, determined to at least strike back at the moment his opponent will cut him down. The ruffian, however, perceiving the absolutely calm and resolute mind of the tea-master, facing death with imperturbable resoluteness, begins to retreat. He eventually throws down his sword and apologizes for issuing the challenge.

Stories such as these, while of doubtful historicity, were told to illustrate the point that the mind cultivated in a particular discipline is the same mind we take with us into every encounter in life. A mind that is indomitable in one area is indomitable in all areas. The spirit cultivated through any *shugyō* is prepared for any event, even one's own imminent demise. While in the West, one may study the violin or painting for the sake of that discipline – i.e. excellence in that art form is the goal or *telos* – the Japanese model does not see mastery of the specific art as the end. One does not excel in music merely for the sake of oneself, or distinction in the art. The *telos* is in service to others. In this particular case, the Teaman of Tosa was able to serve his lord – and indeed the rogue samurai as well! – in a context quite apart from the tearoom.

We see, then, the particular activity is a means to a greater end. The mind which sheds distraction, disruption, and craving through years of severe practice – whether wielding a sword or a whisk – becomes better able to engage life in all manner of activity. Patience, presentness, and attention to detail in one area of life may be translated to ten thousand others. Donn Draeger, the martial arts historian, explained, “Metaphysically speaking, the *dō* forms [as *shugyō*] urge their advocates to seek an understanding of the whole of life through a segment of it, a sphere of personal activity in which the cadence of nature can be sensed and experienced. The *dō* forms thus involve transferring an attitude toward life from the particular to the universal and absolute.”<sup>13</sup>

The Japanese martial arts, known as *budō*, are also a very important form of *shugyō*. It may seem counterintuitive that studying various styles of combat, systems designed to kill or maim one's enemies, can become a means of fostering spiritual maturity and sowing seeds of peace in society. However, this is exactly the case. The Japanese have long recognized that having an “unfettered mind” is quite important when you are standing face to face with someone holding a 3-foot-long razor blade. In addition to the requisite physical techniques of *kenjutsu*, it was taught that one must cultivate a steady mind, a mind that moves freely and that has overcome all fear of death. As with the tea-master, the swordsman who has overcome attachment to the things of this world is able to dedicate himself body and soul to the calling of duty. His mind is not thrown hither and yon by the attractions of wine, women, and song. He is not susceptible

---

<sup>13</sup> Draeger, *Classical Budo*, 25.

to fits of violent rage, but seeks to act honorably. His mind is not even swayed by concern for his very life. The phenomenal discipline required of a samurai in training his mind for combat must necessarily translate into every area of life.

Armed combat in Japan largely came to an end in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, with the dawn of the Tokugawa era of peace, but the study of *budō* did not. Still today one finds Japanese, young and old, practicing *budō*. At Senshu University, when I taught there in 2008, there were roughly ten different student clubs practicing various forms of *budō*, from archery to judo. Of course, people are no longer training for war, and in fact rarely think about their disciplines for self-defense. Rather, they practice for self-cultivation. (For young people, *budō* as sport is increasing in importance, along with many discussions about the tension between sport and *shugyō*). Even without the need to overcome the fear of death, contemporary martial arts in Japan require of their practitioners decades of practice, study, attention to detail, respect, and mental discipline. Ubiquitous in Japanese *budō*, at the same time, is the mandate that one should refrain from violent behavior. Students are taught that they are learning to fight so that they need not fight. At the karate dojo where I trained in Tokyo, the *dojo kun* (sometimes translated “training hall rules”) were simply: “Work to perfect your character; Always act with good manners; Refrain from violent and uncontrolled behavior; Cultivate a spirit of endeavor and perseverance; Have fidelity in seeking a true way.”

Here in the West, we often see martial art schools advertising the value of discipline, respect, and patience for youngsters. In the East, it has long been understood by serious practitioners that this is a discipline for a lifetime. I am convinced that this traditional Japanese observation is right: We never outgrow the need to develop ourselves physically, mentally, and morally. Failure to do so is, quite simply, poor stewardship.

Unfortunately, younger generations in Japan have begun to think more like their American counterparts. Japanese *geidō* (art forms) are increasingly viewed as sport. This can be clearly seen in martial arts like judo, kendo, and *kyudō* (traditional Japanese archery), but also in arts like calligraphy, where *shodō* clubs in elementary and high schools compete with one another for titles and prizes. Here, the goal is victory over another, rather than victory over oneself. Today, the older generation still holds to the value of these disciplines as *shugyō*. Perhaps the young adults will return to the perspectives of their elders as they mature.

In all *shugyō*, the role of the sensei, or teacher (literally, “one who has gone before”), is of the utmost importance, and he or she is treated with the greatest of respect. Indeed, all teachers are accorded considerable esteem in Japan – a situation I will admit to enjoying during my time at Senshu University. In the case of *shugyō*, it is understood that one’s sensei has undergone decades of rigorous personal training to learn, internalize, and live the “Way” of the particular discipline. She has cultivated her mind, body, and soul through a particular *dō* form and has

thereby become a person of great discipline, character, and compassion. As one who has then “gone before,” she is able to teach others. In teaching others, please note, she is not simply helping them to become accomplished in this one particular art, but in ten thousand arts. That is to say, she enables them to become accomplished in all of life. The one who has achieved this, and who is dedicated to helping others to do so as well, is then deserving of great respect. This may explain why the Japanese refer to those who study various *shugyō* as *deshi* (“disciples”) rather than *gakusei* (“students”).

### **Lutheran *shugyō*?**

Christians are generally in agreement that faith is to be active in works, as an essential part of the Christian life. Actually living that life the way we should, however, is really hard. Developing and nurturing godly virtues – courage, self-discipline, patience, stillness of mind, indomitable spirit, compassion, generosity – allow for greater progress in one’s sanctification, becoming the people God wants us to be. Again, this is not for the sake of our own glory, but the well-being of others.

The Japanese have their various *shugyō* to achieve this. And it is easy to see the merit and worth of undertaking rigorous discipleship in a *dō*-form, cultivating excellence of character, in order to be of greater service to the world. Am I, then, suggesting that western Christians should adopt a *shugyō* for the sake of their sanctification? Yes and no.

I honestly believe that a westerner who has the opportunity to undertake serious study of a classic Japanese art form from a qualified instructor should seriously consider doing so. It is not that there is something exceptional about the particular art form. Calligraphy holds no inherently greater virtue as an activity than golf or tuba. Rather, it is the context in which these disciplines are taught. The true masters of these *dō*-forms are able to teach all of life through their particular disciplines. The teaching paradigm involves the development of mind, body, and spirit through years of austere discipline. Thus, there is pedagogy already in place for teaching not only the art, but its application to all of life. Various western hobbies and pursuits do not have the same emphasis on personal cultivation as an essential component in their practice. Turning down an opportunity to study a Japanese *shugyō* could be a waste of a phenomenal resource.

At the same time, few people have an opportunity to discover, let alone undertake, such a traditional Japanese practice. This is not a matter of driving down the street to your local karate school or signing up for flower-arranging at the YMCA. Qualified teachers of these arts who treat them as *shugyō* are rare, especially outside of Japan. And even if one is found, there are innumerable constraints that may prevent us from pursuing such a discipline, from our work schedule to the balance in our checking account.

However, it is not my intent to suggest that a traditional Japanese art form... studied for decades... under a qualified instructor... is the only way to import value from the Japanese model. Rather, it is the strenuous effort to improve oneself for the sake of the world that matters. This can be undertaken through the disciplines of *hatha yoga*, running, riflery, gardening, or housekeeping – which, believe it or not, holds an important place as *shugyō* in Japanese culture. What matters is carrying out one's task with attention to cultivating mental and physical excellence in every moment. The fruits of such work can be patience, diligence, industriousness, health, and awareness. The man who disciplines himself to be fully mindful and "in the moment" in fly-tying can, if he desires, bring that same aptitude to his relationships, being fully present when listening to the concerns of his wife, children, or friends. If he understands that what he is fostering in one discipline may translate to ten thousand, he is engaged in *shugyō*.

The value of this notion of *shugyō* need not be limited to specific art forms or undertakings. One can engage all of life as *shugyō*. Zen Master Omori Sogen Roshi taught that one cannot rely only on the time spent in seated meditation in order to discipline the mind;<sup>14</sup> it must be undertaken all day long, whether walking, working, or waiting for the bus. Our daily lives are full of opportunities to develop our human potential. Rush hour traffic is a wonderful opportunity to attend to one's mental discipline and maturity. My buddy Steve will intentionally stand in the longest checkout line at the store in order to develop within himself greater patience. When painting the soffits around your house, attention to detail and the pursuit of perfection, rather than just doing it "good enough," can translate into all aspects of one's life. As Dad always said, "Something worth doing is worth doing right."

At the same time, while I believe that it is possible to nurture the body, mind, and spirit in various times and places, doing so effectively is not a given. Throughout Asia, different cultures have developed such disciplines over millennia. Various schools of yoga, Daoist meditation, *zazen*, and tantric practice, to name a few, have remarkably sophisticated approaches to personal cultivation. Working on keeping your cool while driving at rush hour on Route 1 in New Jersey is good – and something I never quite achieved – but there are a great deal of formal techniques and methods practiced by millions around the world. It may be wise to seek out and benefit from those who have centuries of design and practice behind their system.

It is not my hope, nor within my perception of possibility, that my fellow Lutherans will all run out and sign up for classes in calligraphy, seek out a Zen master, or join their local judo school. I doubt that they will form book clubs, reading classics like *The Life-Giving Sword* or *Zen Mind*,

---

<sup>14</sup> Omori Sogen, *An Introduction to Zen Training*, Trans. Dogen Hosokawa and Roy Yoshimoto (Rutland, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 2001), 98.

*Beginner's Mind.* I do not anticipate anyone heading off to Japan in search of their true self through the disciplines of Japanese archery or the Tea Ceremony. Rather, I would only wish that more Christians could perceive and appreciate the value of self-cultivation.

One of the greatest concerns I have about Lutheran theology is the ease with which it can be twisted into Quietism. We sit around waiting for God to inspire us to do good, knowing our salvation is already in the bag. It is true that we are incapable of good works on our own, and what little we do is tainted with greed and selfishness. And our forebears in the 16<sup>th</sup> century were right to condemn the claim that “good works are necessary for salvation.” However, we live in a world of tremendous misery and grief. The Buddha described our condition as one of inevitable suffering, while Luther spoke of the world as “a mad dog with bloody teeth.” We can pick up any newspaper on any day and face the distress which characterizes human existence. How is it, then, that the redeemed can be found resting? When there are tools at our disposal that can bring solace and succor to those in need, why do we so often leave them hanging in the shed?

If more of us could appreciate the moral imperative of good stewardship – stewardship of our minds and bodies – and how the Christian life requires of us hard work and sacrifice, we might be more inclined to take seriously the opportunities for *shugyō* that may present themselves. Whether they come from Roman Catholicism or Zen, or even our secular pastimes, time spent in such disciplines is well spent. When the development of the self becomes more highly esteemed, not for its benefit to the practitioner, but for what it may enable us to contribute to the world, we will be making a good start. And in doing so, we may better understand our own theological heritage: “Let us therefore covet this, that we may always be able to progress and not pause at any time or have reached perfection.”<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> LW 11, 429.