

The true meaning of “Look at a far away mountain”

By Santoso Hanitijo

Most of us practicing Kendo and Iaido are quite familiar with the saying of “Look at a far away mountain”. It sounds rather poetic and philosophical as those wise and ancient sayings. What is the true meaning or is there any hidden message behind this saying? In fact, it is one of the most important concepts in the training of oriental martial arts.

In Kendo’s sparring, when the opponent tries to strike you, your eyes at once catch the movement of his/her sword (shinai) and you may strive to follow it. As soon as this happens, your mind stops at the opponent’s sword. You will lose the freedom of your movement and most likely you will be cut (hit) by your opponent. It is because your mind attaches to a particular thing that we refer to as the “stopping mind”.

“Look at far away mountain” teaches one not to attach his/her mind on any part of the opponent, whether it is his look, his movement or his striking sword (shinai). You look at your opponent as if you were looking at far away mountain (i.e. one can never fix his/her eyes on a particular part of the far away mountain).

When your opponent’s sword (shinai) is about to strike you, do not let your mind stop there. Do not intend to strike according to his/her rhythm. You perceive the opponent’s move but do not allow your mind to stop there. You move on just as you are; the striking sword of your opponent will become the striking sword of yours (i.e. the mind of your opponent will be overtaken by your unattached movement). Takuan Soho (1573-1645), the great Zen Master and teacher of many famous swordmen including Miyamoto Musashi once said: “You see but don’t react. Don’t let it stop you; move on just as you are.”

Is the above explanation still too philosophical?

How about this: *“when you look at a donut, do not focus on the hole or you will miss the whole picture”*.