

## No-nonsense no-mind

*Zen & Budo: The Way of the Warrior* by Roshi Taisen Deshimaru and Reiryu Philippe Coupey; Budo Éditions, Noissy-sur-École, France, 2013; 160 pages, trade paperback, 15 euros.

Reviewed by [Dana Wilde](#)

"I began Zen through Karate," Philippe Coupey tells an interviewer who is trying to get him to talk about the links between Zen practice and the martial arts. "The school was Shōtōkan. I arrived from the U.S. in 1969 and began Karate in 1971 with the teacher Daniel Ney on Rue de Pontoise. ... I went to the Paris Zen dojo on rue Pernety in 1972 alone," where he met Master Taisen Deshimaru and went on to spend the rest of his life – still going strong – as a Zen monk.

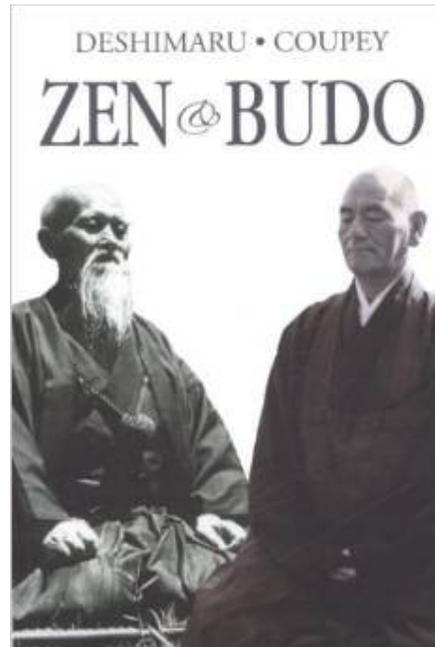
A Zen monk intent, that is, on the authentic transmission of the teaching. Following his time practicing with Master Deshimaru, who died in 1982, Coupey became a "spiritual referent for some 30 dojos in France, Germany, England and Switzerland" and the author of a number of irreverent books, including *Simply Sitting*, *In the Belly of the Dragon* and now *Zen & Budo*, all of which function something like whacks of verbal *kyosaku*.

They express a sort of no-nonsense no-mind. They aim to detach the essence of Zen practice – which is, essentially put, no-practice – from the tangled webs we weave over practically everything. One of the tangles involves the evolution of Asian martial arts into a form of spiritual practice and then, especially in the postwar West, their devolution into a sport. The disentangling agent, in the Coupey way, is the teachings of Master Deshimaru. *Zen & Budo* is a collection of Deshimaru's talks (given in 1975) on martial arts and Zen.

"Budō is the way of the Warrior," the book tells us right upfront, "and it includes all the Japanese martial arts. Budō is directly responsible for deepening the existing relationship between ethics, religion and philosophy; ancient texts pertaining to

Budō concern mental culture and its reflections upon the nature of the ego. In this way, the martial arts differ from mere sports."

"In Japanese, 'Dō' signifies the Way," the master says, and continues: "In Asia, the Way has become



the most elevated morality and the essence of all religion and philosophy. For example the yin and yang of the I Ching; the 'U' and 'Mu'; Lao Tseu's 'existence and non-existence.' This means to forget one's body

and one's personal mind: which is absolute mind, the world of the non-ego. This also means to harmonize, to fuse heaven and earth, to follow the cosmic system."

After this introduction, the talks, sort of like fundamental *katas* of the mind, rehearse the essential teachings of this harmony of mind and body, no-mind and no-body, for which practice – whether sitting or martial – can clear the way. A talk on *Kendo* ("the Way of cutting") points out that "Zen is not some sort of health cure."

The parable that follows recounts the frustrations of a man who cannot get rid of a big, ugly rat marauding in his house. He solicits the loan of a couple of cats who, though in their different ways are athletic and powerful, are frightened off or

defeated by this rat. Finally the man brings in a third cat, scrawny-looking, small and black. When confronted by the rat, this weaker-seeming cat maintains a perfectly still composure, which disconcerts the rat. In the rat's instant of uncertainty, the cat pounces and kills it. The black cat succeeded where the stronger cats failed because "he had been able to unify his strength ... and his technique and his activity in the very instant."

Then, the parable, observes, there is yet another cat, old, gray and weak-looking, who has never killed any rats – because his composure is so much more natural and automatic than even the black cat's that the rats run from him even in his dreams.

*Zen & Budo* is a labor of reverence, diligence and high dedication to the duties of mushotoku. The bilingual text, with English translation facing French, provides the full range of Philippe Coupey's notorious verbal energy. It's illustrated with black and white photos of Master Deshimaru and other significant figures along Coupey's way, plus pleasant, well-displayed Japanese calligraphy. A slap-your-face interview with Coupey gives more context to the topic at hand. *Zen & Budo* and Coupey's other books are available through [online book sellers](#).

*This review was scheduled to appear in the venerable small New York magazine House Organ, but the sad, sudden departure of editor, publisher and friend of the truth Kenneth Warren in May 2015 got in the way.*