

# VISUALIZATION

The skill you must develop to become proficient  
in Martial Arts.



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## Introduction

*"Be as still as the wood, attack like the wind. Be as thorough as fire. Once we concur, be unmovable as a mountain." –Takeda Shingen*

**V**isualization is an important part of many martial arts. It works better than most people could ever realize. Its power has been documented for thousands of years, and has been proven from martial arts to medicine to quantum physics. If appropriately used, visualization can increase your speed, strength and stamina. It can make you capable of manoeuvres that practice alone could never accomplish.

What is Visualization? What is the role of visualization in the martial art of Jujitsu? To answer these questions, it is important to know what Jujitsu is.

Jujitsu is a form of unarmed combat which originated in the Orient, and can be traced well into Japanese and Chinese History. This art is a forerunner of many contemporary combat activities such as *Judo*, *Aikido* and *Karate*. Literally Jujitsu means "gentle art" which is based on the principle of efficient use of mental and physical energy, while moving in harmony with your opponent's force (*ki*). **Ju** is the principle of suppleness, non-resistance, yielding and/or giving way. **Jitsu** means an art, the studying of techniques. The art of Jujitsu incorporates the use of techniques for self-defence, unarmed combat, sporting and social/recreational pursuits. This is when visualization is extremely important because trainers and learners of Jujitsu cannot go out and have actual fights each day. How is it then that a person can develop the Jujitsu arts skill without fighting? The answer is visualization or imagery.

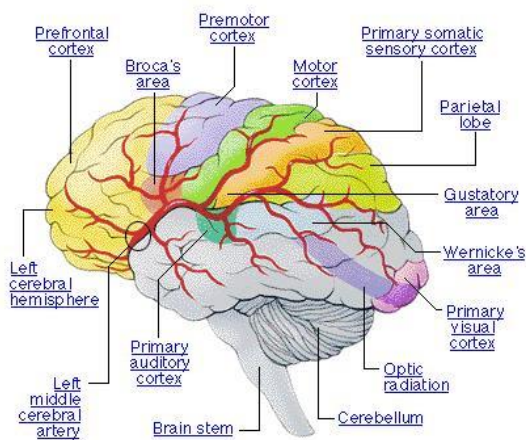
In the most basic form, visualization is simply imagining yourself completing an action or having particular motion associated to a given situation. Modern Jujitsu maintains many of the original techniques of the samurai warrior which includes training in and application of the techniques of falling, throwing, joint-locking, strangling, striking, holding or immobilization techniques and resuscitation techniques. These techniques require physical manoeuvres and intention of what you want to do or feel control of the physical body with the mind. This is visualization, the process of mentally creating an image.

You can't talk to your hand and tell it to heal itself; but if you picture the wound shrinking and healing, studies have shown that it will heal significantly faster, which proves that there is an actual biological connection between the mind and the body. Visualization when appropriately used and when done correctly, can be just as effective as physically executing the manoeuvre of Jujitsu's gentle art, based on the principle of efficient use of mental and physical energy.

## Background

Your body is a mass of muscles and nerves linked together into the central processing unit that is your brain. This series of articles on sports psychology seeks to show you how to use that central processing unit to its greatest effect in controlling your body to give optimum sporting performance. Your body is a beautifully evolved sporting machine, comprising, among other things, muscles that can be trained to a peak of fitness and nerves that control the muscles. The nerves are massively linked in your brain: vast numbers of nerve cells are linked with a hugely greater number of interconnections.

### *Parts of Human Brain*



Part of the reason that human children take so long to reach maturity relative to animals is that we have many more nerve cells in our brain. Initially our brains are much disorganized. Much of the process of growing up, being educated, and becoming mentally mature is the process of organizing the vast chaos of the interconnectedness of the nerves in our brain into useful pathways.

Much of the process of learning and improving sporting reflexes and skills is the laying down, modification, and strengthening of nerve pathways in our body and brains. Some of these nerve pathways lie outside our brain in nerves of the body and spine. These need to be trained by physical training.

Many of the pathways, however, lie within the brain. These pathways can be effectively trained by the use of mental techniques such as imagery and simulation.

Just like learning anything worthwhile, this will take practice and the more time you spend practising these techniques, the better you will get and the more parts of your life you will be able to affect with it. Once you're good at visualization, there is nothing you can't accomplish!

## **Become Proficient in the Martial Arts through Visualization**

Modern psychologists have expounded that visualization is a method of practice valuable in developing a positive attitude to a winning technique in a physical skill. To be effective in the arts of Jujitsu, students should develop the skill of visualization. Students of Jujitsu don't go out and have a fight each day and yet they develop martial arts skills without fighting.

### **Visualization can be translated in three ways:**

1. ***The Mind's Eye*** A Jujitsu martial artist is seeing the movements in the mind and then performing the moves that meet the visualized scenario. The martial artist can also use visualization out of the world. Good instructors will ask their students to imagine themselves in various situations. Suppose you were walking down the street and someone jumped out at you from the alley. What would you do if someone attacks you as you are getting in your car? As the person imagines the different attacks might occur, he or she physically goes through the moves that will take to deal with such an assault, to move instinctively, a necessary skill for self-defence.
2. ***Mental Image or 3-D Image*** In Jujitsu, it is essential that the practitioner has a realistic target. Like other martial arts, Jujitsu punches, kicks, and strikes legitimate nerve centres, students would in actual self-defence. The visualization must be so accurate that it is no different from having real people in the area. A Jujitsu practitioner can gain real self-defense experience without having to fight or harm a human being.
3. ***Other Senses*** As the martial artist practises Jujitsu, he or she feels hands grab the wrists or shoulder, feels his or her body encircled in bear hugs, and hears footsteps coming up from behind. In a real-life combat, any number of things can save your life. Example: When the sun is behind a person, a shadow leads. Seeing a shadow approaching swiftly from behind may be enough warning to save your life if you are perceptive enough to notice it. Reflections on a store window, in a mirror in a restaurant, or in the glass door of the refrigerated area of a convenience store may be the warning that saves your life. The idea is to structure your imagination the most realistic scenario you can visualize. Moving in this imaginary world helps you develop the skill you will need in real-life self-defence.



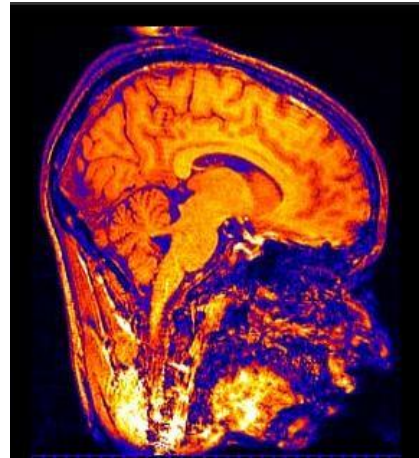
### **Mokuso**

*A recuperative and meditative posture, one relaxes, breathes calmly and tries to maintain an 'empty' mind, thus freeing oneself from habitual tension. At the beginning and end of each class, instructors and students often carry out **Mokuso** which is a kneeling or sitting meditation. A mental rehearsal beneficial to enhance physical performances is by closing one's eyes and mentally walking through the movements required of a Jujitsu technique. Visualization involves running through a sequence of movements in the mind, imagining what it would feel like to perform them for real.*

## How to use Visualization to practice a manoeuvre effectively?

One theory is that your mind is afraid of unknowns and considers them to be “pain”, while it considers “knowns” to be pleasure, regardless of how unpleasurable they may actually be. This means that once you have put that manoeuvre or into the “knowns” category in your head, your brain will stop fighting against you and will do everything possible to make it happen.

The following steps can be used for almost anything, whether it's to step into the ring and face an opponent, to speak in front of a crowd or to use a new software application that you are nervous about trying:



*MRI of a Human Brain*

- You must firstly know exactly how the action should be performed, because visualizing it incorrectly is the same as physically doing it incorrectly.
- When you visualize, use deep breathing and picture yourself performing the action flawlessly. Imagine how it feels physically and emotionally as well as how it appears.
- You should use a combination of all of your senses and feelings as you walk yourself through a mental scenario. You need to visualize exactly how each move looks and feels while you play it through in your mind as if it were actually happening from start to finish. Your brain will believe that whatever you are imagining is actually taking place as if you were actually living through that situation.

This can work for physical or emotional challenges such as anxiety before a test; fear of public speaking or apprehension to commit. Once you can visualize the association of calmness or excitement to be connected to being tested or public speaking, you will physically begin to feel different in that situation. By appropriately using visualization to associate positive emotions and outcomes with situations, your feelings of anxiety, fear or apprehension will fade away.

On this example, I will walk you through a short visualization for feeling confident when public speaking:

**First**, sit comfortably, close your eyes and begin breathing deeply. Clear your mind of any other thoughts and focus only on the matter at hand. Imagine yourself standing in your martial arts class – your instructor asks you to teach the class to do *Kansetsu waza*, a joint-locking technique applied to the wrist.



elbow, shoulder, knee and ankle joints. If you are a person who has anxieties for being in front of groups, your stomach may have flipped just at the thought of being asked the question.

**Second**, what you need to do now is to run yourself through the scenario as if you were there, but you will replace those feelings of fear (terror for some), with feelings of excitement or calm. In order to do that, you must know how it feels physically and emotionally to feel excitement. Picture that teacher telling you that you just won the lottery or picture your significant other telling you some great news. How does that feel? Now, you need to associate that emotion with having your instructor ask you to teach. Before replacing the emotion, you'll need to work through the problem. If your fear is failure, ridicule or simply being in front of people, you'll need to visualize teaching the class flawlessly, having the class extremely supportive and receptive, you'll have to see yourself demonstrating the move flawlessly to a class that learns it quickly. Basically, you need to visualize things working out without a hitch.

**Third**, once you can picture yourself teaching the class flawlessly, you need to feel the positive emotions of accomplishment and pride. Feel them in every way possible. You should be able to smell the surroundings, feel the cold mats under your feet and see and hear the class being impressed at your skills and abilities. Now that you can visualize that, insert the positive emotion of winning the lottery into the visualization when your instructor asks you to teach.



**Five steps to improve the quality of your Jujitsu sessions by effective use of visualisation:**

- Step One** Focus on the correct way to learn a technique. Example: Learning the *Ukemi waza* – falling technique in Jujitsu. Visualize yourself executing the falling technique with perfect balance, accuracy and coordination. Start slowly and gradually build speed. You can imagine practising a throwing technique with a wide range of partners, even if they aren't all available to physically throw, or you can imagine executing different grappling techniques in response to different actions by your opponent.
- Step Two** Imagine how to react to a specific self-defense situation. Example: The *Atemi waza* – striking techniques using punch and kicks. Visualize your opponent or attacker delivering a front kick or right cross. Think about how you should react. See yourself reacting confidently with strong counters and strikes. This is when you could apply *the continuous motion*, the physical principle of Jujitsu that creates momentum by continuously moving helps to generate power. As with striking, when you throw a jab you create the pre-stretch and momentum for a powerful straight punch.
- Step Three** Create a strong visualization for greater impact. Use all of your senses to observe the detail of sensations, such as the feel and movement of a kick, the texture of your uniform, and the sounds of your feet moving.
- Step Four** Imagine yourself within your body rather than looking at yourself from a distance. It creates a more realistic visualization. It is especially useful to apply these techniques to various katas like *Ukemi No Kata, Kyushin Jitsu Kata, Nage No Kata etc.*
- Step Five** Anticipate the anxiety and stress that comes with competition and promotion testing. Visualize yourself using deep-breathing techniques and performing confidently to reduce your stress level.



## Conclusion

Visualization is especially powerful when used in conjunction with relaxation in training. While there is still a debate as to the precise mechanism by which visualization works, it has been proven that the body responds to internal images just as it does to external images. Thus, imagining executing a hip throw can produce much the same physiological responses as actually doing it. The key words are “can produce.” During a deep relaxation state, you are quieting the body and the mind. You trick the body into learning the skill based on our imagery. On the other hand, the more tense, keyed up, or mentally and physically busy you are, the more likely the signal will get lost in the noise. Some psychologists argue that for imagery to be effective, it must be coupled with relaxation and focus.

Visualization allows us to communicate with ourselves in a non-verbal fashion: words, even words we say to ourselves, require an extra layer of translation. Images, on the other hand, can produce a direct physiological response. With practice, you can imagine virtually any scenario and build into the image our desired responses.

There is experimental evidence that visualization can help with strength training, physical conditioning, and healing. Sounds great, right? Of course, there are a couple of *caveats*.

**First**, you must have some understanding of the skill you are trying to visualize. Mental rehearsal is fine, but if you rehearse the skill incorrectly, then you’ll perform the skill incorrectly.

**Second**, visualization requires practice. Like any other skill, don’t expect it to be there under stress if you haven’t trained it. Some people claim that they simply can’t visualize. While that may be true in rare cases, the simple reality is that if you can daydream, you can visualize. It’s just matter of learning how. Different people will visualize in different ways: some people visualize in colours, others do not; some people can imagine sounds, others textures, etc. Part of learning visualization is learning what works for you.

While learning to fully integrate mind and body can be an extremely challenging task, the rewards are worth the effort.



*... there are no shortcuts in Jujitsu. Each person entering into the art must labour in slow pain, like a mother giving birth. Only after the birth of her child can she explain the highs and lows of it.*

*- Unknown author*

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