



## **NINPO & NINJUTSU AN INTRODUCTION**

### **What is Ninjutsu?**

Most people have a set image of ninja and ninjutsu in their heads before they begin practicing the art. Much of this image comes from popular fiction and Hollywood movies. Some is based on truth but mostly it is based on people's perceptions and in many cases misconceptions about the art.

The most common image of ninja are that of black clad assassins, this is not a true reflection of ninja in historical Japan. Many people argue that ninja wore black because they are depicted as wearing black within most contemporary Japanese wood block prints and this is true. However this ignores the perception that Japanese people have of the colour. Black in Japanese art is generally used to depict people who cannot be seen. As such ninja are depicted as wearing black because it conveys the image of invisibility. Black was a very expensive and difficult colour to manufacture in medieval times, it is also therefore extremely unlikely, that ninja would wear or be able to afford black dyed clothing. But, it is the image of ninjas wearing black which has been adopted by western society and portrayed by the majority of ninjutsu ryu.

Ninja dressed to blend into their environment and society. If black was expensive why would they wear it to blend in, if nobody else was wearing it? Also from the point of view of hiding and camouflage black is also an inappropriate colour to wear. When you next look outside at night and look at the colours of the grass, trees, bushes and sky, are any of these black? The answer will almost certainly be no. One of the aims of the British Fuma Ryu Ninjutsu Society is to dispel the Hollywood and western created myth about black clad ninja. This is the reason why we do not adopt the black ninja costume sold for ninjutsu practitioners by most martial art equipment suppliers.

Fundamentally ninjutsu is also not about fighting; when you have to fight it is generally using a weapon. The opponents of ninja in medieval Japan were other ninja, Samurai, Yamabushi, Ronin or Ashigaru. All of these people were warriors of some description and usually armed. Therefore unarmed skills of fighting against these opponents would be of limited use. We therefore question ninjutsu practitioners who only emphasise unarmed techniques, as ninja would be facing armed opponents. This does not make their techniques in-effective but it should make students question their instructors interpretation of ninjutsu as it may be a particular trait of that Ryuha. Unarmed techniques have their place in ninjutsu but the Fuma Ryu teachings emphasise that weapon skills are the most important skills as you were always fighting other armed opponents.

Finally ninjutsu also places a different emphasis on confrontation to other martial arts. Most other arts teach their students to effectively fight one on one against opponents. Ninjutsu does not place as much priority on this. The aim of ninjutsu is to survive and complete assigned missions. If I have to fight then I put myself and the mission at risk. Therefore logically fighting is the least important of all ninjutsu skills. If all other skills are practiced effectively then I will not have any need to fight. I will not put myself at risk and I will not put the mission at risk. I will have a greater chance of surviving and completing my objective.



If you take this final point, then ninjutsu is not about fighting, nor is it about hiding in the dark, it is really about a state of mind that you adopt to complete whatever mission you are assigned. Although this is just a simplification ninjutsu when practiced in its pure form is essentially as way of life and a way of looking on life. This will vary from the teachings of different Ninjutsu Ryuha but essentially their aims will be similar which is why ninjutsu is different to most other Japanese Martial art forms.

### **What is Ninpo?**

To understand what ninpo is you have to begin with the understanding of Japanese Martial Art doctrine and terminology. Basically, there are three descriptive terms for Japanese martial arts, these are as follows:

Do – Way  
Jutsu – Skill  
Po – Path

This is a very simple way at looking at all Japanese arts and does not mean that some are more effective than others, for there is no ultimate martial art. Each is different and places an emphasis on a different form of movement and way of fighting utilising distance to their own advantage. But, Do, Jutsu and Po can be used to look at the philosophical complexity of the arts.

Do arts can be seen as practicing the techniques of the art and many Do arts have their roots in older jutsu arts practicing skills and philosophy. In some respect there is little difference between Do and Jutsu arts as many have the same root basis. This tracks the development of arts such as Kendo which formed from Kenjutsu. Kendo practitioners are exceptionally skilled swordsmen who train to cut points on the armour to score points in competition; however, they are not kenjutsu practitioners who train in a different and deeper aspect of using the ken. Kenjutsu practitioners train to cut and make killing blows with the ken. Both arts have effective ways of using the sword but they both train to use it for different purposes.

However when you look at the difference between ninjutsu and ninpo it is more complex. Although Nin in both words is the same kanji it takes on a different meaning. Ninjutsu means endurance/stealth skills where as ninpo translates as ‘path of choice’. This is fundamentally different to ninjutsu. The emphasis in ninpo is about the path of ninpo and your choices on the path, this is different to ninjutsu which emphasises on survival. Although ninpo also sees survival as important the emphasis is on the choices made to survive, what you choose to do and what you choose not to. It is about maintaining the balance within yourself, the inyo and enyo forces within the world and how your interaction with others affects these.

You cannot fully understand ninpo without first understanding ninjutsu, both are related and an understanding of one assists with the understanding of the other. What is also true is as you train and develop your understanding of ninjutsu and ninpo develops with you as you walk further down the path of knowledge for each discipline.