



# AJA NEWSLETTER

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## Special points of interest:

- 2012 AJA dues are due now. Please see your sensei to submit as soon as possible.

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## The Concept of *Zanshin* in Japanese Martial Arts

Reginald Lee Heefner

The concept of *zanshin* in Japanese martial arts (*bugei*) and martial ways (*budo*) is not easily defined. For the moment, let us use “a heightened state of alertness once one opponent has been dispatched” as a working definition, though it may be a bit clumsy. I personally believe that it is not something that can be explicitly taught, though a good sensei can draw students’ attention toward its attainment, which happens only of its own accord after decades of rigorous training.

In order to get a better handle on the term, I believe it can be apprehended theoretically by examining the meaning of the two Sino-Japanese characters used to write the compound that represents the concept.

The syllable *zan* in *zanshin* is

written with the Sino-Japanese character

the basic meaning of which is “to remain; be left over; linger; stay; survive.”<sup>1</sup>

The syllable *shin* is the Sino-Japanese character for “heart”<sup>2</sup>

This character also expresses the semantic range of “mind, spirit, mentality, attention, intention, interest, will, and true meaning.” Combined with the Japanese verb *sura* (to do, to

name), it also means “to take heed.” So together, quite literally, the two characters mean “remaining heart/mind” or “remaining attention.”

Nelson’s classic Japanese-English dictionary does not list the compound for *zanshin*. However, it is listed in the *Kojien*, a comprehensive Japanese-Japanese dictionary that native speakers use then they are stumped by the meaning of a compound. Here it states that *zanshin* is “an attitude of mental preparedness for an enemy’s counter-attack once a technique has been effected in the art of sword or the art of the bow.” Thus, as we might well have surmised, the origins of the concept inhere in the sword, with a carry-over into the theoretical and practical framework

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## Stay On Your Feet

J.D. McCurdy, President

If attacked on the street, remain standing if at all possible. No one should want to go to the ground. Hitting concrete or asphalt will hurt.

When I decided on this topic, I knew where my thoughts were and why but was interested in what other good martial artists I know thought about it. I already had a pretty good idea,

because they have studied self-defense strategies, and we have discussed such situations off and on over the years. I’m reminded of what Sensei Al Gardner said at a camp at the University Of Maryland one summer: “Dennis, as a karate-ka I will kick you and punch you to the ground so you will not get up.” I got the same response when I recently asked the ques-

tion of my closest karate friend.

An aikido friend emphasized that the ground hurts (no matter how well you are versed in ukeki on hard surfaces), but he had mixed thoughts about the subject. According to his ryu, standing is the default strategy. Going to the ground is either a last resort and danger-

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## The Pre-Emptive Strike

David Patton

**“There is nothing that says you have to wait to be struck before striking out.”**

In thinking about self-defense I have often asked myself when and where a pre-emptive strike or “first blow” would be appropriate. It is important for people who train as we do to go through a kind of mental scenario from time to time. Doing so has proven to make people sharper and more prepared when confronted with the prospect of real violence. For those of us who study under the *Budoshin* system, it is common practice to yield and block before stunning and striking or kicking. Of course, it is our obligation as good citizens to avoid, evade, create distance, and/or run whenever possible to thwart conflict.

However, as a police officer for the last 23 years, I can tell you that there are times when a person can defend him- or herself lawfully by striking first. For example, take a domestic violence case: An abused woman faces her batterer. His hands clinched, he looks very angry, and he says, “I’m going to make sure, once and for all, that you do what I say.” The woman has no immediate escape and decides she is not going to go back to the hospital again. Before he has a chance to do or say anything else, she strikes him hard, breaking his jaw, and runs to safety. In many cases, despite the fact that she struck first, she may not be held at fault, since it can reasonably be inferred that she

was not the primary aggressor. Of course, we do not know all of the dynamics of this event, but let us assume that she had been battered for years and knew from his body language and statements that he had every intention of hurting her. Why would anyone believe that she would have to yield or try to run away before striking first?

Let us look at another situation that could happen to any of us. You have just left the local mall after shopping. You are in a dark parking lot trying to get into your car. Just then, a man walks up behind you with a tire iron in his hand and says, “Give me all your cash or I’m gonna bust you up!” Just as you reach for your wallet, he raises the iron as if to strike. What do you do? Most of us know that *Osoto Gari* would work well in this situation. Most of us do not see that technique as pre-emptive, but it is! You counter-attack the attacker before he has a chance to complete the strike. [Editor’s Note: *This might be an example of sen sen no sen, as described in Reginald Heefner’s article, although that concept often applies to subtler forms of threat.*] If the tire iron goes past the apex of his swing (where his strike is most powerful), it will be too late and the *Osoto Gari* will not work. So this is the time to strike. Now, as most Yudansha know, you can amplify this technique to

disable the attacker and ensure the success of your defense. Remember, this is a violent robbery where a deadly weapon is used. There is nothing that says you have to wait to be struck before striking out.

The aggressive incidents described above are potentially very violent, a fact that justifies a pre-emptive maneuver. Keep in mind that most assaults are far less likely to harm people physically. The prospect of being shoved or touched in an offensive manner will probably not justify a pre-emptive strike. In most cases you will have to “yield” first. Students should practice in reality-based situations whenever possible, while acting and responding in a responsible and prudent way. This requires more than just *dojo* practice. It requires discussions of legal matters, researching case law, speaking with lawyers about self-defense cases, training in real life scenarios, etc. I not only train my people in *kata* and *waza*, I explain to them why we do what we do and what the ramifications might be. We train without *gi* tops, with blindfolds, and in inferior positions to make the training as real as possible. The more you train in real terms, the better off you will be when faced with a real danger. ☪

## The AJA: More Than Just Insurance

George Kirby, Chairman

For some sensei and students, the AJA is like a shoebox in the back of the closet with the word "Insurance" on it. However, others see the AJA for what it is – a service organization. You might ask, besides providing insurance, what else does the AJA do? Well, it does a lot!

- The AJA provides national certificates of rank, which are recognized in AJA dojo throughout the county. The certificates, required for all members sankyu and higher, are nice looking and inexpensive. Do you have yours? AJA certificate applications are available online at the AJA website.
- The AJA provides AJA membership cards. Sensei can contact Steven Castorena for more information. He's listed on the AJA website.
- The AJA sanctions freestyle kata tournaments on both the east and west coasts. If you can get enough competitors together (combining 2-3 local dojo), there's no reason why you can't organize an AJA sanctioned kata competition yourself. In addition, I'm working with Sensei Alene Carteret and 2-3 other black belts to construct a system for determining national tournament winners, based upon standardized scoring across individual tournaments. Competitors

don't even have to meet on the same mat!

- The AJA publishes the AJA Newsletter. David Boesel and Will Harris have been doing an excellent job putting out issues of the newsletter as an online publication. If you're a sensei, you should be giving the link to your students or providing them with printed copies. You are encouraged to write an article for the newsletter, whether you're a sensei or a student. Sensei Dave also needs information from YOUR dojo including promotions and other events your dojo and students are involved in!
- The AJA has a new National Awards program, thanks to the work of Sensei John Landry. Sensei submit nominations for outstanding students and black belts, and there are awards for outstanding dojo. In addition, sensei will be able to present AJA certificate awards to students within their dojos for outstanding service or other reasons. More information will be available later as Sensei John finishes this up in the next month or so.
- The AJA can provide you with a list of available black belts in your area who might be able to sit on promotional boards for students testing in your dojo. It's impressive to see

outside sensei at black belt boards. It's good PR for you, the sensei, and your students will appreciate it too.

- There are also AJA sensei who'd love to teach a seminar at your dojo. This could be a good fundraiser for your dojo. All you have to do is ask.

The AJA can do a lot for you and your dojo – but you've got to get the shoebox out of the closet. Use the AJA logo on your documents and in any publicity. It can only help when others see that you're part of a national martial arts organization. Post your dojo and instructor certificates for all to see. Be sure to mention that you're an AJA dojo in any publicity or news releases you send out.

The AJA is not just about insurance. It's about a lot of other things, as well. What it does, how you and your students see it, and how your community sees it is up to you, whether you're a sensei or a student. The AJA is only as strong as all of us working together to publicize the organization and get it the name recognition it deserves. Don't be a weak link in the chain. Publicize the AJA. Use all of its services. Make the AJA chain strong and unbreakable. As a practical matter, the AJA is what you make of it! Shout "Kiyai" and go for it! ☺

## Newsletter Submissions

We need your help! If you have an article or an upcoming event, we would like to hear from you. It can be an article about technique, philosophy, real life encounters, or anything about the students or dojo. Even if it's just a comment about an article in the newsletter or an AJA event you've attended, we'd like to see it. If you have an upcoming event you would like to advertise, let us know. If you haven't guessed by now, we're interested in just about anything you have going on. If it's about you, the students or the teachers in your dojo, then it's about the AJA!

Please send your submissions to:

[American.Jujitsu.Association@Verizon.net](mailto:American.Jujitsu.Association@Verizon.net)

A note about formatting: Don't worry about it! The editors will take the time to format and size it to make it easy to read. Just get us the information and we'll make it work! ☺

## Stay On Your Feet

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ous tactic or an outcome that you don't choose – for example, if you are knocked to the ground and forced to defend in that position.

Goho (hard) techniques can help prevent an attacker from taking you to the ground. For example, if an attacker tries to tackle you from the front, you may be able to counter with evasion and strikes to open targets. Another approach is to apply a varietal kaiten nage technique while remaining upright. If he wraps his arms around your legs to sweep you off your feet (in morote gari or tora nage), you can sprawl and deliver an empi-uchi to the base of the skull or to the nerve pocket at the lower base of the scapula (shoulder blade). Painful blows such as these can easily dissuade your attacker.

If you are knocked to the ground (say, by a second and unknown attacker), you must have a useful defense strategy to deal with an opponent who is down on the ground with you... and with his accomplices in cowardice standing above you. There are (or should be) specific hard techniques for these situations in your ryu. For example, if you are in the guard or a mount position, you can strike with the elbow to the solar plexus or the face, immobilizing your opponent and allowing you to get back to your feet.

On the battlefield one goes to the ground to avoid a myriad of projectiles and incoming munitions followed by the enemy field force. In such a situation, you might be confronted by a standing, armed enemy approaching from the front, and perhaps from the rear and un-noticed until they are upon you. From my perspective, being pushed to the ground in a city neighborhood is no different than a battlefield. The aiki-bujutsu ryu have an entire category of goho defenses for fighting on the ground and defending against standing combatants. At the Daitobukan Dojo we practice defending from the ground using

our legs to kick at the opponents legs and then regain a standing posture.

However, there may be some occasions where deliberately taking an opponent down can give you the upper hand. If an attacker (in one-on-one situation) has the advantage of leg and arm length or excessive lower body power, these things can be eliminated by going to the ground. This is not wrestling per se, but a strategy that can make the small equal to the larger. Unfortunately, in my experience, many instructors teach ground techniques without teaching the associated strategies required for good self-defense.

A good way of training for this eventuality is to practice your basic judo ne-waza of transitioning from one immobilization to another -- mune yoko gatame to kesa gatame to kata gatame to kuzure shiho gatame to gayku (ushiro) shiho gatame and then back out...all the while uke is dynamic in his movement. Static practice offers little in what can be expected by uke. Osae-komi techniques of the judo and ju-jitsu are effective in gaining understanding of how an opponent is likely to move and hence how you can achieve a standing position.

Conclusion:

In general, staying on your feet is the best way to defend against an attack on the street. However, going to the ground as a strategy can be done. In some cases it has to be done. In rare and only rare cases, it should be done deliberately. In training, where we are operating under a system of rules, things are not the same as what we encounter in the street. We cannot always select our strategy, so the best advice for survival is to be prepared, and trained, for everything and not become involved in a mantra of assuming the mount. My preference is to stay on my feet -- if my opponent will let me. ☉

## The Concept of *Zanshin* in Japanese Martial Arts

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of unarmed combat.

But how might we see or learn *zanshin*? One of the prime purposes of *kata* is to inculcate this into practitioners, along with the concepts of *sen* (combat initiative), *go no sen* (responding to combat initiative), and *sen sen no sen* (foreseeing and sensing the intention of combat initiative).

You can see an example of *zanshin* in the movie *The Seven Samurai* (*Shichinin No Samurai*). Pay particular attention to the scene in which Kyuzo, the taciturn master swordsman, is challenged by another samurai and reluctantly accepts. The challenger charges Kyuzo, and both swing their swords. For a long moment, both men stand facing each other, swords down. It is not clear who won. Then the challenger topples to the ground. Kyuzo remains still, as if frozen in time and space, and

the scene closes with a lingering shot of his immobile face. Kyuzo is in that state of lingering heightened awareness that constitutes *zanshin*.

Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup>See Andrew N. Nelson's *The Modern Reader's Japanese-English Character Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Charles Tuttle, Tokyo, 1974, p. 522 entry 2444; henceforth abbreviated N2444, etc. Some sources use a different character for *zan* (N1713) that means "cruelty, wickedness, harsh, or merciless." I myself believe the first definition remains closer to the concept of "remaining in a heightened state of mental alertness." Both characters are correct, but the second is more rooted in the Chinese meaning of the term.

<sup>2</sup>N1645 in Nelson's dictionary. ☉

## About the American Ju-Jitsu Association

The American Ju-Jitsu Association was founded in 1972, by George Kirby and William Fromm at the request of their sensei, Jack Seki, for the purpose of bringing different ryu of the art together in an atmosphere of mutual cooperation and respect. Since that time it has grown from two dojo to approximately twenty-four, plus international affiliates. The AJA has established itself as a reputable organization within the martial arts community and works closely with other major Ju-Jitsu organizations in the United States and internationally in areas of mutual concern.

The AJA is a non-profit amateur athletic association registered with both the state of California and the United States government [IRS code 501(c)(3)]. It is a non-profit corporation with a charitable foundation status. Although originally recognized by the IRS as a "social club" because there was no other way to recognize the AJA as an amateur athletic association, formal recognition of the AJA as a true amateur athletic association, according to the criteria of the United States government, was secured in 1976 under the Sports Act of that year. To our knowledge, the AJA is the only martial arts organization in the U.S. that is classified by the IRS as an amateur athletic association. ☺

## Promotions

Rank	Name	Dojo	Date
Godan	Jeff Wynn	Vancouver Institute of Self Defense	8/21/2011
Yodan	Arnold Smith	Cub Run Jujitsu	9/25/2011
Shodan	Leon Mansfield	Reston YMCA Jujitsu	10/8/2011
Ikkyu	Arron Diyarza	Reseda Catdragon Dojo	10/20/2010
	Chris Wright-Martell	Budoshin Jujitsu Yudanshakai	11/6/2010
	Emily Hallameyer	Maru Martial Arts	9/29/2011
	Kelley Robins	Vancouver Institute of Self Defense	9/30/2011
Nikyu	Diann Reese	Vancouver Institute of Self Defense	10/7/2011
	Peter Turney	Bel Air Rec Council	3/24/2011
	Dustin Ferren	Bel Air Rec Council	3/24/2011
Sankyu	Joshua Smith	Bel Air Rec Council	3/24/2011
	April Warren	Reseda Catdragon Dojo	4/24/2011
	Marcos Diyarza	Reseda Catdragon Dojo	10/14/2010
	Trey Kimberling	Reseda Catdragon Dojo	10/14/2010

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