

Zanshin

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Zanshin means awareness. In practice zanshin is a state of mind where one maintains mental calmness yet takes in all that is happening in his surroundings without letting any threat cause undue anxiety or physical tension. It is simply being aware of what is going on around you so that you can if necessary take any appropriate action.

Through ongoing practice of the martial arts participants develop their skill in zanshin. Like anything else zanshin must be continually practiced before it simply becomes a part of your subconscious and intuitive.

You need this skill just as much when driving your car as you do when entering a dimly light night club. Never switch zanshin off, always be aware of your surroundings.

When entering any room, familiar or not, never just walk in to it. Let your hearing and peripheral vision lead you through doorways and around blind corners. Casually observe people in the street or at the shopping mall, cinema or where ever else you happen to be.

When you identify undesirables simply cross the road or the room or move to a different night club. This is not paranoia talking; this is simply taking such precautions as are necessary to keep yourself and your family safe. The alternative to identifying potential threats and taking action to avoid them is to put yourself in a position where you may well have to physically deal with the threat. Putting yourself and your friends/family in harms way is not an intelligent course of action in my opinion.

If you are confronted by another person and you cannot see their hand or hands, perhaps they are inside their jacket or obscured by a lamp post etc, then always think weapon. Only the unskilled who want to frighten you, show you the knife, the bigger the knife the more he wants to frighten you and perhaps the more frightened he is which makes him unpredictable and dangerous.

A mugger does not need a knife two foot long to do life threatening damage to someone; a small knife will do that quite nicely.

If someone truly wants to cut or stab you, they just walk up and do it. So you see the need to think weapon when you cannot see someone's hand/hands. If you are approached by such a person you must keep a personal space that can if need be become an effective fighting distance.

If you find your self in this situation and the person produces a weapon of any kind then give them whatever valuables they ask for. Too many people world wide die for the \$20 inside their wallet. Credit cards can be cancelled and replaced; you on the other hand cannot be replaced.

Remember. Rules? In a knife fight? No rules “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid” (1969). It is quite true.

So if they refuse to keep their distance and attempt to come close after you have told them to keep their distance and or given them what they asked for then perhaps preemptive action is called for depending on the situation.

Can you now see the need to avoid something like this through your practice of zanshin?

I give the above hypothetical because it is real, it happens to people all the time.

Fortunately the two people I will now tell you about were not a threat in the end, whether they changed their minds or they were simply not a threat I do not know. But I was approached by two young men who walked straight at me while I crossed the Victoria Bridge in Brisbane with Sensei Jane late in 2008. I had traffic at my left side that prevented escape and the two men were between me and the bridge railing, with the water far below. The nearest man kept one hand suspiciously inside his coat as he looked at me and kept coming. He veered away at the last moment which was a good thing as it saved much unpleasantness.

I did not judge them to be a robbers but assailant’s intent on injuring me and Jane using a weapon or weapons. This I could not permit, in “you or them” situations only you matter. You must not become a statistic; they on the other hand in a possible life and death situation are expendable.

By the time they were two meters away my plan was set. Had they stepped inside my personal space and not veered away when they did there would have been violence. The vicious take no prisoner violence that karate was developed for. I am so pleased this did not happen.

Perhaps they sensed or saw that I was aware of them and the threat they posed and possibly that was enough to dissuade them as it would now not be a simple assault but now other people would take notice of them once the violence started.

But had I not been aware, had I not seen the potential threat as it approached me and acted accordingly by making my defensive preparations and setting my mind at rest so that I could act as required depending on what I faced, I may have walked into a blade.

This may seem all very dramatic but this can happen at any time to anyone.

Maintaining zanshin does not mean that you are paranoid. Maintaining zanshin simply helps to keep you and those in your company safe.