

Another Look at Zan-Shin

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During the seminar this past June, Sukh Sensei walked us through many of the more complicated techniques in the following way: we would do the whole technique focusing on blocking out the major movements, then he would have us go a certain part of it, then work on the flow of the entire technique, then work on some of the finer points, and finally put all the details together and add more intensity. This process was much needed for many of us to be able to do these techniques with any level of competence. It was convenient to have him tell us what specifically to work on, and that is appropriate when beginning. But, as we develop as students of *budo* (way of the warrior), we need to be able to adapt our goals, intensity, and attitude for ourselves as appropriate to the context as well as our personal learning needs.



The answer to this is not concrete or universal, it is a process of awareness and adapting. Training in class is different with each Uke, which is different than training alone, which is different than testing on the technique, which is different than using the technique in *randori* (sparring) which is different than using the technique in a real life altercation. Our personal learning needs can be equally varied. Sometimes we get stuck in the details and need to relax and look at the big picture. Sometimes we are missing certain details and need to focus in on them. Sometimes we lack intent and need to focus on increasing our intensity. Sometimes we lack fluidity and need to focus on smoothness. All of these personal and environmental factors should influence how we perform a technique in any given moment. We adapt to these variables sometimes, but often we just fall back on our old routine and natural tendencies and fail to adapt and work on what we need to improve. Being unintentional about dealing with these variables can reduce the effectiveness of the technique, put us and our training partners in danger, and decrease the richness of the learning opportunity.



There is no perfect formula for dealing with this, it is an art. But, there are a couple of simple steps that have been helping me when I think about this. The first step is to have the awareness of intentionally choosing appropriate goals, intensity, and attitudes for the moment. The second step is to take the time to notice when you have not chosen the best combination and adapt accordingly. Our teachers often remind us of the concept of *zan-shin* (awareness) in the context of watching those around you, guarding as you finish a technique, etc. Being intentional and adaptable in your goals, intensity, and attitude is just another application of the importance of paying attention to your surroundings. This simple, yet difficult to master, aspect of training is often neglected but is just as worthy of pursuit as where to put our hands and feet.