

# Getting Outside of Your Comfort Zone

By Bob McKean

Revised from the previously published article in the Kiai Echo

It has been several years since I have written an article for the Kiai Echo and I have a view that I would like to share. In my travels over the past 39 years as a student of Danzan Ryu, I have had the opportunity to train at a number of AJJF schools and with a number of Danzan Ryu instructors and students. I have noticed an area of our system that I believe has been somewhat neglected over the years.

Danzan Ryu is a very encompassing martial art system. The development of character, building self esteem, learning self control, showing respect for others, physical fitness and self defense are only a few of the many areas of our system that have been passed down to us by Master Okazaki.

I have a very simple question to ask each and everyone of you. As instructors and as students of Danzan Ryu, are we really teaching and learning self defense? For those of you who answered yes, you may want to reassess your answer after thinking about some of the issues I am about to address.

Our system contains some of the best self defense and fighting arts in the martial arts world. We all learn these arts as we progress through the different boards and ranks. Do we learn these arts with self defense in mind or only for promotion purposes? Unfortunately many students learn to perform the arts for the purpose of looking good for exams when in reality they have not developed the ability to use these arts in the real world of self defense.

Here is a simple test for you. Ask yourself: (1) Do I often practice my arts other than in kata format? (2) Can I make my arts really work on someone who is really resisting and is not a good and willing uke? (3) Do I practice my arts in a dimly lit room or in the dark? (4) Do I train outdoors with my shoes on and in street clothes? (Try working nage some time on a person who is not wearing a shirt!) (5) Can I make my arts work when I'm dog tired or injured? (6) Mentally, do I have what it takes to seriously injure or kill another human being in order to protect my own life or the life of someone else? (7) Do I have the confidence in my ability to defend myself in a real physical assault?

If you have answered NO to any of the questions I have presented, then I believe you have not developed the skills necessary to effectively defend yourself in the real world we live in today. By real world I mean a place where a second place trophy is not given, there is no referee to stop the fight and if you lose you will be seriously injured or killed.

Your mental attitude and determination to survive is a major component in self defense. This subject area is best left for a future article as I want to focus here on how we need to train to be good at self defense.

In our quest to learn Danzan Ryu, we all need to understand the principles of the arts and first learn them in a kata format with a cooperative uke. Many instructors and students spend all or a majority of their class time working in this area and never move out of this comfort zone. To truly learn self defense, and to make our arts work, we

must be willing to move out of this comfort zone and challenge ourselves and the arts. Example: Anyone can learn to throw Seoi Nage in a kata setting but how many of us can throw Seoi Nage in a combat randori setting where your opponent (not uke) is resisting and trying to throw you, or worse yet, trying to hurt you?

It is important to sometimes train in your street clothes, on carpet or lawn instead of in your gi and inside the dojo. If you are ever assaulted, chances are it will not be inside your dojo. Train in an environment where you could be attacked. Move outside of your comfort zone.

Train hard. I mean real hard. Work up a good sweat, get tired and then attempt to perform just one art 50 times. If you can perform that art effectively the 50<sup>th</sup> time just as good as you did the 1<sup>st</sup> time then you will probably be able to do it effectively in a self defense situation. Anyone can perform well when they are fresh and not under physical and mental stress. Push yourself and your limits. Move outside of your comfort zone.

Do you usually train knowing what the attack is going to be and what art you are going to do? If the answer is “yes”, you are not preparing yourself for real self defense. After you have learned a number of arts and have become proficient in a kata format, push yourself and your limits. Practice having an uke attack you from different angles and speeds with different spontaneous attacks. Learn to read the attacks before they happen and respond with the appropriate defense. This is not easy and it takes a lot of work and practice. You may even take a few lumps in the process but you need to move outside of your zone.

I have only covered a few of the training areas that one needs to practice to become effective in self defense. I was very fortunate that my sensei, Professor William Montero Sr. was a strong believer in making the arts of Danzan Ryu work in real world, self defense settings. I am sure that all of you have heard the saying, “Where the rubber meets the road”. In this contest, it’s “Where the face meets the asphalt”. If you are not able to effectively use the arts for self defense, the further development of character, building self esteem, learning self control, showing respect for others and physical fitness will not occur.

I am open to any comment concerning my view point. I encourage open communication and I would welcome any correspondence on the issues of self defense.

P.O. Box 1881  
Phoenix, Oregon 97535  
E-mail [cop2rn@aol.com](mailto:cop2rn@aol.com)

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