

Pacify to Live

In 1975, I almost did not buy a little paperback called *Zen Karate* by Randall Bassett. First, I had never heard of Mr. Bassett; second, a quick perusal showed me that the techniques offered were nothing new. But I was looking only at the *physical* techniques. What *was* new to me was a psychological aspect dealing with threatening confrontations that was probably more important in self-defense than physical prowess.

In the traditional martial arts, we prepare for physical confrontations that we cannot truly rehearse. But how often do we prepare for the pre-confrontation stress, the demeaning, the feeling-out part of what might eventually turn into an attack? Programs like Model Mugging or RMCAT do exactly this as well as teach how to deal with the adrenaline dump one might experience when unexpectedly attacked or being cornered so that the attacker can feel up to attacking.

To be psychologically prepared, one must have (a) enough physical know-how to feel mentally confident, and (b) enough mental rehearsal to know what one is doing. That's where Bassett's book comes in. To be fair, since 1975 several books dealing with self-defense psychology have been published by people like Curtis Sliwa (founder of the Guardian Angels) and my friend the late Dr. Bernd Weiss. But, to my knowledge, Bassett's was the first and I think offers the easiest principles to follow. I will touch upon a few of them here, but my goal is not to have you scouring used books sites to find *Zen Karate* (although I would not discourage it), but to suggest that traditional martial artists start doing some independent studies on aspects of self-protection (psychology, street weapons, and common types of assault) that their martial arts training does not, and traditionally is not supposed to, address. Traditional *budo* is generic self-defense within a stylistic pattern. It is up to the student to convert the stylistic to the practical and the seemingly practical to the more and more realistic. In this way, the generic practice can mentally represent the realistic, which, in my opinion, it was always intended to do.

Some suggestions from Bassett Sensei:

- (1) do not let your ego get you into a fight—sacrifice your short term ego for your long term health (this is what I call “To live in peace, pacify”);
- (2) do not trade insult for insult or try to demean, even if one is insulted or demeaned;
- (3) if you show psychological or physical vulnerability or if potential attacker feels psychologically or physically vulnerable, the confrontation is likely to escalate;
- (4) if you feel he is building up to an explosion or trying to build you up to one, try to defuse the situation by diverting the subject (“the subject” can be the person looking for the fight or what he is talking about);
- (5) listen carefully to your opponent; ignoring him is insulting; don't interrupt; and
- (6) do not bluff; bluffing is a disguised threat and begs to be called.

There are, of course, other ideas not suggested by Bassett Sensei like: the judicious use of being pissed off (don't fake it, be it), not at your opponent, but at your life in general so that you appear angry enough to fight anyone in your way; or appearing ultra confident and using humor to be on the opponent's side, as if you have something in common. These take some explaining and that is not my job here to offer a course on self-defense psychology, however, I do think that you may want to consider it your job to read a book or two on and practice some scenarios for street confrontations. This supplemental training is not traditional martial arts, but without it, your traditional martial arts may not be enough.