

Lessons from the Martial Arts

SAME (Se-meia)

—The Ability to Project Oneself to the Target

If you have read the book Zen And The Art of Archery by Eugen Herrigel, he refers frequently to how the Japanese Archer or Kyudoka has the ability to project himself onto the target. Herrigel believed that it was an almost supernatural ability, some type of astral projection that made the master archer such a deadly adversary in combat as well as competition.

Herrigel did not completely understand that this is a learned skill that anyone can master. It is not from the realm of black magic or Zen transcendence. In his book, his teacher tried and tried to teach this principle to Herrigel, the only problem was that Herrigel was an academic and therefore was always seeking a logical explanation or reason. To the Samurai warrior, there is no time to ponder the logic or rationality; men of action do not have the luxury to over think many things. You just learn that you do what the teacher teaches. Nothing more, nothing less. Enlightenment is a luxury of surviving to old age and pondering how and why you got there.

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This skill has a name. The Japanese call it *same* (se-meia). Same is a term used most frequently in the arts of sword combat. It means to project your *ki* energy or your life energy literally right through the opponent. *Ki* is basically the life force that flows through all living things. (Sounds a lot like George Lucas’s “the Force.”) The martial artist learns to tap

into this energy within his own body and move it from limb to limb or body to weapon. Your *ki* is centered in the area the Japanese call the *hara* about 1-2 inches below your navel. When the Karate practitioner punches a stack of bricks and miraculously shatters them without breaking even a single bone in his hand, he had just focused all of the energy in his body to travel out through his fist into the target.

Many times *same* is viewed as a swordsman who is strong or to project a strong presence. It is the projection of inner energy that wakes up a crowded room and silently announces that you have arrived. Everyone who sees it cannot help but to recognize it.

In the realm of sword skills, *same* is directed from the *hara* out through the eyes beyond the opponent. This gaze is called *enzen no menske* or “to gaze at a distant mountain.” The common mistake people make is to stare directly into the eyes of their opponent. If you fix your vision there, you cannot see what the rest of his body is doing. It is like staring out through a window screen. If you focus your vision on the screen, you lose sight of everything else. If you gaze through the screen you see peripherally out to about 140 degrees, out to the horizon, and things immediately at your feet. *Enzen no menske* gives your *ki* energy a path to follow. Have you ever

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heard about aiming your bow about three feet beyond the target? It is the same thing.

In archery, we endlessly discuss whether we should be looking at the sight or looking at the target. *Enzen no menske* along with *same*, brings the target to you and your energy to the target. I believe that this is the true meaning of following through on the shot or on the sword cut. The real object is to tap into your inner energy give it direction and let it loose. Everyone who has shot a bow for some time has felt this. It is when you have one of those shots that just happens almost by surprise and when the arrow hits the target the whole shot just feels right, strong, and perfect.

So how do I develop *same* and learn *enzen no menske*?

It is actually quite easy. When you are ready to begin the shot sequence just concentrate and feel the energy of your body building up in the *hara* and exploding up your body and out through your bow hand through the center of the target and beyond the horizon. Work on gazing through the sight through the center of the target to the same point you have directed your *same*. You can also practice these skills without your bow, using mimetics and practicing the motions and actively visualizing that you are shooting the perfect shot utilizing *same* and *enzen no menske*.

When I tested for my second-degree black belt in *Iaido* (swordsmanship), I failed my first attempt. The *kata* or skills were perfect, but my *enzen no menske* was off and my *same* was not in the right place. The whole test came down to not what my body was doing but where my eyes were and where my *ki* energy was directed. That misdirection of energy forced my cuts with the blade to be off target by a few inches.

These concepts work. There is a 2000-year history of their effectiveness and many thousands of written pages in both the ancient and modern martial arts worlds attesting to their importance and relevance.

The modern western equivalent is "being in The Zone." You can see it in the eyes of athletes. That purposeful, powerful gaze that tells everyone around you that you are here and you are performing at 100% or higher. In this state your mind, spirit, and body are in perfect balance. In Kendo the term is *ki ken tai ichi* (spirit, sword, body as one). The hands and arms do not direct the sword; the sword is a part of the swordsman just as his mind, body, and spirit are all parts of the whole. The swordsman directs his focus and energy and the sword follow. No thought, no hesitation, no mistakes.

Archery is the same. Direct your focus and energy to

the target and the bow shoots itself. The arrow finds the desired target; it is not forced to it. The bow, the arrow, and the target all become an extension of the archer just as the sword becomes a part of the swordsman. The hand does not hold the sword or the bow, the sword or the bow become the hand.

The Zone is a very elusive place; it only exists in the spirit of the individual. The only way to get there is to train with all your heart, be pure in thought, action, and intention in every aspect of your life and *ki ken tai ichi, same*, and The Zone become a part of who you are and not just a gimmick or tool to be used on competition day. I believe that you can develop yourself to the point that you live in the zone every minute of every day and everything that you do will have purpose and meaning beyond just living and doing.

This is my personal quest. To live my life where every action, every thought, every moment has meaning and that nothing is taken for granted. It is a huge struggle for me to be that attentive to even the most mundane daily activities like grocery shopping or brushing my teeth. It is much easier to be in The Zone when stress levels are high like working in the *dojo* with a razor sharp sword where the risk of serious injury is always present or on the archery field shooting a single elimination match. The challenge is to balance those aspects of life, the ordinary and the extraordinary, and have that presence, that *same* always.

Ki yumi tai ichi spirit, bow, body as one.

Enzen no menske to gaze at a distant mountain.

Same focus and direction of internal power with the external world.

Ichi go ichi I one encounter, one chance.

John Vetterli says, "I live in Salt Lake City Utah. I have been a professional Firefighter since 1987. I am married and have a daughter and son. My martial arts history began in 1984 with Osaka Sensei in the Karate form of Wado Ryu (the way of peace or harmony). Osaka Sensei instilled in me the desire to always know why we do things not how. I began the study of Eishin Ryu Iaido (the art of the Japanese sword) in 1998 with Harris Sensei. A Zen Buddhist Priest who finally taught me how to focus. This has been a profoundly life changing experience. I am a partner in the Zen Bu Kan Dojo with my two friends Dick and Jason. We teach Iaido and Kendo."

