

# *Zen and the Art Of... Well, Everything*

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Who is your Sensei? What do they do when they are not teaching Danzan Ryu Jujitsu? Do they have another life? A vocation? At a recent dojo get-together my boyfriend was telling one of my students that I might be a good professional connection for her in higher education. That really surprised her since it had not crossed her mind that her Sensei had a life outside of teaching Jujitsu to her.

But all Sensei have something else, don't they? Even those that do Jujitsu as their full-time profession spend some time doing something off the mat. Maybe it is not far off from Jujitsu. Maybe it is collecting books or watching movies related to martial arts. But maybe it is something not as closely related. Maybe it is fishing, or cooking, or writing stories, or painting or any number of things.

Or maybe they have a "day job." Professor Estes was an officer in the Salvation Army when he arrived in Hawaii, and a clerk/office manager in Chico. He also was a deacon in his church. Professor Fisher did gymnastics, served in the military and was integral in the US Swimming organization. Professor Ball taught high school science, free-heel skis, rides motorcycles and is an avid reader, among many other things. The Sensei of our Ryu are a diverse group of individuals and the range of professions exemplify this. They are physicists, educators, doctors, military professionals, scientists, civil servants, artists, computer programmers, engineers, financial professionals, journalists, electricians, police officers, salesman, business owners, project managers, writers, psychologists, and on and on.

How many times have you heard your Sensei bring in an example from something outside of Jujitsu to explain a principle? My Sensei refers to many, many sources. He employs everything from classic texts to modern movies. The role of the Sensei is to help the student understand. To show them the way. To guide and suggest. Metaphors, analogies, stories, anecdotes, all of these

things are vehicles a good teacher uses to help their students learn. Connecting new knowledge to prior knowledge is an important way to help us learn and remember new information. In other words, in order to learn something new, you need to find a place for it to fit into what you already know.

***"My mind could not catch up enough to get me to move. I was frozen. Who knew that mushin was a part of badminton?"***

Which brings me to my own teaching experiences. I use physics examples when I teach some arts, but my understanding of physics is very rudimentary. In fact I would say that most of what I know about physics comes from learning Danzan Ryu (probably from classes taught by Warrior-Engineers). And that is the frame of reference and scope I employ when I use physics to teach my students about the key motions in our art. I talk about fulcrums and levers, about counter balance and momentum, and about torque and torsion. The extent of my understanding is very limited and very narrow, but it is effective in getting the point across in most cases.

However, I do have some insecurity when it comes to the subject matter I use for my teaching analogies. It took me years to realize the motorcycle "revving" motion that I was describing in joint locks was actually the exact opposite direction of how a motorcycle throttle actually functioned. But it did get the point across and got the student to make the correct motion. And that is the goal. It is not to teach how motorcycles work.

I worry sometimes that my brand new students are going to be experts in the field that I am cannibalizing for a clever analogy. I had one new student who seemed to really understand my explanations of momentum in the forward roll so I off-handedly asked him what he did for a living. He said he was an engineer. The alarm bells started to go off in my head. I asked him what kind of engineering and the answer was aerospace. Yes, I was explaining 8th grade physics to a rocket scientist. But it worked. My examples helped him understand what he needed to do for that technique.

I get a lot more comfortable when I am discussing my field which is education and pulling information from that arena. The problem is, maybe I get a bit too comfortable. I have to remind myself that when I talk about prior knowledge, meta-cognition or being a self-regulator and other education topics that I am bringing in my own perspective and my own sensibilities. I am no longer transmitting Danzan Ryu Jujitsu in its pure form. I am adding some color and insight from my own experiences. I think it fits very well, but nevertheless I do my best to make this very clear to my students. I do not tell them that Prof Okazaki discussed learning styles and gave his students multiple opportunities to learn via different modalities. Instead I show them how seeing a technique, hearing it described, feeling it done to you, doing it yourself, writing a description and then teaching it to others is in line with this idea of learning styles that comes from learning theory. I show them the similarities and I make sure to emphasize the source - especially when it is outside of Jujitsu.

The sources we use for teaching our students can, and do, come from many aspects of our lives. I recently learned to play badminton and play each week with a group of co-workers. To me, this is just more Jujitsu practice. I was reminded again of the joy of the beginners mind. I had no experience so everything was

a learning moment for me as I figured out how to play this game. But there was more to it than the physical skill of playing and the strategy involved in winning. There was kuzushi. I found myself twisted, contorted and completely off-balance. I was double-weighted and out of position and unable to function. Sounds familiar. Then I started to experience the mental side of the game. There was mental kuzushi. My mind was not flowing but had stopped, either to consider how great my shot was about to be or how amazing it was that I pulled off that last one. And then I watched as I swung and missed an easy shot. Or as the other side returned my amazing save and then the birdie fell to the ground five feet in front of me. My mind could not catch up enough to get me to move. I was frozen. Who knew that mushin was a part of badminton?

Some instructors have experience in other martial art disciplines. A master teacher can use examples from other systems to illustrate and highlight aspects of our own system in a clear manner - where the goal is still to master Danzan Ryu. It is tempting to try to fit everything we want to do under the umbrella of Danzan Ryu Jujitsu. But bringing in outside resources and renaming them to fit our needs does not serve our art, in my opinion. Some people have the desire to acquire more techniques or learn other systems and that is a pursuit unto its own. Those who wish to learn the art of Danzan Ryu can reap a valuable benefit from practicing other techniques, but I believe that if one wants to truly master our style they should learn under the guidance of an experienced Danzan Ryu Sensei. Someone who can pull in techniques and arts that are relevant to our style and most importantly relevant to the students' understanding and growth in this art. And they are clear and implicit in telling their students what is part of Danzan Ryu and what is not and why they are teaching it to them.

Where does kata fit into this whole schema? Kata is the central core of our practice. It is where our fundamental motions and values are embedded and transmitted. Kata is the vehicle. On one level, Kata presents questions that students work to answer through practice, study, investigation, etc. I believe in preserving that conduit and that

everything else we add to our teaching shouldn't tamper with our core. The goal should not be to change or improve but rather to help the student unravel the mysteries. To shine some light on an aspect that is in darkness for that student. Each Sensei learned the kata of our system and those experiences transformed them. The experience itself was what allowed them to unlock and discover the art and, in doing so, discover something about themselves. It makes perfect sense to see ways to change the arts as we ourselves evolve in our practice. But those arts, the kata the way it was taught to us, were the keys that helped us to unlock our own understanding of the art. I feel that we as teachers should bring in all the resources we can to help our students learn and discover, but in order for them to be able to have transformative experiences we need to leave the tradition of our art intact for them to uncover. We owe them the opportunity to realize what this art has to offer for them.

If we view our world through a Jujitsu lens, I think we can find many places where we can practice our art and learn by using our art as the frame of reference. I was able to apply my Jujitsu to my badminton game and vice versa, gaining a deeper understanding of kuzushi and the mind through playing a game that had nothing to do with Jujitsu. My students do have to suffer some badminton stories but they are never under the impression that Prof Okazaki played badminton or that they need to play badminton to gain these insights. The lessons are everywhere and in everything if we know how to see them. Maybe that is the Zen and the Art of Everything.

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