

Zanshin budo

Japan's traditional martial arts (*budo*) boast a history that is centuries old. Samurai applied themselves to the study of *budo* not only to master the various techniques but also to develop themselves spiritually. Formal teachings were simultaneously practical and mystical. The goal was a superlative synthesis of body, mind, and technique, a fusion that is still the Holy Grail for practitioners in the 21st century as *budo* prospers in the world of international sports.

Despite the growing global appeal of martial arts, it would be erroneous to see them as mere sports. The philosophical and spiritual underpinnings of such disciplines as *kyudo* (Japanese archery), *kendo* (Japanese fencing), and *karate* remain important. The world of *budo* is a precious legacy that provides modern practitioners with deep insights into the beauty of life and the quest to reach one's fullest potential.

Budo arts abound with old sayings and tenets of wisdom that provide a framework for life. One such concept is *zanshin*, literally translated as "leftover heart" or "remaining mind." It means that one must always remain totally focused and alert even after scoring a point against an opponent or hitting a target. Competitors, like warriors of old, must never let their physical or mental guard down. They must remain vigilant, calm, and collected at all times and somehow manage to subdue the adrenaline surging through their veins. This is not only an essential component of success but also a sign of respect for one's opponent.

To imagine a scenario devoid of *zanshin* one need look no further than the movies. When the hero finally vanquishes the villain and is breathing a sigh of relief, we all prepare for the inevitable and predictable happy ending. But just as we let our guard down, the villain typically makes one last dastardly assault, and it is the lack of *zanshin* on the part of both hero and viewers that generates the entertainment and excitement. Another example of what can happen without *zanshin* can be found in mountaineering. Around 80 percent of climbing accidents happen not on the way up, but rather on the way down. Inexperienced climbers reach the summit and relax their guard on the descent, mistakenly thinking the hard part is over.

Indeed, the emphasis on *zanshin* is what distinguishes *budo* from other sports. When a goal is scored in soccer, the triumphant players dash around the pitch unabashedly congratulating each other with

delirious enthusiasm. In *budo* it is considered highly inappropriate to show pleasure upon scoring a point; throwing one's arms in the air with joy is clearly an act lacking *zanshin*. Scoring is not the only thing that matters in *budo*. Even more important is the competitor's deportment after the fact. In *kyudo*, the emphasis on *zanshin* is so strong that it is impossible to tell just by looking at the archer whether or not the arrow has in fact hit the target. Hit or miss, the solemn facial expression stays exactly the same as emotions are subdued, and each subsequent movement is tranquil and resolute.

Learning to stay focused, attentive, and respectful regardless of the situation is the crux of martial arts training. It is concepts such as *zanshin*, which can be applied to one's activities and demeanor outside of practice and competition, that make the study of *budo* a lifelong spiritual journey.

