



## 'aliveness' in martial arts training

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I've recently run across a number of remarks calling for 'aliveness' in martial arts training. People seem to throw the term around casually as if everybody agrees on what "aliveness" means. After some additional reading and reflection I believe we are lacking an accurate definition of the term. It is extremely important that our terms are clear to avoid misunderstanding and sloppy thinking.

I believe that 'aliveness' must refer to a techniques efficacy in a given context. In my thinking context is everything. In one context a simple pop to the solar plexus will be all one needs. In another context it will take every fiber of your being, every ounce of energy and every technique you know just to stay alive. In yet another context the problem is solved by leaving the area and going someplace safe.

In one instance a palm extended toward a potential attacker followed by the word "Stop!" said loudly enough for everyone to hear will work perfectly; in that context the technique is 'alive. Try the same technique in another context and it is dead ... and you're injured or worse. Therefore 'aliveness' is determined by context.

Some who are calling for 'aliveness' seem to suggest that any technique that will not work against an all out attack – such as a bull rushing, machete wielding, berserker ninja – is DEAD technique. Yet in actual situations I've used very subtle techniques like finger locks, goosenecks or the word "Don't!" to put my – would be – attacker at a serious disadvantage ... enough to dissuade them from continuing. I've actually grabbed some by one of the nerve bundles under the arm with enough force to induce pain compliance. They weren't happy, but they stopped. The technique didn't feel very dead to me OR my opponent.

I've also noticed an intriguing tactic when discussing 'alive' and 'dead' techniques. Often the person complaining about the technique will change the scenario in order to 'prove' the techniques ineffectiveness. I've actually had someone tell me that a finger lock would not work because if the attacker's intent was to cause real harm a simple finger lock wouldn't stop him. My answer was; true enough, but finger pointing is not the ballistic portion of an assault. Finger pointing is a precursor to an assault, an intimidation tactic; and the perfect time to take pre-emptive action. Secondly, if the attacker wanted to do me real harm, that's what he'd be doing; then my choice of technique would change. Changing the scenario to 'prove' a technique won't work is false reasoning. It's a straw man. Once the scenario changes ... the technique MUST change, it's as simple as that.

Assault statistics tell us that even the implied use of force is enough to give some attackers second thoughts. OK ... class, please take out the study from Florida State University professors Jongyeon Tark and Gary Kleck titled RESISTING CRIME: THE EFFECTS OF VICTIM ACTION ON THE OUTCOMES OF CRIMES. If you don't have a copy, you need one; you'll find it in the journal CRIMINOLOGY Volume Number 42 Number 4 2004 (call 'em, it's \$7 or \$8bucks if they fax it to you). In it you will discover that almost any self protective strategy (except trying to talk your way out of trouble) will likely result in your surviving the encounter. Don't take my word for it, get a copy of the study and see for yourself.

So, what's the deal? People keep saying we have to have a clear understanding of how the world *really is*; all the while throwing scenarios at us that almost NEVER occur. I understand 'worst case scenario' training and encourage it ... how about some 'most likely case scenario' training? How about an escalating use of force continuum? That's what we teach our students.