

# Thousand Waves



Martial Arts &  
Self-Defense  
Center, NFP

Thousand Waves Foundation

# KIAMI!

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## Self-Defense and Non-Violence: Natural Allies

By Nancy Lanoue

DOES SELF-DEFENSE work—or does it instead give false confidence, or worse yet, make an attacker angry and bring more harm to the victim? This question has long been a point of contention between self-defense advocates and those who doubt the efficacy of self-defense training as a violence-prevention strategy.

Several studies and a large body of anecdotal evidence collected from survivors repeatedly show immediate, forceful resistance to be an effective protective strategy against many different types of violence. However, those of us who teach self-defense still find our selves caught up in this old debate.

We must, of course, continue to address questions about the effectiveness of self-defense training. These questions affect the willingness of government, schools and social service agencies to see us as potential partners in prevention. In turn, those agencies' blindness to our potential contribution to anti-violence education affects allocation of resources for violence-prevention, and ultimately our access to populations that need self-defense training.

Here at Thousand Waves, we are also wrestling with another question. That is: Can self-defense honestly be called an anti-violence practice, and if so, how must it be taught? The challenge of convincing people that self-defense not only works, but is a morally appropriate response to violence, has led us to develop a more subtle understanding of what the core skills and attitudes of a self-defender really are.

I have been involved in the women's self-defense movement for 25 years. In some ways, the people I teach these days know more about the reality of violence than they used to. They are less likely to view rape as a crime of

passion, and more likely to be aware that violence within intimate relationships is an international problem of epidemic scope. Some girls now are *not* socialized to avert their eyes from a male stranger's gaze, or to remain silent if threatened.

But the problem of violence persists, and I am finding that my original curriculum, which focused primarily on the rights of defenders; verbal confrontation skills; and how to direct strong weapons into vulnerable targets on an assailant's body, is not providing a complete set of tools to those who want not only to keep themselves safe, but also to work for peace.

We recently have broadened our definition of self-defense to include both rights *and responsibilities* that govern our relations with others. For example, we teach that we have the *right* to control who touches our bodies, and the *responsibility* to control our words and behavior when we are angry or upset.

Trusting your instincts, learning how to read the body's warning that danger is near so you can take action before overt violence erupts, has always been a core skill in our program. Now we also help students learn to recognize how they themselves habitually respond when their "buttons" get pushed. Many law-abiding people explode with angry words or hostile actions when they feel ignored, unheard, or disrespected, yet don't see this behavior as violent. By relating the small forms of violence within ourselves with the big, scary forms of violence we fear others may do to us, we open ourselves up to becoming more compassionate and creative self-defenders.

Self-defense thoughts and behaviors are intrinsically *assertive*, rather than passive or aggressive. This idea



Above and right: Students from a recent self-defense class demonstrate some techniques. PHOTOS COURTESY OF STEVE BUNYAK

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## Self-Defense and Non-violence *continued from page 1*

of balance—striving to enforce our boundaries and communicate what we need to feel safe without dominating or controlling others—can guide us when we have to choose which strategies, and how much loudness or force, to use in a given situation.

At Thousand Waves, we group the core self-defense skills into five categories: mental self-defense, communication strategies, positioning strategies, fighting skills, and building alliances. Mental self-defense is both intuitive and logical. It means believing you are worth defending, and being sure you have accurate information about the “who, what, when, where, and why” of various forms of violence. Students are asked to examine their childhood socialization to learn how the way they were raised might predispose them towards either passivity or aggression. This helps them become aware of which set of skills are likely to be hardest for them.

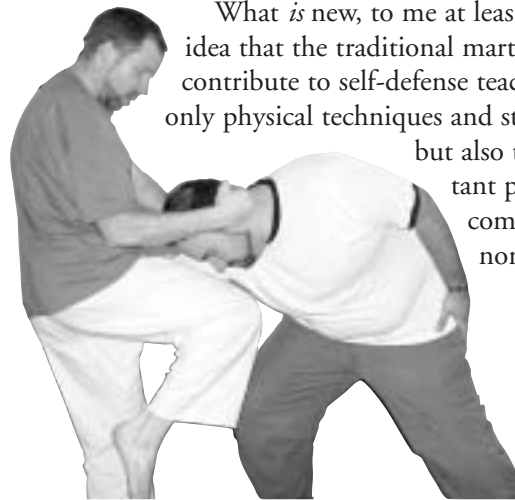
Communication strategies, both verbal and non-verbal, can be used to enforce a boundary or set a limit. A loud yell used during the pre-attack testing process that many rapists use to select a “good victim” communicates quite effectively that the person targeted is a self-defender who will not be silent or cooperative.

Self-defense communication also includes knowing how to de-escalate as well as confront. In these cases, the goal is to use a particular tone, words, and body language with someone who is upset and angry in order to reduce tension and prevent violence. We even discuss how to safely intervene and interrupt violence that doesn't involve you by choosing words that don't polarize the situation or publicly identify the people who are fighting as perpetrator and victim.

And yes, we do also teach people how to fight if no other, more peaceful, solution is possible. We believe that the action of stopping an assailant by force is one of a self-defender's rights, assuming that they hold themselves accountable to the *ethic of least harm*. The idea behind this principle is that the more skills and choices an individual defender has, the more responsibility they have to solve whatever problem arises with minimum harm to the aggressor.

None of these ideas is new to traditional martial artists. My teacher, Kaicho Tadashi Nakamura, continues to teach me, as I now teach my own students, that the purpose of our training is to help us become more mature and compassionate human beings. That we must look at our egos, and try to see every complicated, difficult situation from a broader perspective. That our rank, denoting experience, carries with it far more responsibility than privilege.

What *is* new, to me at least, is the idea that the traditional martial arts can contribute to self-defense teaching, not only physical techniques and strategies, but also the important philosophical commitment to non-violence.



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## The Newsletter of Thousand Waves Foundation, Thousand Waves Martial Arts & Self-Defense Center, NFP



### Thousand Waves Martial Arts & Self-Defense Center, NFP

is a licensed branch school of the World Seido

Karate Organization. Our co-director, Kyoshi Nancy Lanoue, 5th dan, is a direct student of Seido's founder and grandmaster, Kaicho Tadashi Nakamura.

Thousand Waves promotes personal safety, encourages non-violent conflict resolution, and fosters physical fitness and a non-quitting spirit through self-defense and traditional martial arts programs.

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