

Tae Kwon Do

An Essay

태권도

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*Second Dan Test
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There have been, and continue to be many people in my life; those have through their devotion, loyalty and encouragement, helped to make me the man I am today. Without their influence I would be but a shell of my current self. My debt to them is immeasurable. Of special note are:

*My Father – Everett B. Donahue (deceased)
My Mother – Joyce A. Grier
My Wife – Lauren A. Donahue
My Tae Kwon Do Master – Grand Master D.K. Cho
My Tae Kwon Do Instructor – Mr. John Lancendorfer*

Special appreciation is given to Grand Master Cho for seeing in me the strength and ability I never knew I had.

Thanks to Mr. Lancendorfer for never ceasing to be extra hard on me, and for teaching me, not always consciously, how to be a leader.

I would also like to thank all of the classmates and friends that have held boards for me, sparred, critiqued, learned, taught, and kicked me over the years.

Every student that has given me a kind word as they realized their own potential has filled my heart with joy. Not because I have helped them, but because they are better people knowing they can accomplish any goals to which they aspire. That I helped them is immaterial. That they have opened their mind to the power within them is paramount. This is the joy of teaching.

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Introduction

"The more we study the more we discover our ignorance."

~ Percy Bysshe Shelley ~

Introduction

Tae Kwon Do in its most simplistic translation is “The art of kicking and punching”. This overly simplistic description of Korea’s most famous martial art is only the beginning of the story. This description only quantifies the most basal aspects of Tae Kwon Do. To say that Tae Kwon Do is only kicking and punching is akin to describing a Vincent Van Gogh masterpiece as “Just an oil painting”. While the description is technically accurate, it fails to encompass the grace and technique of the artist, nor does it convey the emotion evoked by the experience of art.

The key to understanding Tae Kwon Do is not the “kicking and punching”, but the “art”. While the Tae Kwon Do practitioner does indeed learn and practice kicks and punches, this training is merely the medium in which higher lessons are learned. Often without conscious thought, the student becomes a different person, learning confidence, leadership skills, and a new way of looking at life.

One of the most misunderstood paradoxes of Martial Arts training is the fact that through regular training in what many people misconstrue to be violence, the practitioner actually becomes substantially less prone to violence through increased self confidence and self control. This is the essence of Tae Kwon Do. Not to be the best at kicking and punching, but to be a complete, well rounded individual that others respect for reasons they often can not quantify.

Description

Tae Kwon Do is the most famous of the Korean Martial arts. It’s roots can be traced to almost 2000 years ago as will be described in the section labeled “History”

Tae Kwon Do is best known for it’s flashy aerial kicking techniques. These techniques form the basis for many of the popular martial arts movies of recent years. The acceptance of Tae Kwon Do has increased so dramatically over the years, that it will be considered a medal sport in the Olympic games, starting in the year 2000. Tae Kwon Do is a source of much pride for the people of Korea, and it is considered by them to be their national sport.

Tae Kwon Do is considered a “hard” art, as it uses methods of force and techniques of striking to disable an opponent. This is in contrast to a martial art such as jujitsu, a “soft” art, which instead uses balance, pressure points and the manipulation of the opponent’s center of gravity to subdue or disable them.

Although Tae Kwon Do may seem to be, on the surface, the practice of violence, it must be stated that the goal of Tae Kwon Do is the eradication of violence. It has been said that to overcome violence, one must be its master. The Tae Kwon Do practitioner strives to become both physically and mentally enhanced towards the goal of bettering himself and society as a whole.

History

"Never forget the importance of history. To know nothing of what happened before you took your place on earth, is to remain a child for ever and ever."

~ Unknown ~

Ancient History

Many people are taught that all martial arts in Asia originated in India and were brought to China in the sixth century AD by traveling monk Bodhidharma. It is further believed that the students of Bodhidharma later spread his teachings to surrounding countries including what are now Japan and Korea. According to this idea, all martial arts in eastern Asia were introduced externally around 700 AD

In the city of Kyongju Korea, capital of the ancient kingdom of Silla, there is a Buddhist temple nearly 2000 years old. On the walls of this temple are the relief statues of a warrior. Historians have proven that these stone reliefs were created almost 2000 years ago. These statues are important for two reasons:

- 1) These statues depict the warrior executing martial arts techniques, the concepts of which formed what we know Tae Kwon Do to be today.
- 2) The age of these statues predates the recorded introduction of martial arts to eastern Asia by at least 500 years

In another ancient kingdom, Koguryo, there are paintings on the walls and ceilings of tombs depicting men performing exercises that again are attributed to the foundation of modern Tae Kwon Do. These tombs, and the paintings contained within have been dated between the years 3 AD and 427 AD.



The existence of these ancient works of art prove that Korea had developed it's own distinct forms of martial arts long before Bodhidharma influenced China. It is inferred by many, based on these facts, that Tae Kwon Do, or at least its foundations, was probably among the first martial arts practiced in eastern Asia, if not the world.

The Hwarang

During the sixth century AD, what is now known as the Korean Peninsula was divided into three kingdoms; Silla, Koguryo, and Paek Ja. The smallest of these three kingdoms, Silla, lived in constant fear of being overtaken by its larger neighbors.

In answer to this continued threat, the kingdom of Silla created the Hwarang. The Hwarang, or "Flowering Manhood", were an elite group which dedicate themselves to rigorous mental and physical training in order to protect their kingdom.

The Hwarang were not simply elite soldiers – they were masters of culture and honor as well. The Hwarang-Do was a philosophical and religious code followed by these valiant warriors. Remnants of this code can still be seen today in the tenets of Tae Kwon Do.

The Hwarang practiced a form of martial arts called *Subak*. This martial art used no weapons as a rule, as the Hwarang believed that ultimate power was summoned from within. Subak became very popular over time, and public contests were often held. This was a very prolific time for martial arts in Korea

Though it is easy to compare Korea's Hwarang to Japan's Samurai, there are some important differences. The Hwarang did not retain their elite status for life like the Samurai, nor did they enjoy the same level of nobility.

What makes Hwarang-Do and its followers so intriguing today is the fact that it was being practiced hundreds of years before the Samurai's Bushido was in favor. Once again history indicates that the martial arts of Korea seem to predate those of neighboring nations, both in style and in philosophy.

The Beginning of Tae Kwon Do

Early in the twentieth century, the prominent martial art in Korea was called Tae Kyun. Tae Kyun had evolved out of Subak into an art similar to western wrestling. Tae Kyun was at first practiced widely, but later fell into disfavor with politicians. As a result, the politicians tried to suppress Tae Kyun, resulting in martial arts knowledge only being passed either from father to son or in extreme secrecy.

In 1909, Japan occupied Korea and summarily outlawed all Korean cultural activity in an attempt to obliterate the Korean way of life. Still Tae Kyun was practiced in secrecy. It is of interest to historians that Tae Kyun volunteers often fought next to the Koreans military. Battles were in fact won or lost sometimes as a result of the brave men.

When the liberation of Korea took place in 1945, martial arts masters again taught openly. New styles appeared, some of which incorporated Japanese and Chinese techniques. Efforts to establish a distinctly Korean martial art were undertaken by some of the top schools. The name decided upon for this style would officially be Tae Kwon Do.

In 1962 Tae Kwon Do was admitted as an official event for the first time in the Korean National Games. By 1965, Tae Kwon Do was widely accepted nationwide. In 1971, Dr. Un Yong Kim was elected as the president of the Korean Tae Kwon Do association. Dr. Kim, in 1973 organized the World Tae Kwon Do Federation, and was instrumental in the construction of the Kukkiwon.

The Kukkiwon, pictured here, is the world headquarters for the World Tae Kwon Do Federation or W.T.F. The Kukkiwon symbolizes Tae Kwon Do's worldwide appeal, and is the very epicenter of all things related to Tae Kwon Do.



Tae Kwon Do grew into an Olympic demonstration sport and will in fact be a medal sport in the 2000 Olympics for the first time. This constantly expanding polarity is testament to the fact that Tae Kwon Do is not only an excellent form of self-defense, but also an excellent sport, and perhaps even the best method available for self-improvement. Clearly, Tae Kwon Do has something to offer everyone.

Tae Kwon Do Today

Tae Kwon Do is often referred to as “The World’s most popular martial art”. This praise is applied to Korea’s national sport with good reason. With Tae Kwon Do becoming a medal sport in the upcoming Olympic games, even more people will be exposed to it.

Ask any parent that has watched their child progress not only through the ranks of Tae Kwon Do, but ever higher into the realms of self-confidence and moral responsibility. These parents have nothing but praise for what Tae Kwon Do has done for their children.

Ask any adult that takes Tae Kwon Do why they take it. The variety of answers is amazing, yet rarely if ever will you hear a negative answer. If someone is looking for a way to hurt someone else, they will not stay a Tae Kwon Do student for long.

Tae Kwon Do promotes goodness in all things, and strength of character above all else. Perhaps this is why Tae Kwon Do is so popular. Perhaps it is the excellent physical conditioning, or the increase in self-esteem that invariably ensues from continued training. Most likely it is a combination of all these things. Something so basic yet so profound that it defies easy explanation. Tae Kwon Do brings out the best in people. It is no wonder people flock to it.

Facets of Tae Kwon Do

*“The world basically and fundamentally is constituted on the basis of harmony.
Everything works in co-operation with something else.”*

~ Preston Bradley ~

Philosophies

The famed Hwarang of ancient Silla (See *The Hwarang* earlier in this document), lived and died by a strict code of ethics. This code, called the Hwarang-Do still has a strong influence on Tae Kwon Do today.

The Sun Do Kwan school of Tae Kwon Do has a list called "The Spirit of the Practitioner". These rules, of which memorization is required by all students, show a code of ethics similar to that of the Hwarang. Though the rules have been updated to modern day life, the basic tenets that they promote are still quite obvious.



The Sun Do Kwan Spirit of the Practitioner rules are:

- 1) Loyalty to Country
- 2) Obedience to parents
- 3) Respect your elders
- 4) Be faithful to your friends
- 5) Be courteous in all situations
- 6) Consider all alternatives before killing any living thing
- 7) Never give up; Persevere to finish what you start

There are also several unwritten rules that are ingrained into the Tae Kwon Do student's life from the very first class. These include such ideals as "Never start a fight", "Protect the innocent", "Always do what is right", and "Be a model citizen".

The very core of these ideals stems from the fact that a well-trained Tae Kwon Do student is literally a lethal weapon. To train a student in the ways of unarmed combat and not impart a sense of moral consciousness would be akin to given a gun to a child. Just as a child does not have an understanding of the deadly impact of the weapon he is holding, the morally corrupt person has no idea of the impact of his use of deadly force. Just as a gun should not be given to someone that does not understand his responsibility for its proper use and safety, a person not capable of responsible behavior should not be given martial arts training.

Teaching Tae Kwon Do only to people that are capable of responsible action and are willing to live by the tenets listed above has an added benefit. Those that achieve high rank in Tae Kwon Do become examples of Tae Kwon Do. If a maniac gained high rank and that person committed some crime, then people would naturally assume that Tae Kwon Do students are all maniacs. By ensuring only people that can live by these rules attain high rank, Tae Kwon Do is cast in a positive light, as the actions of these people are usually just and good.

Tae Kwon Do is also replete with many philosophical ideas that often go unnoticed by the casual student. The W.T.F. Tae-Geuk forms are based upon the eight trigrams of the I Ching, a Chinese philosophy hundreds of years old. The symbols of the I Ching are pictured at the beginning of this section. The black belt forms are named after not only objects such as "Keum-Gang", but also the meaning behind those objects. For example Keum-Gang-San is the largest mountain in Korea. Keum-Gang-Seok it is the Korean word for "diamond", the hardest substance occurring in nature. Understanding the philosophy behind the form helps the student understand how the form should be presented. Learning the meaning of the form also helps the student expand his mind with new ideas and philosophies, thus making him a better person.

Poomse (Forms)

Simply stated, forms are groups of moves choreographed to resemble combat with one or more imaginary persons. As with most causal observations of Tae Kwon Do, this is only a superficial description.

As a student graduates from one rank to another, he is responsible for a new form. As the level of rank increases, so does the difficulty of the form required of that rank. As each new form is learned, new moves are learned as well. These new moves are built on moves found in previous forms, just as advanced kicks are only taught after basic kicks have been sufficiently studied.



As the student practices his form, the instructor watches with a keen eye. This opportunity for critique is very important. Correcting problem movement in forms will greatly ease a student's introduction to sparring. Turning one's head before actually turning the body is a prime example, and is usually mastered practicing forms. Proper foot placement and proper hand position is also learned during forms practice. By drilling proper stances in forms, they become second nature later on.

Rhythm and teamwork are also lessons learned by executing forms. When practicing or performing forms in a group, the student must learn to adjust his pace to that of the people he is performing with. Since each form has its own rhythm and everyone has their own speed, the Tae Kwon Do student must learn to watch the people around him, while concentrating on performing the form accurately. This enforces a sense of teamwork, while helping the student learn how to adjust his speed and techniques to fit a given situation.

The fact that forms must be performed in front of a group is also important. Both during class and in a testing environment, the student must repeatedly demonstrate his forms to others. It has been said that the number one fear in America is speaking or performing in front of large groups. By making a student learn something to perfection and demonstrate it in front of the master and his fellow students, the self-confidence of that student increases. The Tae Kwon Do student starts to realize that by putting forth their best effort, they can do anything, including conquering their fears.

The World Tae Kwon Do Association's Tae Geuk forms are based on the philosophical principles of the I Ching (See *Philosophies* in this section). By introducing these concepts to a student, his mind may grow as well as his strength. Thus, forms offer more than just repetition of moves, or a choreographed view of fighting. They offer a path to a deeper understanding of life itself.

Kyorugi (Sparring)

It is human nature to compete. Americans especially seem driven to be the “best” or the “biggest” or the “first” in just about everything. This, coupled with the continued popularity of wholly unrealistic martial arts movies makes sparring one of the most popular aspects of Tae Kwon Do in many student’s eyes.

Because the aforementioned martial arts movies usually depict unrealistic, even ridiculous scenarios, many beginning students have the wrong idea about sparring.



Tae Kwon Do sparring is performed in a very controlled environment. Extensive safety equipment is mandatory, and the safety of those involved is considered paramount. Only controlled techniques are allowed, and excessive use of force is cause for warnings and even disqualification.

With the advent of the excellent safety equipment available today, the Tae Kwon Do practitioner has been freed to explore more dangerous techniques in sparring. Where a back side kick to the solar plexus may have severely injured a participant twenty years ago, new breakthroughs in sparring gear have allowed these kicks to be delivered without fear of injuring the person being kicked.

While sparring certainly has elements of risk, the benefits are enormous. In order to spar successfully, one must be confident. Since running away from an opponent is not an option, a student must face his fears and confront his enemy. Once the student discovers he is capable of this courage, he invariably finds that this newly gained self-confidence is carried over into every aspect of life.

Sparring is a means whereby the Tae Kwon Do student learns to apply the techniques that they have drilled in for so many months. It is also a way in which the student learns the limitations of their reach, and the area in which their techniques are effective. This increased awareness of self helps the student avoid physical confrontation in potentially violent situations by increasing his awareness of his surroundings.

As the student’s confidence increases, he starts to experiment with more difficult techniques. When this happens, the basic techniques start to become engrained in the student’s repertoire of moves used in sparring. When the student has sparring enough times, these basic moves become second nature, enabling them to be executed without thought. Because thought is not wasted on the execution of the technique, more mental energy can be expended on how, why and where the technique should be applied. This enables the student to remain calm, and act with lightning speed only if and when action is called for.

When the student achieves high rank, his sparring skills increase dramatically. Having sparring hundreds if not thousands of times, he has an unconscious understanding of when and if action is to be taken, and if so exactly how much force need be applied. It is for this reason that sparring with a black belt is much safer than sparring with a beginner.

The benefits of sparring are not simply learning to fight, though undoubtedly this is a benefit in a life or death self-defense situation. Sparring is very physically demanding. A two or three minute sparring round seems like an eternity in the ring, though the spectators often wonder why the fighters look so tired after such a short amount of time.

With physical conditioning comes better health. With improved confidence comes better opportunities in life. With an improved mental attitude comes progression in one's school or career. The student of Tae Kwon Do inherits all these things. Sparring helps sharpen the edge of the sword tempered by years of training. What most spectators fail to understand is that without the years of training, there is no blade to sharpen. Sparring is only one facet of Tae Kwon Do. It must be balanced with forms, breaking and endless hours of practice to be of any benefit.

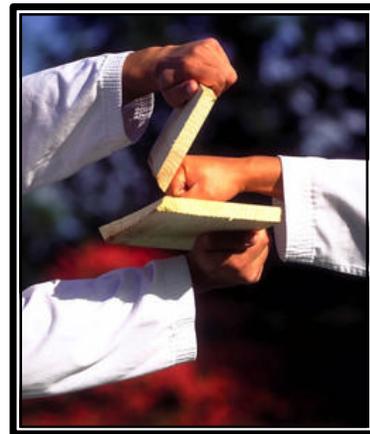
In Tae Kwon Do as in life, patience is a virtue.

Kyuk Pah (Breaking)

Ask any child that has witnessed a Tae Kwon Do demonstration what the best part was, and they will usually reply "The part where they broke stuff with their bare feet".

While it's hard to deny the fact that an audience loves to see people break things, the underlying principals of breaking are usually lost on that same crowd.

While breaking may appear to the average spectator to be an amazing act of strength, quite the opposite is in fact true. While someone that is strong may be able to break a one inch thick pine board, that strength will not help them break the same one inch pine board being held in one hand. The reasons for this are easily illustrated.



There are certain laws that govern the universe. One of these laws (In fact one of the simplest), is Newton's Second Law: $Force = Mass \times Acceleration$ ($F=ma$). In Tae Kwon Do terms, the Mass is the striking fist (or foot or whatever is used to strike), the Acceleration is the speed with which that fist is propelled forward. Since the mass of a fist is, for all intents and purposes, unchangeable, the only thing that can be affected is the acceleration. Simply put, the faster a given technique is performed, the more *force* is generated by that technique.

Sir Isaac Newton discovered another simple law in physics, which is actually Newton's First Law. It states "Every body continues in its state of rest, or of uniform motion in a straight line, unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed upon it". In layman's terms: "An object at rest tends to stay at rest; and an object in motion tends to stay in motion". This is called *inertia*.

In Tae Kwon Do terms, a board (or any object to be broken), wants nothing more than to stay in one place. By hitting it with your fist, you have impressed upon the board an outside force. That board will now change its state, usually by being moved by the impacting fist.

Here's where it gets interesting. If the board is impacted with nothing but strength (i.e. without speed), the board will react by moving out of the way of the object that imparted the force upon it. The board will fly away unscathed, or the holders will be pushed back.

Now if the board is impacted with the same fist, only much faster (with more acceleration), the board will most likely break. Here's why: When the board is at rest, it has a certain amount of *inertia*. Now remember that an object at rest tends to stay at rest unless an outside force acts upon it. Whether the board breaks or not, it still moves, it's inertia having been disrupted by the blow. There comes a point however, where a certain amount of force is so powerful, that the board cannot get out of the way of the incoming object fast enough. When this critical amount of

force vs. the board's inertia is reached, the board has no choice but to give way to the force acting upon it. Thus, the board breaks.

If we extrapolate this to its logical conclusion, we see that adding more boards adds more mass. More mass means more inertia, which requires more force to disturb that inertia. Just as an automobile is harder to move than a tricycle, multiple boards are harder to break than a single board.

Interestingly enough, by holding a board with two hands, we make it substantially easier for someone to break that board. Why? Because the act of holding the board is in effect, imposing an outside force on that board. The board would drop to the ground if not for the holder stopping it from doing so. Also, at the moment of impact, stresses are placed on the very structure of the board. The end points being held are forced in an opposite direction from the center, which is being forced by the fist coming through it. This is why hitting the board in the center makes breaking the board easier. Striking the center of the board ensures that the stress created by the opposing forces is maximized. This stress coupled with Newton's laws make the board break. It also explains why a "speed break" is so much harder to accomplish than a "normal" break. There are less outside forces acting on the board so more force, which can only be increased through acceleration, is required.

Ho Sin (Self Defense)

Many people come to Tae Kwon Do looking for "self-defense". It is indeed a sad state of today's world that so many of us need to look for ways to defend ourselves. Still the truth cannot be denied, and the goal of defending oneself and one's family is certainly a noble one. With the advent of violence in our nation's schools, self-defense for our children is a real concern.

Some have put forth the argument that Tae Kwon Do is not truly a martial art, but is instead only a sport. While this is a matter of semantics, there can be no doubt that someone who trains in Tae Kwon Do learns a means by which he may defend himself.

The fact of the matter is; self-defense is not a technique, nor does it rely on strength or power. Self-defense is an attitude and a way of thinking. If someone trains for ten years and when attacked, freezes in terror, they have gained nothing in the way of self-defense.

If someone that has trained for three months decides not to walk down the alley, but instead decides to stay on the crowded street and walk another three blocks, thus avoiding possible conflict in the dark alley, then that person has learned a lot about self-defense.

Self-defense can be broken down into two areas. The first is avoidance of attack. The second is dealing with attack.

Tae Kwon Do teaches us to be more aware of our own body and our immediate surroundings. Tae Kwon Do also teaches us to be gentle, honorable people. Being courteous in all situations certainly helps avoid conflict. If more people were courteous while driving, there would be much less "road rage" on the news these days. Tae Kwon Do helps us relax.



Perhaps the best weapon available to us is our mind. By thinking clearly and understanding an enemy's point of view, we can diffuse potentially violent situations without lifting a finger. Just as in sparring, where knowing how your opponent will react to your moves helps you win, understanding how a potentially violent confrontation may be avoided can save your life without resorting to violence.

Tae Kwon Do also teaches us how to use our body as a weapon. While we are taught that Tae Kwon Do should only be used as a last resort, and then only to the degree necessary, the ability to end a violent confrontation quickly is certainly better than becoming a helpless victim.

Many students of Tae Kwon Do drop out after a few months, upset that they have not learned enough "self-defense". What they don't understand is that self-defense is again, a state of mind. A way of living that cannot be learned in a month. By devoting oneself to the lifestyle of Tae Kwon Do, one will gain an aura of self-confidence thereby becoming proficient in self-defense without consciously striving towards that goal.

Conclusion

"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away."

Henry David Thoreau
Walden
Conclusion

As an instructor and advocate of Tae Kwon Do, I am often asked the question: "What is Tae Kwon Do". How do I explain to these people that there is no simple answer to this question? Sure I could tell them that "Tae Kwon Do is a martial art created in Korea that is heavily kick oriented", but what does that say about the philosophies and principals of Tae Kwon Do? How do I convey the fact that a student is changed forever when they take Tae Kwon Do, their life enriched in ways they never could have imagined? The answer is deceptively simple. I tell them to stop by and watch a class in action. If they have ever witnessed another martial art class, they are usually amazed at the respect given not only to the instructor, but to the students in a Tae Kwon Do class as well.

Anyone that has known me long enough has seen the change in me since I started training in Tae Kwon Do. Many have enrolled themselves because of these changes.

Through the years of training I have been complimented on my confidence without arrogance, my teaching ability and the respect with which I treat lower ranking people than myself. Perhaps these traits were always within me, though I think it was Tae Kwon Do that brought them forward. More accurately it was my increased self-confidence brought about through Tae Kwon Do training that brought these traits forward.

My life today would be dramatically different had I not enrolled in Tae Kwon Do all those years ago. How it would be different is of course something I will never know. Luckily, it is also something I do not care to know.

Appendices

"The daintiest last, to make the end most sweet."

William Shakespeare
King Richard II
Act I, Scene III

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Main Reference	Most of the knowledge I have gleaned over the years is from my training in Tae Kwon Do. Of all the influences I have had, Grand Master D.K. Cho and Mr. John Lancendorfer are by far the most important. This document calls upon considerable knowledge imparted to me by them, in addition to the copious reading I have done on the subject on my own.								
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