

KUDO: The Way of Self-Discovery

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The martial artist, who among other things is a person striving to integrate moral culture into his or her daily life, undertakes a journey of self-discovery in physical, mental, and spiritual ways. Just as physical training is ongoing in that improvement of technique, teaching, and learning methods can always occur, so too is the process of self-discovery an ongoing experience.

Moral culture (*joongshin sooyang*) can be interpreted as the development of both the spirit and of a person's character. The martial artist learns "might for right" so as not to become a bully but rather to become a functioning member of the society in which he/she lives. I would even go as far as to say that the martial artist strives to become an exemplary member of society, or even a leader of society. To live one's life in a morally correct way (how to accomplish this, or even WHAT this is, can be discussed another time) should be a goal of the martial artist, not simply the development of self-defense skills or the ability to generate powerful and accurate technique. Suffice it to say for the present is that the common and broad interpretation of morality is the guideline for this writing. Kudo is an integral part of that cultivation (*joongshin sooyang*).

This can be observed in numerous ways including understanding the self both as an individual and as part of society. Just as a baby grows through infancy, childhood, the teen years, into adulthood and maturity so does the student/martial artist grow and develop. As a student progresses through the ranks, learning technique and how to control that technique (along with how to control his or her behavior), particularly to the higher degrees of black belt, he/she generally becomes aware not only of what he's doing and how he's doing it, but also how this affects others. This is true for actions both inside and outside the *dojang*. Perhaps the martial artist can be seen as an individual who does not make a distinction between *personas*, as someone who doesn't change him/herself when changing into and out of the *dobok* (even though he/she certainly knows the difference in attire). I like to think that the martial artist is a person who has attained some level of self-realization. An example of this is practicing (actually living) the tenets of Taekwon Do everywhere. They are not just talked about or observed while training or in the *dojang* but rather are lived by the martial artist throughout all areas and aspects of his/her life. Perhaps, through diligent, conscientious, and observant training the martial artist (student, instructor, even Master), in addition to gaining skillful and effective technique, can be said to have discovered who he or she really is. It should be noted that such training (and discovery) is facilitated by a supportive martial arts community, particularly one guided by a leader (or leaders) of care and conscience. Such leadership can be seen as an essential element of this process.

I can think of myself as a part of my community (society, in a larger sense) with my individual social security number, driver's license number, home address, job title or position, age, gender, and so many other (often numerical) differentiations. I can also consider myself as husband, father, son, brother, friend, student, Instructor, group/board member, neighbor, or other such roles. The various numbers are generally assigned to me from external sources while the various roles are generally created by my choices and actions. As a martial artist it's more meaningful to me to help others learn the Art than it is to file a tax return, for example. Obviously I have a societal obligation to pay my taxes, but I can (and do) hire an accountant to help with this. I cannot pay someone else to teach my students what I know of Taekwon-Do.

Another way of looking at this can perhaps be seen in more philosophical terms. A person can view him/herself as an individual consciousness somehow enclosed in a bag of skin, separated from the outside world and sometimes acting upon it (or having it act upon him/her). Another person might view him/herself as an always-active part of the world, where his/her actions affect others whether he/she wants them to or not. I've heard this view also expressed as "I" is a place where the world becomes aware of itself. Valid viewpoints or not, our actions (or inactions) do affect others and the environment, so we might as well do things in a positive and morally correct way; or at least attempt to. I believe that this attitude reflects the motto and mission of the Universal Taekwon-Do Federation. The reader is welcome to visit www.utftkd.com for further consideration.

I can remember my Master, the late Grandmaster Han Cha Kyo, asking participants at a black belt promotion test many years ago what each would add to the tenets if given the opportunity. I, as an observer at that test, thought that Kudo (self-discovery) would be my choice. He had told me once (prior to that test day) that self-discovery was an important part of our training. It wasn't something that you could necessarily set out to do and/or accomplish, but was more of a by-

product of thorough and aware training and practice. By observing and being part of the Junior-Senior Relationship (again, both inside and outside of the *dojang*) and by contributing to the good of society (community service) a student almost couldn't help but learn something about himself, if only he/she remained open to the possibility. This was seen as Kudo.

Just as the "Do" in Taekwon-Do can be translated as "the way" or as "Art" (similar to, if not the same as, the Chinese Tao) the "Do" in Kudo can be translated in basically the same manner. I should point out that I have as yet unsuccessfully found a literal translation of the Korean (or Chinese) term *kudo*. **Addendum: Kudo can be translated as "one's pursuit of the Truth" or as "a religious way to find out about yourself and cultivate your spirit."** Through conversations and research I have yet to find a reference where the reader might verify my terminology. Perhaps this is not the most important thing, as the process of discovery is more important than the term used to describe it. I trust that any potential linguistic error might be seen as of minor importance. Just as improvement of technique (be it fundamental posture, fundamental movements, self-defense principles and application, patterns, sparring, or anything else) doesn't occur overnight or "in 10 easy lessons" but rather over time through repetition, the same is true of kudo. As is so often the case while training that the harder one tries the more he gets into his own way, so too is the case with self-discovery; the more one might try to know who he/she is, the lesser will be the result. Through action, repetition and over the course of time will one truly come to know oneself; it is difficult indeed to expect such results if one is constantly looking for some answer. It is also difficult to "step outside oneself" during some activities and observe what or how we're doing that activity, especially if it's sparring or some other free-flowing type of situation. Often it is at the conclusion of, or after, the activity that we can reflect, analyze, or otherwise take stock of what we've been doing and how we've been doing it.

Such self-diagnosis is an important part of our development. If we can recognize the things we did well during our training, we need to note them and continue to work on making them even better. The same can be said of our activities at work, school, in personal relationships, and in so many other areas. If we also can recognize any things we might not have done well, we note them too and seek out ways to improve them. Some students keep a notebook or pad and write down thoughts, impressions, realizations, mistakes, or other noteworthy things that happened or were learned during class. A video camera can also be quite a useful tool. By reviewing these notes (mental, written, or visual) and working on the things they refer to the student generally improves his or her technique. This isn't automatic however; practicing the same thing "the wrong way" thousands of times will only make for bad habits. We still need our seniors to point out mistakes or provide guidance and/or suggestions. Sometimes the student will need to go to a senior (or the Instructor) and get clarification as to how something is done; sometimes the student will simply need to spend time and energy (through repetition) forging tools and also conditioning the body to make techniques relaxed, natural, and reflexive. When the student gains some level of control or expertise with a technique, then he/she can call it his/her own and share this with other students, getting feedback from them in the process. Such interactions contribute to a healthy junior-senior relationship; they can also be seen as elements of Kudo, when the student reflects on what is being learned and shared. Such reflection may come across as a great

revelation or as a moderate and humble understanding of where the person fits into the larger scheme of things. Such understanding is discussed in writings and conversations involving Big I, little i. Even learning that he has much more to learn is a worthwhile thing.

Earlier I referred to the martial artist as one who lives the tenets at all times and in all places, not just practices or follows them in the *dojang*. Living these tenets (seven as recognized by the Universal Taekwon-Do Federation; Community Service and Love were added by Grandmaster Han to the five of Courtesy, Integrity, Perseverance, Self-Control, and Indomitable Spirit) can be seen as a main differentiation between Taekwon Do as a sport and a Martial Art. While the main goal in sports is victory the main goal in martial arts is character development and self-improvement. I find nothing "wrong" at all with competitive sports; there are numerous benefits from practicing, conditioning, striving to be the best, learning sportsmanship, and generally having fun. A person needs to learn that not everything undertaken results in victory or winning. Much can be gained from simply the doing (or playing the game). And this does not mean that the participant who does not win is a loser. We can learn from defeat; it can strengthen our resolve, it can lead us to find out where we may lack skill or competency, and other positive things. Yet the main pursuit in a sport is to win.

The incorporation of the tenets into our daily lives is an ongoing process. Some days we have greater or less "success" in faithful practice of them, individually or as a whole. The ongoing striving to do better, to improve as an individual, and to better oneself is just as (if not more) important to the martial artist as is perfecting a technique. That is one reason Grandmaster Han added the tenets of Love and Community Service. Providing teaching to others, particularly those at some disadvantage or disability, can be seen as a way of doing this. Providing service to others, and doing so fueled by a genuine love for doing so, makes the martial artist a stronger person (and a valuable member of his/her community) in many ways. The recipient gains something as well, resulting in at least some small measure of building a more peaceful world (part of our Student Oath).

I would not go so far as to say that Kudo is (or ought to be) a goal of the serious Tae Kwon Do student (or of any Martial Art). I see it as more of a *result* of serious training. As is the case in so many aspects of life, having an open mind is necessary in order for learning to occur. Not only while free sparring multiple partners/opponents for example, is it necessary to use one's peripheral vision and get the big picture (rather than focus only on what's in front of you) but also in so much of what we do on a daily basis. Like it or not we are all part of a larger scheme of things. The global village, if you will. Using a simple example, driving a car during rush hour (or at any time, really) *safely* means seeing not only what is directly in front of you, but also what's next to you, behind you, and even multiple car lengths ahead of you. Not to mention having a vehicle that runs well and has reliable brakes! Again, Grandmaster Han would remind us not to spar or approach life with blinders on. Having tunnel vision, or a narrow point of view, or even focusing too tightly on something generally isn't in our best interest. Just as relaxation is necessary to better accelerate so as to achieve one's full potential in executing technique, so is seeing that big picture necessary to achieve one's goals. Although some students perform well on tests (academically) when they're tense and not well-rested; the majority, I think, do better when

they are prepared, rested, confident, and relaxed. The same is generally true at Tae Kwon Do promotion tests. Presenting oneself as nervous or unaware of a potential employer's dress code, way of doing business, or corporate philosophy is not the way to have a successful job interview (let alone get the job).

As beginning students we are shown basic and fundamental things like stances, how to form a fist or knife-hand, how to turn our head and eyes before turning our bodies, and other things of this nature. We don't always *learn* them so easily however. If the student pays attention, observes him/herself AND others, listens to his/her seniors, takes criticism in a positive way (as it should be given), corrects the mistakes we all make, takes the time to reflect on these things, and cultivates an attitude of doing things the *right way* then he/she will be on the path of becoming a Martial Artist, the way of Kudo. Traveling this path takes time and effort, but the journey is well worth the energy spent. And it is the journey, not so much the end point that is the worthwhile endeavor. Many beginning students start their journey with a goal such as learning practical self-defense or of becoming a Black Belt. Probably a small minority (certainly in this country at this time) starts their training with self-improvement, character development, or self-discovery as a goal. Perhaps this says something about our culture; I will not get into that discussion here. Under the guidance of experienced, knowledgeable, humble, well-intended individuals can white belts advance through the ranks and come to some degree of technical expertise, self-knowledge, and self-discovery. Those who are able will share their experiences and pass along The Way to those who come after them. This process is part of what makes Tae Kwon Do such a wonderful Art and what makes Kudo such an important part of Taekwon-Do.