

Third Degree Black Belt Paper

Andrew B. Spiegel

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Introduction

This is the long overdue black belt paper that Master Han never thought was necessary for me to do in order to test. The jury is still out on whether that waiver was good or bad for me. I am unable at this time to see it from Master Han's perspective, but I am sure he had his reasons.

When I first started to actually sit down and write this latest paper (in November 2010), I had attended 91 black belt classes since 1 January 2009, which included:

- a. 48 out of 51 in 2009 94.12%;
- b. 43 out of 45 through 12 November 2010 = 95.55%.

My final tally for attendance at 2010 black belt classes was 48 out of 50, 96%. So far, for 2011, I have a 100% attendance record, 19 out of 19 possible classes (as of May 21st).

I know this because I am an historian at heart and have been keeping a black belt "diary," "composition book" or "training book" since attending my first black belt class: August 16, 1986. I was promoted to 1st Dan on December 13, 1986; on June 1, 1991 was promoted to 2nd Dan.

Since then I have completed 10 Kup tests and was a 2nd Degree 1st Kup when we switched to the review system. I have done four reviews, the last being in November 2004. There may have been a later one but I am not sure at this point.

In this paper I will discuss how my teaching adapts to students with different challenges and abilities. This will lead us to a discussion of *Kudo* and the "Big I/little i."

Teaching Students with Different

Challenges and Abilities

My first teaching experience actually pre-dates the Universal Tae Kwon Do Federation and happened when I was a junior colored belt. I am referring to the classes we used to do at the *Illinois Children's School and Rehabilitation Center* ("ISCRC") on Polk Street and Roosevelt Road in Chicago. It was inspirational for me to participate in that program. I was coming from the law world where a person's motives for doing anything were often in doubt. Yet here, we were giving of our time and talent, asking nothing in return for teaching martial arts to those children.

At the ISCRC we had to adapt teaching to children in wheel chairs, on gurneys and with other challenges. Dyna-strikes were liberally used to give these students the chance to hit a target and perhaps to release some of their built up frustrations.

I first saw board breaking at the ISCRC. I remember Master Han holding a board for a student with pencil thin arms and laying on a gurney. Master Han insured the board was going to break when this pencil thin girl hit it with her technique (a *palkop taerigi* I believe).

I have also taught classes at the annual Cystic Fibrosis Summer Camp in Indiana (with Michael Pope) and at their weekly classes at Lutheran General Hospital (the Arthur Sontag) program. There we used the

Isotrimms to replace the method they used to break up the congestion, which builds up in a child's lungs. The standard method consisted of basically pounding on the child's back to free up the lungs.

Michael and I had to develop "games" with the students to inspire their participation, i.e. running and hitting a dyna strike from two rows as if in a race, when they were really just doing basics. The inspiration had to be two-fold: to continue their interest in the class and to motivate them to attend the next day's class. The summer camp was for one week at a time. This was my summer vacation for several years.

In more recent times I have been teaching on Thursday nights at the Pathways dojang with Scott Ernstein, first as his senior and then, after his promotion, as his junior belt. We teach the 6:30 p.m. class which usually has from one to three or four students, including one student who usually arrives at least 30 minutes after class has begun.

I have had to adapt my communication skills to fit the level of students I am teaching (and the age). Often a teacher believes they are teaching one thing but the student perceives something different from what the teacher thought they were conveying. This "failure to communicate" in the teacher-student relationship is often experienced in other areas of life as well ("What we have here, is a failure to communicate," from the film "Cool Hand Luke").

During the last junior belt test at Pathways, for example, I was sitting as a judge. There were three children in one group and while they were before the Judges' table; I attempted to correct their *sonkol* technique by explaining that the hand should be maintained in a convex rather than concave shape. To see the looks on their faces (as well as on my fellow Judges' faces) was truly a "Kodak" moment. It was quickly apparent that I was not getting my intended message across! Showing them with my hand was far more effective than trying to explain it to them.

Teaching has been a test of spontaneous adaptability as well, since there is always the chance I may be the senior belt at any particular class, even the black belt class. Last time I taught black belt class I tried to give the students a taste of what a class with Master Han was like...this was an experience that was hopefully as inspirational to the black belts as it was to me.

It was April 23, 2011. Mr. Copeland was in Kansas City, so I did know in advance he would not be there. I did not know if another senior belt would be there or if I would be teaching class. One exercise I included was the Master Han "wake up" exercise – *sonkol* strikes to partner's inner forearm ("*naygwon*," it used to be called). Since there were so few of us that day (a total of 6) we did this as well as line basics the length rather than the width of the dojang.

Kudo

Teaching experiences are a good way to learn about myself as well as to teach students. How well do I communicate with others? Do I want to communicate or do I want to do something else (consciously or subconsciously) with the language I use or choose to use? An interesting question to be sure; I am still seeking the answer.

Self-discovery is an ongoing process. I have discovered over the years that my goal in Tae Kwon Do was far too general...to keep training for the rest of my life. Master Han always told me when to test; I was not proactive in this regard. Since his passing, I have been maintaining without really having any specific goal other than to keep training. This has now changed; I have undertaken the task of becoming a proactive rather than reactive student, as a result of this discovery, but relapses are frequent. I have also come to realize that testing is as much a part of training as anything else we do.

This reactive problem carries over into other areas of my life as well. For instance, I first became interested in martial arts after seeing the film "Goldfinger" when it came out way back when (mid to late 60's). It was not James Bond who inspired my martial arts interest - it was Odd Job and his "karate" techniques that seemed so magical to me at the time.

However, I did not actually start training until *Bastille Day* - 14 July 1984. The start of my training coincided with my separation from my second wife – Pamela Whitmore. I found the physical rush from this training helped offset the emotional turmoil my life was in at the time from the break up of my second marriage.

My life has gone through a number of transitions over the course of my training. I re-married in 1986 (14 February) and trained with Roxanne until she blew out her knee one night at the Devon & Western Dojang (jumping over two Isotrimms to kick the bag and landing wrong). Although Master Han was able to pop her knee back in, she was finished with Tae Kwon Do from that point, unbeknownst to us at the time.

I became a homeowner when Rox and I moved to Glen Ellyn in November 1986. Rox wanted me to start training at the Langlas school (in West Chicago) rather than going to Devon and Western. At that time classes began at 6:30a.m. and I had to leave by 5:30 a.m. This had a collateral effect on both Friday night and Saturday. I had to go to bed early and was tired the next day after class, so I was not much fun to be with I suppose on either Friday nights or Saturdays.

Anyway, we resolved the question of where I would train by my promising to go to West Chicago as soon as Rox returned to training. The result was I continued to train with Master Han until his passing. My first black belt class at Langlas (then in Winfield) was on September 7, 1996.

My second double hernia surgery intervened during this time too (16 January 1997). There was a joint class in Winfield on the one-year anniversary of Master Han's passing, and then classes at Fane Berman's Academy in Skokie. I began training regularly at the Langlas dojang when Bradley and Emily began their training on November 17, 1997.

One of life's major transitions is when a person becomes a parent. I was a 1st Degree when Bradley was born on January 14, 1988. Emily was born on August 3, 1990. In June of the following year I received my 2nd Degree. When Bradley and Emily began training I became the father of two students...a new perspective for me from just being a student myself. Although both children enjoyed training, their lives were busy with school activities too and their mother got the *brilliant* idea they should take a sabbatical from training for the summer of 1998. This was against my better judgment and advice.

Emily has yet to return to training. Bradley continued training and was promoted to 1st Dan on November 16, 2002. He continued training for a time after that, but then became involved in other activities at school (and extra curricular activities as well). He went to Marquette University in Milwaukee and now lives and works there. He credits his Tae Kwon Do training with the awakening of his spiritual awareness.

I can honestly credit my training with giving me the perseverance and indomitable spirit it takes me to continue to be a caregiver for Roxanne, since she has been diagnosed or misdiagnosed as having chronic depression. Although we were divorced and living separate and apart since August 16, 2005, I have undertaken my latest role (since July 2008) to insure Rox eats supper and to help her manage her financial affairs.

I say possibly misdiagnosed because no depression treatment has worked on her. It is as if she had a mini stroke that left her with brain damage, but her MRI does not reveal any such damage. Her hormones are in order and her Vitamin D level is fine. There is no physical sign of any problem, other than the fact she

has lost over thirty pounds since having her "breakdown." Fortunately, she is able to continue working, although to ask her about work or anything else is to receive the same negative answer - she cannot do it any more, or nothing tastes right.

The second area of my life most affected by my training has been my driving. I no longer have the attitude that I must teach other drivers a lesson or that when someone gets in front of me that they are cutting me off. In all my years of driving, I have not been pushed back even one millimeter by another car getting in front of me; and the more reckless a driver is, the farther I want them away from me.

I know there are certain exercises, which would help Roxanne if I could get her to do them. You can lead a horse to water but you can't force it to drink. She is not ready at this point. I must protect my own sanity in my new role and this is at times a real challenge.

It is likewise important that students realize that their greatest challenge is with themselves. Unfortunately, for most of us in western society, our first exposure to martial arts comes from our exposure to it in film. Attending black belt class is a weekly exercise in self-control – fighting the desire to roll over and go back to sleep, which would be so easy to do.

Kudo is a process I am also learning from my spiritual son thanks in part to his martial arts training. He gave me a book to read called *The Voice of Knowledge* by Don Miguel Ruiz, a *Toltec* Wisdom book.

The way we teach the art to students is in a non-aggressive, non-threatening manner, instilling in them the confidence to try something new and not be concerned how they look or what other people might think.

During the last triple Challenge for instance, Scott Ernstein and I were the judges in the white belt-yellow stripe ring. We did not know one of the yellow stripe girls had some kind of physical affliction, so we treated her as any other student, no special attention.

Her mother was so grateful for the way we treated her daughter that she sent a thank you e-mail, which Mr. Copeland shared with us. It really warmed the cockles of my heart to read this kind thank you note from her mother, and to learn how we had affected this girl without really doing anything out of the ordinary for her.

Students must be made to realize they are not here to compete with any other student. Even in the tournament setting, students can learn this and benefit from the experience without the traditional winning/losing scenario.

Big I-little I

Which brings us to the final topic in this paper, the Big I-little i. There are a number of ways to think of this concept, even from the elements of our student oath. ***I shall be a champion of freedom and justice.*** Does this mean we just think about it or do we actually do what we can beyond ourselves so that we can be, or so that we can become such a champion? And what **about building a more peaceful world?** The easiest place to start is in your own head and to expand from that little i to a bigger I to build a more peaceful world – in your family in the class in the community. It depends on how big an I a student wants to consider.

Continuing with the oath, if we truly observe the tenets of Tae Kwon Do, then the big I little i is ingrained in those concepts. ***Observing the Tenets of Tae Kwon Do*** cannot be done without involving both Iis. ***I shall never misuse Tae Kwon Do:*** we do not use our training to go around beating up people. We do not rove around in gangs looking for trouble nor do we go out in packs to create problems either.

The last time I was out with a group of students was just this past April at the adopt-a-highway program of Pathways...helping to keep clean a section of Butterfield Road, between Naperville Road and Butterfield Road, going a mile west of that intersection on the south side of the road. Dr. John Christianson continues to lead this program on behalf of the dojang.

I shall respect the instructors, juniors and seniors. This can be viewed as either a big or little i. For me it is a little i, since I directly have contact with these people and I can reach out to them. Yet it is beyond the self, so if you view the little i as minding yourself, then this would be a big I matter. For me, in order to be a big I it must be someone or something over which I have no direct contact or control.

Writing the cover story article for Tae Kwon Do Times for Master Han was a Big I matter for me. The article was published in a magazine with wide circulation. Now, with the Internet, it is available all over the world to this day both on our web site and elsewhere.

Another example of the Big I/little i was the newsletter I did with Michael Pope for a time, called *Jungshin Sooyang* (moral culture). The newsletter was a way to keep the little i community of students informed about current events in the schools as well as a way to get the word out to the Big I community at large of our activities and the work we were doing for the community. Perhaps we should consider scanning the issues and making them available in an archives section of the web site.

Conclusion

One of the objects I had when I began keeping a training diary was to succinctly describe each class I attended, what we did and what I took from the class. In this paper I have attempted to succinctly cover the three areas we are expected to discuss in this 3rd Dan paper. The multi media presentation I hoped to make will have to be presented in some other format rather than here.

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