

How One Demonstrates the Five Tenets of Taekwondo in the Dojang and During the Pandemic

The five tenets serve as the ethical and moral foundation for taekwondo as well as for any taekwondo practitioner in the dojang and in their daily life. While taekwondo officially became a standardized martial art during the 1950s, its core philosophy stems back to 600 AD containing influences from multiple East Asian philosophies such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Bushido. Taekwondo masters wanted to not only train the body, but also train the mind. The tenets are incorporated in lessons in order to develop martial artists not just as good fighters but as good and moral people. The five tenets of taekwondo are Courtesy (Ye Ui - 예의), Integrity (Yom Chi - 염치), Perseverance (In Nae - 인내), Self-Control (Guk Gi - 극기), and Indomitable Spirit (Baekjul Boolgool - 백절불굴)

Courtesy (Ye Ui - 예의) means to show respect, politeness, and humility. Courtesy stretches farther than basic kindness; it is infused with discipline. While kindness is flexible, courtesy is attentive. Courtesy can be displayed in the dojang by bowing when you enter, showing respect to your masters by listening to what they say, always saying “Yes sir/ma’am,” pushing yourself to do your best when training, and respecting your peers.

However, courtesy must go beyond a surface level, basic performance. It must seep its way into daily habits. An example of this would be respecting another person for simply being another person. This is done in both good and difficult times and is irrespective of our relationship with them. Courtesy is given to both strangers and friends. I would consider the largest display of this kind of courtesy being simply caring enough to not get anyone ill with COVID (SARS 2).

Integrity (Yom Chi - 염치) means to be honest and to have a strong moral consistency.

Integrity does not just mean to be honest with others, but to be honest with ourselves and that our actions align with who we are and our beliefs. It is the strength to not conform. Integrity can be having the discipline to train consistently, even when not prompted or asked to. It can be shown through personal honesty about progress and where to improve. It is based on developing and nurturing a strong moral foundation. An important part of any moral foundation is empathy. In a more personal sense, it is to be empathetic enough to make sure that everyone is safe from covid, and to have the integrity to repeat that empathy and behavior with consistency. Our actions should always match our words and beliefs.

Perseverance (In Nae - 인내) is a continued, persistent, and passionate effort to reach a goal or a purpose. One can persevere in Taekwondo by pushing themselves in multiple ways. It can be training for a test, working towards mastering a move, or practicing better proficiency in sparring. In any scenario it is about pushing ourselves towards our goal without giving up, regardless of how long it takes. However, I believe any set of morals and motivations is best tested through difficult situations. An important example of practicing perseverance is persisting through frustrating moments in the pandemic. It is making sure to stay masked regardless if people judge, staying at home and being as safe as possible, and staying true to ourselves and doing the right thing to do is despite the pressure.

Self-Control (Guk Gi - 꺾기) is the ability to control one's impulses, emotions, and behaviors. Everything has a range and so does self control. Inconsistent self control is a performance of feigned discipline. An example would be showing self control in the dojang but not outside of it. I consider self-control another form of perseverance. It is controlling ourselves enough to be able to achieve what is best for us long term and holding back on what we know will only give us short lived and instant gratification. It is restraining our egos and desires for the greater good.

In the dojang self control can be shown in many forms. One prominent example is sparring; it is about making sure that we keep our opponent safe while still aiming for good form and output. An example of extending this in every day life can be seen again with COVID. It means having the self control to mask and not going to riskier places like restaurants or meeting up with people are not as safe or are actively sick. Everything is about risk and reward. Is it more important to focus on long term goals and rewards or short term outcomes? Having the self control to recognize this and be truthful to yourself is the truest test of strength.

Indomitable Spirit (Baekjul Boolgool - 백절불굴) is about inner strength and pushing through difficult times. It is about persevering, adapting, and showing strength in the face of adversity. Indomitable spirit combines the previous four tenets into one mindset. It is built on resilience and independence. This can be shown in every aspect of training in the dojang. It is shown through consistent practice and honesty about progress. It is about sparring effectively but with control or repeating moves countless times until they are mastered. In the pandemic and everyday life, it means staying resilient not just for ourselves, but for everyone around us too. It is about leading by example. It is letting go of individualism and ego to care about the health and

well being of everyone. It is putting a mask on no matter where you go, knowing what risks are worth taking, constantly educating ourselves. It is about sticking to our moral compass no matter how hard people are trying to sway it.

It is often said that history repeats itself. I believe that repeating these ancient and noble values in many aspects of our lives is one of the better ways of expressing that saying. The five tenets should be imbedded into every crevice of our lives. They are a way of being, not simply a list. The tenets are about being a consistent, well rounded, and disciplined fighter in the dojang and being compassionate, caring, and kind person outside of it. It is the ultimate synthesis of a person through mindful practice.

Works Cited

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