

What Tae Kwon Do Means to Me

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As I reflect upon what Tae Kwon Do means to me, three things stand out: structure, citizenship (teaching others, tenets), and family.

My experience with Tae Kwon Do started when I came to watch a class. My daughter, who wanted to start several years earlier, but was too young when classes were first offered in Lamoni, now wanted to join her best friend in participating. I thought it would be good for her motor development and allow her to do something fun with a friend in a structured environment. I was immediately “recruited:” “Parents are welcome too”, “Children can be helped at home if the parent does it too,” “We participate as a family.”

To start, I was not necessarily excited by “the art of hand and foot fighting.” I viewed it as general activity, not often raising my heart rate to an aerobic training level, nor providing much in the way of resistance training. (Admittedly that changes with improved skills!) However it was something I could do and talk about with my daughter. (More about her later!) I also liked the structured manner in which things were done. Structure, order, and discipline are often neglected in our society or seen and implemented in negative ways and done for the sake of control. During Tae Kwon Do, structure, order, and discipline are used to create an environment where learning takes place, is fun, and we can all work together. So, I continued.

Soon we were introduced to the tenets of Tae Kwon Do: courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control, indomitable spirit.

Courtesy. Golden Rule. Growing up I called the parents of my friends Mr. and Mrs. Our society seems much less formal; my daughter calls most of my friends and the parents of her friends by their first names. Even at work, most of my students call me by my first name. While this may have positive benefits and perhaps give persons a feeling of value and caring, does it detract from respect? Tae Kwon Do not only has courtesy as a tenet that is displayed in the use of rank and titles, but also extends to being polite and demonstrating respect to all people.

Integrity. I have made the commitment to myself and others to reach this level. At first I thought about it. Then it was talked about. Finally, I verbalized it and committed to it. At the times I must gather the will to get off the couch, set aside the housework, or give up another event to participate in class; I do so because I've made a commitment to myself and others. It is then perseverance to be fully engaged when I get there, working to constantly improve, and trying again when things don't go as planned or I lose focus. Tae Kwon Do has definitely revived in me dedication and pushing myself.

Self-Control. Personally, the tenets remind me that all things worth doing take effort. To do my best I must have self-control and focus. This was more difficult at first; I was concerned about the behavior of my child. While she is still my responsibility, I slowly realized that part of not parenting her in the Do Jang meant that she had to internalize the tenets, be responsible for herself, and learn to respect and listen to other teachers outside of school. It also meant I could focus on my own skill and work.

Indomitable Spirit. One can have an indomitable spirit without the other tenets. But in Tae Kwon Do, strength, position and power are balanced by respect at all times in order to reach a goal, do good, be kind ... courtesy, integrity, perseverance, and self-control. Pil Sung!

In summary, to me, the tenets define citizenship and social responsibility. We teach, learn from, and guide and encourage each other. The training of each is the responsibility of self as well as others. As we progress, we not only learn, but we give back by cleaning the Do Jang and teaching others. The seemingly simple tasks of taking responsibility for oneself, helping others, and caring for the environment are the microcosm of social responsibility. What richer environment could I be a part of, raise my child in? Part of this environment is family, my final piece.

I would like to thank some of those who have become my family. I know that even if I tried to mention all, I would leave some out, so I will admit that now.

To those who've gone before, thank you for blazing the trail, yet remaining to guide and support me along the road. You have encouraged me to continue to grow while still being who I am: a wife, a mother, a friend, a caregiver, a leader, a learner, a teacher, a mentor, an administrator, a colleague, a servant, a scholar and now a martial artist ... so that I too may pass along what has so unselfishly been given to me. Thank you ...

Mr. John Meek for planting, caring for, and harvesting your crops both in the field and in the Do Jang.

Mr. Tom Strade for living the tenets! Thank you for demonstrating that strictness and discipline can be done in an enjoyable manner. You are firm on the outside, but those who get to know you can speak of your "soft" center.

Master Hall and Master Slatten for challenging each of us to push ourselves and do the best we can at all times, understanding we are each unique, and holding us each to our personal best.

Mr. Jim McKinney for the endless hours of teaching, encouraging, and going through things “one more time.”

Ms. Jennifer McKinney for sharing your experience and wisdom ... “Just keep going!”
“You can do this!”

Mr. Michael Jordison for your perfectionism, suggestions and patience.

Mr. Scott Farnsworth for your humbleness, dedication and, of course, being my Tae Kwon Do “husband.”

Mr. Lance and Mr. Zachary Fish for your added humor, perspective and support!

The other black and brown belts with whom I have trained: Each of you has enriched my experience and broadened my perspective.

My daughter, my training partner, my motivator, my friend, Kami. You are so precious!
Never forget who you are and that you control the situation by how you react to it.

Finally, to my partner, friend, and love of my life, John! Thank you for your support and sacrifice through every dinner apart, every dollar spent, every moment of distress.