

Dr Cameron Snelling

'Loyalty' is defined literally as 'faithfulness or a devotion to a person or cause' and depending on this setting this can have a number of variables contributing to it and obviously far ranging outcomes. Just to illustrate a few examples or varying levels of 'loyalty' before related back to the Taekwon-do way of life, examples include:

You could say that the most basic loyalty evolved from a kinship with family, a gene pool, friends etc. The creating a close knit unit (e.g. tribe) where being outcast from this could be construed as the ultimate and most unthinkable rejection.

The rise of nations meant that loyalty was used to gain allegiance to a government or a royalty. That same can be said for religion or belief system.

Money/business has its own spin on loyalty where customers are 'loyal' to a favourite brand. The focus of profit has meant that 'loyalty' lies not with the country but with the company (where ever it is based).

Moving into Taekwon-Do, reading the encyclopaedia, syllabus handbooks, and oral teachings from instructors the concept of loyalty is slowly nurtured. From a historical perspective the writings are laden with examples, such as:

- Ahn Chang Ho – Devotion of his entire life to education and Korean independence movement
- Ahn Joong Gun – Devotion to country when assassinating Hiro Bumi Ito
- Hwa Rang youth group – Loyalty to king and country during Silla Dynasty
- Admiral Yi Soon-Sin – 'Unrestrained loyalty to the king'
- Kwang-Gae-Toh-Wang – Loyalty to original Korea by regaining lost territories
- Chong-Mong-Chu – A loyal subject with the famous poem 'I would not serve a second master though I might be crucified 100 times'
- Ge-Baek – A great general with strict discipline i.e. loyalty to the military/country
- Son Byong Hi – Dedication to the prosperity of his nation
- General Kim Yoo Sin – Mistaken loyalty to King in attacking own country with foreign forces
- General Choi Yong – Respected for his loyalty, patriotism and humanity.

I'm sure in the rest of the ITF Taekwon-Do patterns there are more examples where importance is placed on 'Loyalty'.

In years gone by life and death came swiftly and cheaply with all the constant warring therefore I think the concept of 'Loyalty' was taken to almost fanatical levels. In todays society it is a little rarer to see people dying for there 'loyalties', except perhaps for the heavily religious nations where wars are still prevalent.

Honing down to the individual in Taekwon-Do I think loyalty is essential however there are boundaries for me and I will elaborate on this later.

Loyalty examples in my opinion are:

- Being loyal to your 'art', not changing any of techniques/philosophies and nomenclature. This only serves to dilute its effectiveness, each part of the system was scientifically thought out and tested years ago, it is only through personal arrogance that this would be altered. The cohesiveness of the organisation is also weakened when there is fragmentation.
- Loyalty to your club is important because it is a form of a 'tribe'. A regular constant group of people with similar beliefs can only benefit and become stronger in Taekwon-Do. Trainings are organised, fun, and a standard of ability is observed therefore boundaries are set. Knowing what standard each grade is expected to be helps with self directed learning thus taking some pressure off the instructor.
- Loyalty to your instructor. This is an interesting premise, as your instructor is usually that inspirational, tireless practitioner whom lights the fire in your belly stimulating your desire to train and improve. Is this idealistic? Maybe, but I have been fortunate enough for this have been a reality in the past. As a student you owe your loyalty to this person for the input they have given you, and to help maintain their/your club strength. It is very hard for an instructor to teach effectively when there are no regular faces, progress cannot be monitored and information gets repeated to often.

Loyalty in my opinion should not however be blind. What I mean by this is loyalty should be sensible not fanatical. Throughout life we need to actually use our brains and common sense. Loyalty to teaching is important but not when it surpasses our sensibilities. This can, however this can be hard when learning something new and your ability levels are unknown, therefore a degree of trust needs to be fostered (one of five human virtues).

To continue to advance and to further knowledge in Taekwon-Do it is important to know when the current instructor you are loyal to is unable to help you in this. Now, blind loyalty would mean that you stay stagnant in your training, however a good instructor should recognise when their knowledge base is exceeded or style of teaching no longer suits the path the student is on and should redirect the student to the appropriate Do-Jang/Instructor to carry on with the Taekwon-Do journey.

In summation, 'Loyalty' is a cornerstone to many things, in it's essence it stops us just drifting through life as it gives us a sense of belonging, a place to put our energy and to give a form of meaning to existence!