

Assimilating moral culture into the psyche of modern day students

By Hayden Breese

Given the power of external influence, we could be forgiven for accepting the path that is laid out before us. We are the living legacy of our ancestors, our culture, upbringing, caregivers, and environment. There is a common saying, that it takes a village to raise a child and this village defines its environment and moral standard.

Generations have allowed the decay of moral culture in society. We all have witnessed the demise of religion, discipline and honour in our lifetime. We exist in a more selfish and material focused world that has seen a degradation of positive moral influence. Some blame could be placed with the role of television, video games, commercialism and even capitalism. Moreover, war, recession, terrorism and the propaganda of a fear culture build a troubled and anxious people, fearful for themselves and of each other.

Whether we promote morals or lack of morals, it is the focused attention and promoted learning of a particular ideology on a grand scale that brings about change. What can be learned from hours spent playing games of killing or hours watching criminals on television but killing and crime. If we accept that we all have choice and free will – the right to choose who and what interests us, right and wrong, then we can acknowledge that we can choose the standards by which we live our life.

While there is a multitude of bad influence in society there are also pursuits like Taekwon-Do that promote good moral character and the development of an ideal society. Taekwon-Do therefore has an important and positive role to play in contributing to a better society. As a martial art, Taekwon-Do requires the true practitioner to develop a strong set of mental attributes to accompany the development of physical capability. At a basic level a student must understand when and how to use the skills they have learnt in the Do Jang. Further character development includes confidence, fortitude, patience, commitment, integrity, courtesy, and personal discipline for example. This mental skill helps an individual to interact positively in and outside the Do Jang and to set a high standard of personal conduct. That said, the world is a changing place and Taekwon-Do needs to adapt with it. There are new challenges in terms of communication, new standards of discipline and respect. Modern students have an inflated sense of importance and have learnt to expect things now. The modern student exists in a very different social world that includes electronic media such as cell phones and Internet social sites such as facebook and twitter. These connecting media enable people to interact albeit outside of the usual social norms of acceptable behavior. The challenge for Taekwon-Do is how to install the values of a moral culture in the hearts and minds of the modern student.

According to the encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do the study of moral culture “promotes a healthy body and keen mind...good sportsmanship and the perfection of moral behavior.” Importantly, “the more disciplined and cultivated the mind is, the more disciplined and cultivated will be the student’s use of Taekwon-Do.”

One would be mistaken in considering Taekwon-Do a purely physical art. However, it is a highly complex human development system and sophisticated culture. Taekwon-Do can teach students how to use their body’s

absolute potential, to push themselves and find meaning and purpose. Importantly Taekwon-Do provides a system for how to relate to others according to eastern philosophies such as respect for position and age. The famous eastern philosopher Confucius said “To promote the sense of morality one must treat others with faithfulness and sincerity based on righteousness, and to eliminate completely vicious thinking”.

It becomes especially important therefore, that the Do Jang exemplifies the qualities of an ideal society. Principles of mutual respect, courtesy, respect for seniority, age, and wisdom can be learnt in the Do Jang and modeled in society. While the world changes, Taekwon-Do must continue to uphold the integrity of its basic rituals and principles. The point being, the principles in terms of a Tenet culture have to be understood and practiced in the Do Jang. Any erosion of the basic traditions that exemplify the tenets inside the Do Jang is a step closer to an erosion of a moral culture. Graffiti leads to petty crime, and petty crime to serious crime. A simple bow to a senior member is often missed and it is in this moment that an opportunity to practice and focus on courtesy is lost. It teaches a student it is acceptable to show respect only some of the time and ultimately leads to further issues.

Humans are creatures of habit. They need to be trained, practiced, left to action, then trained, practiced again, over and over -a cycle of continuous conditioning. So it is the reoccurrence of moral influence but also its intensity that will determine the effect. It becomes apparent that through practice many students can master the basic rituals of moral culture within the Do Jang. While the basic principles of moral culture can be taught and associated to behavioral expectations in a particular environment, the challenge lies in expanding the wider understanding of how to relate to others outside the Do Jang.

Once the basics are mastered, it is in this consideration and thoughtfulness that I believe Taekwon-Do should focus its efforts. It is in the proactive and cooperative action towards common goals, in the best interests of the group, where a greater level of understanding is required. Some students, as also reflected in society, rise above their own interests, to consider and proactively seek to help others.

At the heart of a western interpretation of Moral culture is the principle of giving. Thoughtful students may ask themselves...what have I done today for someone else or the greater good of the group? Instructors must teach students to be patient and understanding of others, to be aware of others and their needs, respect for others belongings, knowledge of common goals, and the shared purpose of the group.

These lessons are best taught indirectly and learnt through the pursuit of common purpose rather than as an end in itself. For example, Instructors should create opportunities and activities based upon mutual reliance, bonding and triumph over adversity. Students need to learn that they must co exist with others and that they can trust, respect and rely on others who have like-minded beliefs.

In order to be a worthwhile member of society an individual must have a purpose and self worth. They must understand that they are important to the common good. They have respect and their actions matter. Too many people have been taught that they are unimportant and of low worth. It is of no surprise therefore that these people operate outside of social norms, disrespect others and rebel against authority.

It is an instructor's purpose to provide opportunity and encouragement for a student to build a platform of confidence and personal elevation. An instructor crafts a world of potential and offers this gift to all. Ultimately, a righteous path is one fought with challenge and difficulty, and it is the student who decides for them whether this path forms their future.

The following examples illustrate two very different students. I had a troubled youth train at the Do Jang for three months. He had broken into my car and following a group meeting I suggested the consequence of his actions was to start training with me at club. He was an exemplary student, highly talented, respectful and did what he was asked. In my environment, he had conformed and there was hope for his future. Following the compulsory three months he stopped training immediately and returned to his environment. He returned again to what he knows, which was petty crime. This example illustrates the importance of the context in which a student enters the Do Jang, relative to the degree of permanence required of moral teaching. It figures that the greater negative influences in someone's life, the greater degree of positive influence will be required.

In contrast another story illustrates success. Mary was a good person but quiet and withdrawn. She joined the School to help her lose weight and gain confidence. Over the years she grew in confidence and success after success followed. She attended anything she could and worked harder than most. She progressed to help others and contributed massively to the School. Mary will soon sit for her black belt and likely become a very good instructor.

In conclusion, many students of Taekwon-Do are good people as far as societal standards go. They have a reasonable foundation by which Taekwon-Do can build a moral understanding. However, in order to develop beyond basic ethics, students must progress beyond the basic levels of Taekwon-Do and that takes time and commitment. To teach the modern student moral culture one must accept that student retention becomes the primary consideration.

A qualified instructor must teach both spirit and technique. However, not every instructor or club culture may facilitate a moral culture. Taekwon-Do needs to carefully consider the moral merit of its leaders perhaps more so than their physical capability. It is important that students are given opportunities to observe and model ideal behavior both inside and outside the Do Jang. We should then ask what rituals do or could exist within the Do Jang, which might also assimilate moral principle? For this purpose I have developed a model (overleaf), as a basis of forming lessons, to help facilitate the learning of moral culture.

Taekwon-Do has an important role to play in the development of an individual. It has many years of coaching and modeling potential. That said, a student could be morally excellent but not so good practically and vice versa. We learn from each other, and students model those they respect rightfully and wrongly. It is suggested that instructors and examiners re-emphasize the importance of moral character for advancement in rank. We must look to instructors to set the standard, challenge their students' character and provide mechanisms to correct undesirable behavior before progressing students in rank.

A practical model for facilitating the learning of Moral Culture

The following model provides a simple structure for facilitating the study of moral culture in Taekwon-Do. It is a starting point by which lessons can be established. It is especially western in its interpretation and practical, indirect implementation is encouraged over theoretical lessons.

Understanding others Treating others Doing for others

10th – 7th Kup

Friend or foe Listening How to make friends	Tenets of Taekwon-Do Student Oath Right & Wrong
Expectations as a student Giving at home	

6th – 3rd Kup

Fostering genuine interest in others	
Working in a group	
	Self Control Respect & Courtesy Politeness
Giving in the Do Jang Giving to neighbors	

2nd – 1st Kup

Understand self/role/purpose	Situational based behavior: -Disagreement, Debate, Conflict
Seniority/status/position	
	Etiquette
	Integrity
	Kindness
	Performing your duty Giving to the community Helping strangers