

# The Importance of Respect in Taekwon-Do

Mr Jeremy Hanna

---

Respect is defined as "*esteem for, or a sense of worth or excellence, for a person, quality or ability.*" In this essay, I will discuss the importance of respect in Taekwon-Do. In the first section I will discuss the importance of respect for people and their abilities and in the second part I will discuss the importance of respect for the qualities embodied by the tenets of Taekwon-Do.

As a Taekwon-Do student, we are introduced to the concept of respect from day one. Often the first thing that a new student is taught is not how to execute a kick or punch; but instead the correct posture and positioning of the attention stance, followed by the process and technique for bowing.

The protocol of 'forming up' at the beginning and end of each class is performed inside every Taekwon-Do do jang in the world, the techniques taught and theories discussed during the class may vary, but this procedure remains. After the call of "form-up" is given by the instructor, all students reply with the respectful acknowledgement "yes sir/ma'am!" before running to their designated place. The structure is simple; all students stand in straight lines in order of rank, facing the instructor at the front of the class. Once all are in position, the senior member gives the command to face the instructor and bow; then gives the command to recite the Student Oath. Once this is complete, the class' attention belongs to the instructor. The students wait in respectful silence. This procedure is a fundamental and consistent part of Taekwon-Do.

As we progress we are taught various means of showing respect for our peers, seniors, instructor, flag and founder. Small technicalities in etiquette such as seating arrangements in a car in order of seniority, holding our cup with both hands slightly lower than our senior during a toast, and not letting the flag touch the ground may seem unimportant but in fact these are the very things which make us unique.

*"A society and a nation could not avoid chaos without its culture and social order being based on respect for the knowledge and the wisdom of its elders"*e;  
- *Encyclopaedia of Taekwon-Do*, General Choi Hong Hi

In other competitive environments such a rugby or soccer game, players sometimes become frustrated and angry with the opposing team or player. This all too often results in the referee losing control of the match as the players ignore the rules of the game, cross the line and begin to fight. As these sports do not have the same 'respect base' as martial arts such as Taekwon-Do, they rely solely on the control of the referee and his knowledge of the written rules. As soon as his authority is breached, the players have nothing to stop them. In Taekwon-Do competition, the line between competing (sparring) and fighting is much less clear due to the nature of the event. Our primary form of control over the bout lies with the competitors and the deep sense of respect for each other and for the referee.

Respect can mean many things; most commonly it refers to holding someone's thoughts, feelings and abilities in high esteem, giving them worth and importance, and taking them into serious consideration when making personal decisions. Giving someone your respect can also include being honest with them, listening to them and confiding in them.

We can show respect through our actions, and we can also feel it. We can act in a manner considered to be respectful. We can feel respect for someone and feel respected by someone. But because we can act in ways which do not resemble the way we truly feel, the feeling of respect is more important than the action without the feeling. When we feel respect for someone, we will automatically behave in a respectful manner.

*"As son respects parents, younger brother respects older brother, man must always respect his elders and seniors. This is the beauty of mankind, and one of the distinctions between human and animal"*

*- Encyclopaedia of Taekwon-Do, General Choi Hong Hi*

Applicants for the latest senior dan grading (February 2007) were asked to write about their thoughts on the subject of loyalty. Many wrote of the people for whom they felt a sense of loyalty; among them, both people in each case felt a deep sense of respect for one another. Without this mutual respect, neither person has any reason to remain loyal to the other.

For example, customers who visit a shop whose owner treats them with little respect and tries to trick them into paying more than the product is worth are unlikely to return, taking their business elsewhere. However, if the owner treats their customers fairly and with respect, customer loyalty is likely to increase. The same concept also applies to Taekwon-Do; an instructor who has little respect for his students is unlikely to be successful in maintaining a club, he may seem unwilling to impart his knowledge to his students and they will seek the information elsewhere.

*"A generous and loving man cannot have enemies"*

*- Confucius*

Another useful example of mutual respect may be between teacher and student in a school situation. A teacher's authority over his students is influenced by two things: respect and fear. Those in positions of authority often demand that their students show them respect. However, if they have not yet earned the respect of their students they may find that their authority is entirely based on fear. Once the element of fear is removed (for example physical punishment is no longer permitted) and the students no longer feel threatened, the teacher's authority over them quickly disappears. Because respect is earned over a period of time from behaviour between people, it is enduring and difficult to remove. Therefore a teacher whose students respect him can expect ongoing loyalty from his students. This situation also applies between instructor and student in a Taekwon-Do environment.

Different people show respect in different ways, sometimes it is obvious, sometimes subtle. In my experience there always seems to be a common factor though. No matter how they show their respect, it always seems to involve one person valuing the other enough to willingly make

sacrifices in order to help or coach or teach. No thought is put into what they will get in return, seeing their improvement is thanks enough.

*"To help others develop and succeed in life is a reward in itself and has a true value only if nothing is expected in return"*

*- Encyclopaedia of Taekwon-Do, General Choi Hong Hi*

Showing respect in Taekwon-Do surpasses just bowing to one's seniors, instructors and peers. It is important that instructors do not neglect to teach the importance, meaning and application of each of our tenets in favour of passing on their knowledge of the physical aspects of Taekwon-Do. Take the first line of the student oath; "I shall observe the tenets of Taekwon-Do". Without these moral concepts being given the appropriate attention, other areas of our Taekwon-Do training will be weakened. Students will only have a superficial understanding of the tenets. For example, they may know to turn away from senior members when adjusting their dobok; they may know that they are never to present their hand when introducing themselves to a senior; but they do not understand why this is so.

The correct understanding and application of each tenet will benefit the student both inside and outside the do jang.

The first tenet of Taekwon-Do is courtesy. This refers to the manner in which individuals interact with one another in order to maintain harmony in society. It is demonstrated at all levels of interaction between people; we are taught as children to be courteous towards one another through simple acts such as saying "please" and "thank you", taking turns with toys etc. As we get older we learn to show courtesy in other ways. For example, we listen attentively to our teachers without interrupting and show respect for our elders by standing as a principal enters a school assembly. Inside the do jang courtesy can be demonstrated in a variety of ways. For example, when a junior student notices their senior performing a menial task such as sweeping the floors or laying down mats prior to training, they are obliged out of courtesy and respect for their senior to perform the task themselves.

*"Honesty without courtesy can be rather ruthless."*

*"Respectfulness without courtesy can make the recipient rather uncomfortable."*

*"Courageousness without courtesy can be rather violent."*

*"Prudence without courtesy can be rather cowardish."*

*- Confucius*

Integrity in Taekwon-Do refers to the ability to determine the difference between right and wrong; our conscience makes us feel guilty when we do something which we know is wrong. The concept of integrity takes longer to learn than courtesy, and thus young children may not understand the difference between right and wrong. Often it relates to selflessness; if we consider others ahead of ourselves then we are acting with integrity. For example, if a customer pays a shopkeeper for a product worth \$20 but mistakenly hands over two \$20 bills, if the shop owner acts with integrity he will alert the customer to the mistake, and return the extra money. An instructor who is unsure of the correct application of a Taekwon-Do technique, yet still knowingly

teaches his students his own incorrect application, without alerting the student to his doubts, is acting without integrity.

Perseverance refers to the act of remaining patient and tenacious in all tasks regardless of whether they are trivial or important. For us to achieve anything in life, whether it is passing school exams or the perfection of a Taekwon-Do technique; we must first set ourselves a target, then continually persevere towards reaching that target regardless of any problems we may meet on the way. For example, if a student wants to improve their flexibility they must stretch. If after a week they become frustrated that they are not noticing any improvement and stop stretching, then they are not showing perseverance and cannot expect to reach their goal of increased flexibility.

Self control is another important tenet of Taekwon-Do. It relates to the ability to resist doing something which may have some appeal but which will have a detrimental effect on either oneself or another person. If, during free sparring, a student lacks self-control and becomes angry, they could cause significant damage to themselves or their opponent by either running into their opponent's powerful but controlled attack, or by delivering an uncontrolled or inappropriate technique of their own. A student needing to lose weight to compete in a particular weight division for a tournament will need to demonstrate self control to resist the temptations of eating when they are hungry.

The fifth tenet; indomitable spirit, often causes the most confusion of all the tenets as students often find that it is difficult to fully understand. We show our indomitable spirit when we are confronted by overwhelming odds and yet we do not give up. It is the courage to defend our principles, stand up for what we believe in and act against injustice. For example, when confronted by an accident scene, it is the courage to rescue a complete stranger even if it means putting ourselves in great danger. These same principles can apply to Taekwon-Do. For example, in a competitive Taekwon-Do environment such as a tournament, indomitable spirit is shown when we compete to the best of our abilities against an opponent who is significantly more experienced and skilled than ourselves.

A serious student of the art who has been taught to fully understand each tenet will welcome the opportunity to demonstrate courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self control and indomitable spirit. They have learned to **respect** these moral values; and without respect, they have no value.