

## Reflections upon The Tenets of Taekwon-Do

General Choi Hong Hi founded Taekwon-Do including the Tenets, meant as a guide for all serious students of the art.

These tenets have guided all of us through the decades, years and days and are very important for the way we train, teach, inter-act and live. The way to interpret and implement them is sometimes obvious but at other times a rather complex task. Furthermore, the way to interpret them can differ from each individual due to personality and/ or philosophy but also depending on what role a person has.

I would like to compare the interpretation and view of these tenets based on input I have gathered from some different “stakeholders”:

- A color belt student
- A 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree Assistant Instructor
- A mother of two young students (8 years old)
- A manager in a company with no connection to Taekwon-Do at all
- A student at university with no connection to Taekwon-Do at all

### Courtesy

The university student says it is the respect he shows to other people. It can be based on some experience from that person since before or (if he does not know the person) a potential that person has in general or specifically. It will result in empathy from others, respect back and serve as a base for trust and possible co-operation. When I show a possibly hostile person some respect it will make them less secure in their opinion and attitude.

The mother of twin boys says it made a huge impact after only months of trainings in their home. When the sons started training, they were very much competing for the attention from the parents when eating dinner or similar activities. Soon they started raising their hands even though the parents did not encourage them to do so. Their friends often said they noticed a big difference in a short period of time and the same goes for teachers at pre-school.

The manager says that courtesy and respect for others is a key in business. If you do not treat customers, employees, managers, suppliers and other stakeholders with respect they will go to competitors. Most companies have guiding visions like environment, quality etc. These are changed seldom or never. More often focus behaviors are called for. Examples: passion, innovation, drive improvements etc. However, the code of conduct states the way to handle organization changes, security, interactions with society, students and others are very much based on courtesy and respect for people. Sometimes you must give priority to another person’s situation or need in relation to your own for the long- term success of the company and to build long time relations. One example is that all parts should respect set times; if a meeting is expected to start at a certain time it is important that all invited (also managers) are there on time. Furthermore, the way you dress can send signals about respect or lack of respect.

The Assistant Instructor says courtesy is the foundation for trust when teaching and interacting with students. If the students are young, it is also important to have the correct level of courtesy and respect with their parents: too strict may create too much distance with parents focusing on their smart-phones or similar. Too little respect may result in less discipline with chaos or parents trying to help by correcting their children as a result.

## Integrity

The Assistant Instructor: It is important to start with yourself and be honest about your strengths and areas of improvement- after that it is easier to connect that honesty to other people and create integrity. In a larger Taekwon-Do school there will always be co-operation but also competition between students and instructors. To some level this is good for development of the school, students and Taekwon-Do in general. If done too much it can generate conflicts and create cracks.

The mother of twins says she can see a clear difference between her sons now compared to before they started training. Then they could cheat to win games they played with each other, with parents and with friends. Now they almost always stick to the rules and still very much like to win but not if it takes breaking rules.

The university student says that it is about keeping promises to others and oneself. It starts with being true to oneself and then radiates from there. It does not mean that you have to say exactly what you think and feel about everything but when you do, you mean it.

The color belt student: to be as honest as possible without insulting an instructor. It can also be about admitting that an exercise is difficult or that you do not understand and ask for further explanation.

The manager says this is very important in business. It affects the way to handle products, services, climate impact, uses of products etc. If you lie about the impact your products or services has to the environment, you may not be exposed immediately but sooner or later, the truth will be revealed and the trust from society and customers can be damaged beyond redemption. An employee shall show integrity by explaining about mistakes done that could harm customers or the company. This is easier said than done since many employees think it may risk their salary or promotion plans. A good manager shall treat that kind of information as something valuable and not punish the employee.

Furthermore, the way a manager handles an employee, evaluates the work, manages the salary development, possibility for career development etc. is of highest importance for a company.

This is similar to our role as Instructors and Masters, at grade- and degree tests in Taekwon-Do. If we do not treat the students in a fair way, we will lower the trust of Taekwon-Do as an art.

## Perseverance

The manager takes as example to manage a business cycle. When sales are good it can be challenging to find skilled employees and contractors, find suppliers that can ramp up, to have time for customers and so on. When sales are low the focus is usually on saving cost, looking for new customers, improving products and services. When business cycle is shifting (up and down) each company works with shift of focus and resources. Perseverance for a company and its employees in this case is to endure through

theses shifts and being dynamic. Another example of perseverance is when a company is in hard competition and/ or with development of a product that takes longer time than expected.

The student: to study for an exam takes a lot of dedication. When done repeatedly it will result in perseverance. By training the body, the ability to take on harder tasks, more difficult input yet also handle stress, anger and fear is improved. This has been proven in many studies but still some students do work out during the years at university while some do not.

Color belt student: not many other physical activities develop the whole body the way Taekwon-Do does. Handball has a lot of running, technical and tactical difficulties to learn but also quite hard contact. However: Taekwon-Do involves the whole body all the time in combination with top level mental focus and that gives even more development. When my body is getting tired it would be easier to stop trying but that is when it starts to give result.

The mother says that her twins are still very young and their physical development is fast with or without a lot of training. Still, they like more difficult challenges in Taekwon-Do class now than earlier but also at sports in school they often are trying to go for the hardest tests/ exercises.

Assistant Instructor: Besides the more usual interpretations he lifts the ability to take well based decisions of different levels. To teach students to prepare so that in a stressful situation the mind easier can decide. One point is to make the body stronger to elevate the threshold but also to sort out a few options and train to only pick from these when under pressure. Staff in military service and intensive health care use this world- wide in a similar way.

## Self- Control

Color belt: to take decision more based on logic and facts and less based on feelings like fear, anger etc. To control body in stances, when moving in different speeds with complex combination of muscles needing to be synchronized with rhythm and flow.

Assistant Instructor says it relates to many areas. One of the most difficult ones is to manage speed and contact level for different students including himself. Young children with almost no contact at all, a little more speed during training for older students, more at trainings for students preparing for tournaments and top speed for himself and students when competing without injuring opponents. For students over 55 years of age slower and more control again. Part of this should be general, in order to make a class work at the same time. Sometimes more individual depending on the different styles of competing students. When he is training it is a lot about pushing himself to perform more and harder workouts to develop for a competition, a test or even to be a better instructor for the students.

Manager at company: one aspect is to demand the staff to work hard but not over the limit. This could create illness for employees in the longer run. Competition with other companies is often hard and one can be tempted to "cut corners" with either lower quality or too big risks as a result. Self- control can also be to work as hard as one expects the employees to do to create a fare atmosphere at work. A manager needs to find a balance for competition between individuals in a team and between teams in the same company. Too little means less strive and energy, too much can lead to sub-optimization, less co-operation and short term wins to the cost of long- term gains.

University student says it is tightly connected to perseverance. To take time and energy to manage small activities and the details in them create perfection if done over longer time. This takes both self-control and perseverance. This goes for studies for an exam, a project work with classmates and as well as for life in general.

The mother of the twins says a good example she has is when friends ask her sons if they want to come out and play, they first do their homework or help out with something at home before they go out and play. Later when they are older, they will need that self-control to also refrain from falling for possible pressure from other young people to do crime, drugs or similar activities. Also, she expects them to avoid losing temper in some situations in school because of the discipline they learn from Taekwon-Do.

### Indomitable Spirit

The manager at the large company says that competition will always be hard, customers and society will always demand a lot, the search for the best employees and partners will be challenging. There will always be surprises happening that demand adjustments of plans and decisions. There will always be many who want to have your position including the gains you have worked hard for already. I show by my behavior that I always do my best to keep the team and company successful, being a good example for the team you are leading, and I have to keep doing that all the time. That is indomitable spirit for me.

The mother of two sons says it is too early to say what that means for her sons and their family, but she hopes they will continue training all their life, start leading classes later on and compete some.

The color belt student: to keep training and not refrain from doing what I should do. The black belt is not the end but rather a confirmation that I am on the right track.

The university student: indomitable spirit is when the perseverance has become a part of your personality and character. When you have an internal strength beyond all buzz words. Some of our goals may not be reached no matter how hard you try but to know deep inside you did the best you could, may be enough in those situations.

The Assistant instructor says that indomitable spirit is that psychological strength and determination that fires when the body is tired and ready to give up- to make it, to get stronger, get better, being able to do more. Now and in the future. This is the difference between persons with similar physical prerequisites. The ones with indomitable spirit will develop better over time and the risk for them to quit at difficult situations is lower.

## Elaborations

Most companies and (universities) have “Mission- Vision- Values” to guide their employees in general. This is telling a part of the story that the company is telling as well as build the company culture.

I see many similarities between ITF and an international company. Our competition is with other martial arts, with smart- phones including social media, jobs and games to mention some. These can of course be tool for our progress as well but in general we need students to chose training with us and do less of something else. Many parents understand that their children need something to develop the mind and body over time even if a game in their cell phone provide instant fun, challenges and rewards. When they compare us with other martial arts, I know that some of them include the long- term development they will have.

When we are clear about our Tenets, we communicate what they can expect their children to learn and what they need to apply to. After some weeks or months in our schools they will see for themselves how we behave, how our leaders act, talk and lead by example. This will create a clear advantage to most other activities. I have over the years and decades often heard from parents and students that the culture we provide within ITF is unique and that it is exactly what they think is needed long- term.

The input I have got from these different “stakeholders” is adding aspects to our Tenets in an interesting way. Our art has a strong chain from student, to instructor, to school, to National Federation, to ITF. Each individual and school is a lot made up by students, parents (many of them also train in our schools), university students and working adults. The experience they carry from other parts of their lives they will reflect on our activities and vice versa. This means that we are closely linked to other parts of societies all over the world.

On an individual level Courtesy can be how a student approaches friends and instructor at Taekwon- Do class to begin with. It continues with how different instructors interact, co- operates with each other and the school in different matters. One example is if an instructor gets ill and need a substituting instructor for shorter or longer term. The courtesy level and culture within the school will be very important foundation for this to work out well. Between schools in a country there will be competition for medals at tournament but the strive for common goals, educations, rules etc. will be crucial for the development of ITF within that country. Similar dynamics are between countries within ITF. The courtesy between all persons and groups of persons in such a big organization is a true foundation for prosperity. This is very similar to the thoughts of the manager earlier.

Integrity also starts on an individual level. Communicating rules, common interpretations of rules within a class, a school, a national organization, as well as on top ITF level is very important. It takes a lot of IIC, IUC, IHC as well as meetings, phone calls and discussions to remain on a common path forward. One important part of this is for individuals on all levels to state when we do not understand or agree. If I make a mistake, I need to correct it and learn from it. Leaders of all levels need to explain, check for understanding and care for our students and organization.

Perseverance on an individual level is often about trying hard, as our color belt student stated earlier. It can also be about having an injury that hinders you from physical activities for a while. On a school level it can be that two instructors move to another city or for other reasons can- not continue leading classes. This can be a severe challenge, but we must continue forward and find solutions. We also must work proactively by educating assistant instructors who can help leading more classes as our school is growing. We have our business cycles just as companies do: new semesters with new members, administration etc. then education and competitions and finally examinations. For a national organization, like ours in Sweden, Covid- 19 has been a situation when we have had to take many hard decisions and adjust to the legal and medical requirement that were changed often and with short notice. It has meant very much hard work for key persons in the board for a long time. This has been the situation in all countries and thus also for our top- level management in ITF.

Self- Control on an individual level can be hard for most people. Bundled together in class, schools and national organizations makes it very complex. A lot of discussions, educations and leadership are needed to make it work. Our fair treatment of student, competitors but also leaders is key so we can be proud of what we make of our art. We must balance the competitive atmosphere between individuals, schools and countries so it makes us all better to not create negative results.

Indomitable Spirit for an individual can also be to continue working for our art and organization if I have a permanent injury preventing me from some movements etc. It can mean to many times prioritize our work with Taekwon-Do to other parts of our lives. It takes a lot of efforts from all of us to maintain and develop Taekwon-Do further. A school can have very tough competition from other martial art schools in the same area. Our national organization in Sweden has worked very hard for decades to manage the relation to other Taekwon-Do organizations within the National Sports Federation. This has been done on top of other, internal ITF activities just to “stay alive” as organization in Sweden. Without Indomitable Spirit within some key persons, we would have a very small and weak organization in Sweden today.

The passing of General Choi Hong Hi and Grand Master Tran Trieu Quan meant very hard strain to all leaders of all levels as well as students within ITF globally. To continue working is a call for all of us to always try to be better: students, leaders, citizen and human beings.

I think the Tenets is one of the strong foundations that Taekwon-Do is based on. It is among several other parts of our art, a top reason for choosing ITF instead of other martial arts, sports or activities.

We all have a responsibility to observe them, work with them as guiding principles. By continuously reflecting and acting upon our Tenets, we can lower the risk of severe conflicts and wars. The better we manage this- the better the circumstances for ITF now and in the future.

I do not think it will be easy, but I do think it will be worth it.

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August 24<sup>th</sup> 2022