



The Roundhouse: Headlines from Around the Do-jang.

The phrase "Peaceful Warrior" sounds like an oxymoron, but it actually is the philosophical basis for all martial arts. Or, as General Choi wrote in his Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do: "...the ethical, moral and spiritual standards by which men can live together in harmony."

While practicing the many aspects of Taekwon-Do can -- and should -- be fun, it is important to remember the real reason we're studying TKD: to develop a strong sense of character by improving our mental and physical fitness. In this issue of The Roundhouse, we would like to discuss how training our minds and bodies for self-defense helps us to avoid violence.

Why Sparring is Not Fighting.

Sparring is typically the one area of our TKD studies where students may feel they are learning some realistic self-defense or "fighting" skills. After all, we are employing offensive techniques against our opponent, and responding to their actions with blocks and counterattacks. While sparring may resemble a "fight" more than any other part of our TKD workouts, a sparring match is not, in and of itself, effective self-defense training. Unlike a real street fight, rules govern a sparring match to maintain a sense of safety and fairness. This does not make sparring a worthless activity for simulating self-defense scenarios. On the contrary, benefits such as timing, balance, speed and accuracy can make one more proficient in -- and out -- of the sparring ring. However, it is the presence of mind to stay calm while fending off an "attack" that is the most valuable lesson learned during sparring. Again, this mental conditioning and self-confidence comes after the physical tools have been developed over time. Our heightened self-confidence teaches us that a better way to fend off a potential attack is simply by resolving the situation peacefully.

"For every action there is an equal (and opposite) reaction."

-- Sir Isaac Newton

Basic laws of physics teach us that forces always come in pairs -- equal and opposite action/reaction force pairs. Martial arts, on the other hand, teach us that meeting force with force is counterproductive. Every student who has inadvertently blocked too hard, or clashed with a sparring partner knows how painfully true this is. By not responding aggressively to an aggressor, you can instead diffuse their anger and avoid confrontation. With no action to react equally to, there is no reason to use force.

So why are we learning to kick and strike as if our lives depended on it? How are we training ourselves not to use force by learning to execute these techniques with the power and precision to break boards (and presumably bones)? The answer lies in the repetitive practice and perseverance required to perform difficult techniques with accuracy and control. Along with increasing our skills, TKD empowers us with the indomitable spirit to overcome any obstacle or challenge set before us. Once we know we have the ability to do a kick or strike with devastating power, we no longer need to use that power to prove ourselves inside -- or outside -- the Do-jang.

"To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the highest skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the highest skill."

-- Sun-Tzu

So how does TKD teach us NOT to fight? Often times a confrontation develops because one person insults another, or does something to make the other feel threatened. Once their ego is damaged, many people respond by lashing out either verbally or physically to defend their ego and make up for feelings of insecurity. A fragile ego can be your most dangerous enemy. What we strive for in our TKD studies is a strong sense of confidence in ourselves so that we do not feel the need to respond in kind to violence. It is internal strength that protects us from feeling threatened by a verbal assault or insult. TKD can be an excellent tool to forge this resolve because it teaches us how to strengthen our minds by focusing solely on what we are doing at the present moment. After diligent practice, we find ourselves being able to perform techniques and movements that perhaps once seemed out of reach. The resulting sense of accomplishment + physical and mental conditioning = self-confidence. Once we believe in ourselves, we have the foundation for building that honorable person with perfect character that is our ultimate goal.