

American Kenpo Karate, MN. USA

TRADITION, RESPECT, LOYALTY IN THE MARTIAL ARTS

Black Belt Thesis

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PREFACE

My topics of Tradition, Respect and Loyalty in the Martial Arts .

The significance of my topics will be borne out as a result of my life experiences, in that I have observed a decline in the importance of these virtues.

Having been raised by immigrant parents with old world customs, I was taught the value of what it meant to be respectful and loyal. These were a "Traditional Family Value".

Later when I joined "The United States Marine Corps" I became aware of the importance of these values, like the principles of Physics they can't be violated without long lasting repercussions.

In todays world of "Martial Arts," It really concerns me that an eight year old can wear a black belt walk through a tournament hall and knock over displays, as he displays a tantrum for not having won a trophy.

There are also those who come into the "Arts" with an ego out of control who want to earn a black belt. Those are the individuals who'll learn "how" to do , but not even interested in "why" you do. Once they have achieved their belt they leave. Theirs was not about the Tradition, Respect or Loyalty. Their only goal was to satisfy their ego.

These are some of what I hope to explain and answer the "why".
The technical aspect of the art has many variables but the principles and values must be preserved

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INTRODUCTION

“It would be wrong to say that we cannot learn from tradition, but to be practical, we cannot let it be the all-encompassing authority.”

Senior Grand Master Edmund K. Parker

I.

The question arises as to what is meant by Tradition, Respect and Loyalty? How does this relate to the study of Martial Arts?

The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, defines Martial Arts; as pertaining to or appropriate for war and the “characteristics of or befitting a warrior”

The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus; defines Martial Arts; as warlike, brave, fighting sports such as Judo or Karate.

Referring to martial arts as opposed to martial sports is where my investigation will become more focused. The term ‘martial sports’ refers to a form of martial arts such as Tae Kwon Do. The differentiation between “sports and arts” is defined by rules; sports have rules. The true martial artist studies the Art and uses control. This control comes from the learning of ,

1. Tradition
2. Respect
3. Loyalty

I will define these traits as so defined by the dictionary, but will explore in depth their links in the Art of Kenpo

Ia.

Tradition: 1.(n) a specific practice of long standing
2. (n) an inherited pattern of thought or action

Wm. Shakespeare questioned: *“Will you mock at an ancient tradition begun upon an honorable respect?”*

Ib.

Respect: as defined in The Oxford Dictionary. 1.(n) behavior intended to please...
2.(n) a courteous expression (by word or deed) of esteem or regard.

Ic.

Loyalty: 1.(n) the act of binding yourself (intellectually or emotionally) to a course of action.

2.(n)feelings of allegiance, commitment, dedication

This paper will answer the questions of why these elements are essential to the “Martial Life”

TRADITION

*“Strict reliance on traditional (classical) methods
not only restricts creativity and self-expression,
but fails to alter our ever-changing environment”*

Edmund K. Parker

Tradition:

As we now are at the closing of the first decade of the 21st Century man kind has developed technology to incredible levels, computers so advanced that they have Functions of calculators, phone communications, they can search in milliseconds for obscure data and research for students. Some of these machines run other machines, ships, rockets, house-holds and can do diagnostic work-ups. Yet while possessing remarkable capabilities there is a downside. Skills, interpersonal have diminished due to The phenomenon, of text messaging, laziness, avoiding personal contact is not what we consider a traditional lifestyle.

Tradition is defined in Webster’s 1913 Dictionary: “The unwritten or oral delivery of information, opinions, doctrines, practices, rites, and customs, from father to son or from ancestors to posterity; the transmission of any knowledge, opinions or practice, from forefathers to descendants by oral communication, without written memorials.”

In less than a Century we have started the slide away from “traditional” means of interacting with one another.

Teaching is a “tradition” of verbally communicating our ideas and being able to get feedback instantly. We are teachers, teaching, teachers to teach. This “traditional” means of expressing and exchanging ideas and thoughts are at the root of our “art” it is a value that must be preserved.

The term “Traditional Martial Arts” in todays western world, refers to a very specific thing that has little to do with traditional martial arts.

TMA is what is generally taught in the strip mall dojos. The system of belts and bowing; breaking rebreakable boards and performing katas is rich with the language of tradition; but is in fact faux ritual. Here I would like to define what tradition is meant in the martial arts. As a Martial Artist I feel that our traditions have been stolen, diluted and bastardized by commercialism, where an 8 year old can “buy” a black belt.

For many martial artist have had exposure to their Asian roots. Most schools claim to be “original” in their lineage. Their beginnings were perhaps actually Asian in origin but have evolved into a corporate money machine, this is their new tradition. Indeed every culture has had some sort of martial expressions in their history.

Let me define what is meant by “Martial Arts” first the word Martial refers to military. Deeper than that however it means soldierly, that means more than the ability to fight. Soldierly means discipline, focus, will and self-sacrifice. Self- sacrifice made during training. The will to sweat, bleed and push ones self is just one piece of the puzzle. Self sacrifice means giving of ones self. The first thing a soldier must do is to let go of personal desires, wants, and wishes for the sake of the unit; The mission. The journey is part of the reward. It is the “art” part of Martial Arts that trip up most teachers and where most “Traditional Martial Artists” fail. Art is by definition; individual expression. Take ten people for instance, when creating an art assignment will all vary in outcome based on their own expression regardless that they all have the same goal. What matters most is the form rather than the individual application of the principles. Art lacks meaning and depth until you apply the principles to the technique. Students of the Martial Arts are guided to the point where a technique becomes their own. When their own style guides their fighting strategy; when they become an artist.

In tradition we examine both the unity and diversity of the Martial Arts, Chinese, Quan-fa or Chuan-fa is called Kenpo in Okinawa, Karate-Do in Japan but each of these nations has appropriated the “original” elements of Chinese boxing and transformed them according to the demands of modern nationalism.

The way in which they have changed and the motivations behind the fighting arts serves as an excellent illustration of the cultures that created them. Each nation practices the martial arts for a different reason, and the reasons shape the arts they practice. In learning about the traditions of the martial arts, we will also delve into the traditions of the countries they come from.

The Asian Martial Arts have become an integral part of the American culture in the last fifty years, but the cultures and traditions behind these arts remain relatively unfamiliar, even to those self proclaimed “Masters”

The “Traditional Martial Arts” did not start in strip malls. It was not bought through monthly dues or contracts. Progress wasn’t measured by belts. Most of all, Martial Arts were not learned simply for “arts” sake .They may have learned in a Dojo; Martial Arts started with family and friends then spread to communities. You were not taught because You came through the door and asked; you were taught because you were family.

There in lies the true Tradition of the Martial Arts; something shared by kinsfolk, with loved ones. Be it Kung Fu taught in a Temple on the fringes of China or how to use a Claymore sword in the Highlands of Scotland.

In todays world some concessions need to be made. I’m not opposed to people charging for instruction. For one thing bills need to be paid. Training facilities, equipment, not to mention time needs to be covered. Of course some of these expenses are manufactured; But as they say in Hawaii “That the heart of the art stays with ohana (family).

RESPECT

Respect:

Can be expressed in many ways, mutual respect, in the form of bowing to each other as a greeting or a sign of recognition and acceptance. This form of bowing has been practiced for many years. In Asia this practice has existed for centuries. In a discussion of the role of honor Maj. Morgan explains in his book *The Martial Way* that the Japanese concept of *on* (the burden assumed by someone who has received a kindness) and *giri* (the obligation to return the kindness) are born out of the concept of mutual respect as they relate to obligation. Maj. Morgan tells us the Martial Arts teacher-student relationship is one of growing *giri*. The instructor gives the student more than he can ever hope to repay. Subsequently the student assumes an incredible *on*, and the only way he can bear the burden is through his unwavering respect and loyalty.

Saluting is another form of respect expressed that has its roots in martial history.

Medieval warriors would raise the face plates of their helmets as a sign of respect. The non-hostile gesture evolved to the present hand salute of the military.

Verbal respect is paid to senior students by referring to them as "Mister" and their name, this is a sign of respect paid to black belts or the instructor leading the class; it indicates acknowledgement of their skill, experience, and time devoted to their art.

Since we address older men in our community as Sir or Mr. we are showing respect for their wisdom, age, and experience, So should we show respect to those in the art that have earned it. As those medieval warriors saluted each other we Kenpoist salute each other with our salutation as a greeting. Like a hand shake it is a sign of respect, friendship and mutual trust. Students also show respect to their instructor by the wearing of the belt knot on the (left side for men and the right side for women).

We have discussed some of the various methods that we can express respect.

True respect must be earned, through the courteous and humble approach to life and our interactions with other students. As a Senior ranked belt it is my duty to help anyone who needs it.

To teach "the why". Teaching the "how" is only the first step. until they understand the principles, then you can enjoy self-respect

LOYALTY

Loyalty:

The Oxford Dictionary ; an act of binding yourself (intellectually or emotionally) to a course of action; "commitment to public service" feelings of allegiance, faithful, true, dedicated.

These are descriptive of the values that make up the trilogy of ,”Tradition, Respect and Loyalty. In picking the theme for my paper was a result of the erosion of these values in our society. Loyalty has become a commodity, the value of loyalty has diminished in our lives. People don’t decide to succeed at a challenge, the “I’ll try” attitude has replaced the will to accomplish, succeed and remain committed to the task or challenge. The topic I chose to illustrate the importance of these values in our daily endeavors whether they be professional or personal. In the Martial World they are the standard not the exception. A commitment to your country, if you are in the defense forces and to the art if you are a practitioner of Kenpo. We can not live in harmony with one another without establishing and maintaining the traditions of respect and loyalty. Sports fans in our society are very loyal to their favorite teams. If society adopted the same enthusiasm for the other important values into their lives, we would live in a nicer world. Being a veteran of the military, I have lived perhaps a more structured life than most, but it instilled in me a never give up attitude. A close friend who was a student in the Pasadena School left Mr. Parkers teachings and went to study with Bruce Lee in China Town (Los Angeles) he was not aware that when he came back to visit one Saturday morning that he violated those values. Mr. Parker came in saw Jerry Poteet and a group of other students talking upon seeing Jerry Poteet, Mr. Parker went into his office without saying anything. Jerry was embarrassed and left. Upon his arrival to Bruce Lee’s school Mr. Lee motioned to Jerry to come to his office, he then asked Jerry if he had fun “visiting old friends?” He asked Jerry if he had shown anything of what they (Jeet kune do) do? Jerry replied to the negative. Jerry explained that this incident taught him the meaning of, Tradition, Respect, and Loyalty. Bruce Lee explained to my friend that by his act of revisiting the “old school” without Mr. Parkers permission he disrespected Mr. Parker, Mr. Lee and himself. The tradition if you leave a school is to let the head instructor know. Jerry didn’t do that nor did he tell them why he was leaving. The issue of loyalty was also raised in that Jerry had “the grass is greener on the other side of the fence” attitude.

Loyalty, Tradition, Respect are values that are held together with a greater value, “Honor”. We must honor our traditions, we must honor others in our lives respecting their differences and we must be loyal to others, whether it is a personal, professional

relationship. We must also honor strangers with these values, in doing so we create friends

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