

Black Belt Grading 10th August 2008

As part of a written theory test the grading candidates were asked the question.

What does Taekwon-Do mean to you?

Here are some of the answers

Dale Copeland

Taekwon-Do has been described as a sport, a martial art, a club, a family, a philosophy, a cult and a way of life.

A sport: Taekwon-Do can be competitive for those who enjoy tournaments and free sparring; it can occasionally be a team sport, as in a club performing group patterns at a tournament. But mostly it is a sport where you compete against yourself, always trying to improve your skills. Like most sports there are levels of attainment to aspire to, gradings to achieve, new skills to master. Always another goal, another inspiration. The training is excellent for building strength and maintaining fitness.

A martial art: The skills of Taekwon-Do are designed for self-defence. It is not just another form of fitness-training like aerobics or dance or running. The skills are for fighting, for awareness and mastery of danger.

A club: There is the theory that all people need to belong to a group for their mental and social well-being. Whether it's a gang or a brass band, a boat club or Scouts, it seems to be a fundamental need to belong. Young people are very vulnerable and will often be persuaded to become part of an anti-social gang just because of this need. Taranaki Taekwon-Do is an excellent club, welcoming people of all ages and abilities. The fact that so many entire families become part of the club is evidence of its wide appeal and its continuing atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation.

A family: I have seldom felt so accepted by a group, so welcomed in spite of differences, with respect unsullied by envy. It's a very honest group of people with mutual respect accorded to all, with expectations moderated by abilities, and with applause given to all who achieve what they can.

A philosophy: The philosophy of Taekwon-Do is well worth following. The nine points (below) which summarise it would be sufficient for all people to follow, in any field of life.

A cult: The idea of Taekwon-Do as a cult used to bother me because of the common concept of a cult as being a religion. But Taekwon-Do follows the teachings of an inspired leader, General Choi Hong Hi, who has showed himself to be worthy of huge respect, both for the system he has developed and for the monumental effort he put into writing the Encyclopaedia and teaching the art around the world. There does not have to be any supernatural aspect to a cult, it is enough to follow a human who has achieved such an enormous amount.

A way of life: Taekwon-Do is not just a sport, a martial art, a club, a family, a philosophy or a cult. It is all of these and more. More than the sum of its parts, it is a way of life, an aim well worth pursuing, a path well worth following.

1. Be willing to go where the going may be tough and do the things that are worth doing even though they are difficult.
2. Be gentle to the weak and tough to the strong.
3. Be content with what you have in money and position but never in skills.
4. Always finish what you begin, be it large or small.
5. Be a willing teacher to anyone regardless of religion, race or ideology.
6. Never yield to repression or threat in the pursuit of a noble cause.
7. Teach attitude and skill with action rather than words.
8. Always be yourself even though your circumstances may change.
9. Be the eternal teacher who teaches with the body when young, with words when old, and by moral precept even after death.

Hayden Price

Taekwon-Do is a dynamic form of self defence based on scientific principles. However there is more to it than that. It provides a path to self improvement both physically and mentally. It provides challenges and obstacles and helps one become self disciplined. Taekwon-Do also instils good moral values and helps build a better character.

Frances Rookes

Taekwon-Do is a large part of who I am and what I do. It is something that is in my mind in some way for some reason on a constant basis and has become a huge influencing component in the way I live my life.

I particularly align to the philosophy and moral culture of Taekwon-Do and view it as a framework on which to build citizens of strong moral character that will be the beacons carrying our world on the journey to peace for humankind. As humans we can be easily led and have to work hard to resist the temptations put before us by not just the weaknesses our character can harbour but the persistent materialistic and idealistic propaganda that we are bombarded by... if we have tenets to refer to in our thoughts and we have a well developed sense of conscience then we can make the right choices, live fulfilling lives, and be good and useful citizens. Often in life we set a goal and reach it and move on...with Taekwon-do we can set goals ahead and strive for perfection but no matter what we learn and do we can always improve and there is always more to learn...when I became a Black Belt I felt amazingly proud of the fact that I had achieved what I thought when I began, would be impossible...what I learned very quickly was how much more there was to learn...that my Black Belt certainly was the mark of apprenticeship and the more I learn the more there is to know. Since I have been assisting with instruction in the kids class, the main class when requested and instructing classes at a women's gym I have been learning much more about the techniques, as the teaching process requires full understanding from all angles to be able to explain the how and why of it without it seeming too abstract for the student to understand. It is also necessary to have a clear understanding for instructing to be fully transparent so that students have trust in what you are teaching.

Taekwon do has brought more structure to my beliefs and has enabled me in so many ways. I began Taekwon-do overweight and unfit...thinking it would be good to address both those issues and have a common sport with my coming up to teenage son...It has turned out to be far more than I had anticipated or ever imagined. I never tire of Taekwon-do and work my life around being able to attend every training including the kids class. I seldom miss a kids' class as I feel that they need constant instructors they can identify with at that age. We are very lucky to have a new group of students coming through from the senior class that are willing also to give up their time to assist with the juniors... they will like I have, reap the benefits of doing so and accelerate their understanding of the art.

Physically I have gained much since starting Taekwon-Do...I am stronger, fitter, more agile and flexible, leaner by 18kgs and have developed more self confidence... the benefits spill over into all areas of my life. I pay attention to taking care of myself in terms of what I eat and how I train to try and minimise the risk of injury.

Since Taranaki Taekwon-do has aligned independently with the International body ITF we have been enabled to focus on the art in its purest form and disconnect from the potential commercialism and politics of a larger national body and can work at being the best we can each be as individual Taekwon-do practitioners. Our club has become bigger and better... we have a wide range of students working at all levels of ability who communicate well with and help and support each other. I feel very proud and fortunate to be a part of that. I am pleased that we all remained loyal to our instructor and followed the path he knew would be the right one for us all as a club. He has sewn strong and healthy seeds for the future and proven that by standing together in what we believe in we can continue to grow and be strong in so many ways.

I have made Taekwon-do friends for life...friends who I see on a very regular basis who are all brought together by their common belief in the Art...I am very privileged to have that in my life and continue to be grateful that I have found it...even though I wish I had found it far sooner than I did.

Brent Flynn

Apart from the camaraderie, friendships, the feeling of family and belonging that has developed in the Taranaki Taekwon-Do club. Taekwon-Do gives me health, fitness, physical and personal strength. Stress and aggravation disappear when I train. The moral culture, philosophy and tenets of Taekwon-Do are all something I take outside of the Dojang as well as in.

In Short: Taekwon-Do has become a way of life

Joe Sidler

The concepts of Tae Kwon Do are simple, yet complex and profound. The more I see, the more I experience, the more I understand and yet, the more I need to learn. This is, though, a lifelong journey of learning, growing and understanding. This is my art, my Taekwon- Do.

There are many facets of TKD that are applicable to personnel daily life. These have, over time and in a subtle way, changed me as a person in a positive way both physically and mentally. What TKD means to me simply put, is the ability to be a better person to myself, my Family, and my community, and thus reflects a way of life that is more purposeful as a result. The following outline demonstrates this as a sample of specific elements.

I started TKD many years after I exposed my young son to this as initially a physical activity that he could learn and benefit from. By the time I eventually started, I was looking for an outlet that allowed for physical fitness, discipline and a learning opportunity. My son and I rekindled this as a joint activity for the both of us to part take in.

Looking back now, I was initially focused on the physical and discipline attributes that TKD offers and that was good in that it increased my physical flexibility, and fitness. I do enjoy the interaction with free sparring, destruction and particularly self defence, as this is the likely area I believe, we will be exposed to, in the event we need to defend ourselves. Patterns have always been a problem area for me, one that requires particular concentration and discipline, to do well.

From an intellectual health perspective TKD training offers a way of life that requires an alertness, readiness and agility. I have found these attributes provide me with tools to help cope more robustly and positively with everyday interactions with colleagues, clients and work-time priority management. I have also found the increasing work pressures and demands are, as a result more easily managed. In turn colleagues, and contractors respond positively to my leadership style, and I enjoy my work more.

There is a particular comradeship that exists within our club that I have enjoyed over the years, along with the positive and enthusiastic leadership. The teaching style is one that has a wide appeal, is fun, supportive, friendly and caring.

The physical training is varied, interesting and challenging at times - and it helps forget the issues at the end of the working day

I am trying to live the Tenets of TKD, as I once saw a person, Donald Martin epitomes these, at a Grading some years ago. The impression created that day has never left me. I saw him years later at my own Black Belt grading and he acknowledged my letter to TKD talk at the time. I was very humbled by the occasion.

Here are examples of the positive attributes the Tenets have empowered me with, in a tangible way, that collectively explain what TKD means to me. There are many other more subtle ways less able to be quantified or defined:

- Last month I was called upon to be the MC at my-inlaws 50th wedding anniversary, approx 1hour before the celebrations started. I believe the confidence gained at TKD helped me present, maintain a calm demeanour, and deliver a most enjoyable evening to 70 + guests. (Respect for Elders and Seniors) (Tenets of TKD - Courtesy)
- Several years ago, I was involved with another situation where, as a victim, I was a lead participant, in a restorative justice programme, involving some 30 people. Again I believe that the TKD philosophies were a strong motivator in having the courage to take a stand. This included writing a letter to the paper, condemning the reckless actions of 3 young people, wilfully damaging over 30 vehicles. I was challenged by the perpetrators for example, for being 'too hard'. Convictions and fines resulted as an outcome (Champion for Freedom and Justice) (Build a more peaceful world)
- Several years ago we collectively challenged ourselves to climb our iconic mountain. This was not an easy task and indeed required good judgement to retreat at the first attempt and complete this test later in more favourable conditions. A memorable event (Tenets of TKD -Perseverance, Indomitable spirit)
- I believe my current work performance, management and leadership style in delivering Projects that I lead at work, employing various Teams of other skilled people, is attributed in part to the skills learned at TKD, over time. My work is particularly demanding, challenging, stressful, and has large financial and people implications if things go wrong. I have thus far been successful in delivering balanced and positive outcomes for all, as acknowledged by my peers. (Tenets of TKD -Perseverance, Self Control, Integrity, Courtesy)

- Raising a Family together with my wife, and producing positive energetic young people, who I know will be good future leaders and citizens, automatically requires all the tenet skills!! (and some)

Simply put, I believe TKD has made me a better and healthier person by providing a framework of additional tools to use in everyday life. Tools that bring into focus more than just the combative abilities, but the principles of treating people fairly and equally. To a large extent these were in place as I was brought up, but practicing TKD in our club community allows for further collective growth and strength.

I like what it has done for me personally and want to continue the journey.