



Colorado Springs, CO

Longmont, CO

Hagerstown, MD



The Bulletin



Issue 11

May 2010

Some Upcoming Events for 2010!

May 8th Starting at 1:00pm - Our friends at Fountain Valley Martial Arts are hosting an Escrima (Filipino Stick) seminar. Space is limited, so contact Kyosah Scott Arnold @ fvma.Arnold@earthlink.net ASAP if you wish to attend.

Also in May - CATSD Founder, Sabom Nim Medeiros, will be visiting Colorado Springs from Hagerstown Maryland. Stay tuned for details.

June - CATSD Headquarters Testing and Status Testing... Date to be announced!



CATSD Hagerstown Maryland Group

From left to right: Ashley, Doug, O'Sensei (picture), Sensei/Sabom Medeiros, and Tom

Editor's Comments

The Bulletin is an open forum for the Students and Instructors of the Center for Aikido and Tang Soo Do Studies to post their personal thoughts and opinions. This is actually a requirement for membership in our school in order to further engage members in the intellectual aspect of their training. This also serves to enlighten the instructors as to what is going on in the student's mind. For the most part, these postings will pertain to the individual's personal journey, experiences, or observations in and around their chosen martial arts training.

Please feel free to read, enjoy, and most of all, learn a few things.

Editors

Sabom Nim Mike Parenteau
Sabom Nim/Sensei Jude Miller
Sabom Nim Tim Speaks



March 2010 Longmont Community Seminar Group Picture

Thank you

By Sabom Nim Mike Parenteau

I wanted to take this opportunity to say “thank you” (in written form) to those who supported the Longmont Community Seminar with their presence and participation, namely:

- 1) Ki-Aikido (Westminster/Boulder)
- 2) Fountain Valley Martial Arts (Fountain)
- 3) Tsunami Karate (Colorado Springs)
- 4) Center for Aikido & Tang Soo Do Studies (Colorado Springs HQ)

All of you demonstrated a desire to share Aikido and Tang Soo Do with the Longmont, Boulder and surrounding communities. This desire will help all of us promote martial arts training and educate those who may not be familiar with the martial arts, as to its true meaning and philosophy.

I wanted to make special mention of the commitment demonstrated by the CATSDS Yudansha/Yudanja. You continue to show our junior members the importance of our Association and for that I am grateful. I would also point to the outstanding effort put forth by our junior members as well. You cause us to reflect on our commitment by your determination and zeal to learn your chosen art. Thank you to Sensei Goettsche for leading an outstanding Aikido seminar and sharing your talent and understanding in the art. Last but not least, a special thank you to Sabom Nim Medeiros, for his advice and counsel on how to manage an event like this. It was my first one!

I look forward to seeing you all soon, so that we can train together in the arts we love.

Student's Thoughts

My Thoughts on Training

By Cori Parmalee

When I started Aikido in mid-January, I only had a general idea of what it would be about. I knew that it was a martial art that was mostly concerned with throws and defensive maneuvers. What I didn't know was that it would start to shape me as a person. Aikido came into my life when I was having some personal problems and I wanted to try something different with my life.

I have always had an interest in martial arts, but I never really had the time to dedicate to learning it. Finally, in October, I lost my job. It wasn't until I got laid off that I realized how much I had depended on my career for my sense of self. I spent several months being lost and trying to figure out what I had that I could fall back on. I realized that the only things I had were work and school and one of them was gone. I decided that I wanted more out of my life. I wanted to have something that I could do to have fun and to keep me sane.

I tried several different things then I decided I would try Aikido. I figured it was something I was interested in and that it would be a fun way to get some exercise. Although I had only been training for a little while, my perception of Aikido, myself, and the world around me, began to evolve. I had been open to the teachings and they began to overwhelm me.

I had known going into training that one of the main purposes behind Aikido was to not go looking for trouble. Avoid a fight at all costs. One of the things that really surprised me though, was that if you ever happen to be attacked, the main thing you want to do is to protect your attacker, as

well as yourself. To me, this was a new idea. I had thought that if someone came at me with serious intent that I would want to protect myself, whatever the consequences for my attacker. Previously, I would have said something like, "Well, he shouldn't have attacked me; serves him right." Now, I realize that this person is out of harmony with the way things should be and the throws and defensive moves become a lesson for him/her to change their lifestyle. It is just as important to teach them the way they should be as it is to protect yourself. The hope is if it's done right, they'll think twice before attacking someone else. That was something that I never would have considered before, but now that I am aware of it, it comes as enlightenment. I am struggling to figure out why I never realized it before.

Because of this lesson, and so many others, I am more at harmony with my own life. I have more confidence, more patience, and more respect for other living beings. I am more calm and less stressed out than I was before. Aikido has brought me an inner peace that I struggled to find for many years. I am thoroughly enjoying the training and look forward to many years of it in the future.

Distinguished through Harmony

By Brent Bloem

An airplane, a friend, and a dojang begin this rumination. In early March, a close friend named Jason flew to Colorado. Jason has studied Tang Soo Do the last five years; so, having shared similar martial traditions, he has desired to train with the Center for Aikido and Tang Soo Do (CATSD), in order to experience Master Lee's teaching. To recapitulate his time, it has been exceptional—and not simply because of the training. His visit has created awareness about an often understated but often unsurpassed quality of CATSD. The school is different from many other schools. CATSD is unprejudiced towards other schools, outside visitors, and towards attending other unaffiliated organization's events. In short,

what is novel about CATSD is its collegial atmosphere.

One noticeable hallmark of CATSD's collegiality is open-mindedness; at CATSD, unjust words about other martial traditions are not spoken. Yet today, when schools compete in a narrow market, some schools discredit other schools to legitimize their own traditions. Where their intentions are their image enhancement, their outcomes are their image diminishment. Those schools reveal philosophical shallow-mindedness. Diametrically opposite their philosophies is CATSD's. CATSD recognizes, points-out, and praises other schools' richness by not only revealing the theoretical and the practical differences but also by revealing the meta-theoretical congruencies. By avoiding the droll absolutism apparent in a narrow market, CATSD avoids a "black or white" logical fallacy and remains open-minded to the diverse and spectacular realms of other martial traditions.

Yet, everyone at CATSD does more than "talk a good game". Their words correspond to their actions. To illustrate the point, recall Jason's visit. On his arrival, everyone interacts warmly and actively with him. And these interactions, it's important to clarify, aren't put-on. An unmistakable sincerity is attached to everyone's words, inflections, and actions. But, nowhere is the sincerity more noteworthy than in the graciousness for Jason's participation. Where Jason is a guest, where his arrival is unplanned, everyone eagerly shares their resources, and they **thank** him for attending. Put briefly: he gets a gift and he gets thanked for receiving it. What a counter-cultural yet awe-inspiring philosophy! In this consumerist world where the philosophy is take, take, take...CATSD's philosophy is give, give, give. This bedrock of CATSD's identity is a revelation, and it is humbling.

Another marker of open-mindedness is this school's participation in other school's non-competitive events. Here, such events are considered as self-improvement opportunities.

CATSD participates to learn new techniques, to meet new people, and to unwrap new parallels. It chooses not, however, to involve itself in competitive events. Competitive events nurture tests of superiority that malign ego and pride. In short order, the influence on ego and pride instigates the act of "othering" different schools and arts from one's own. The act of "othering", however, is divisive; and, the disharmony it creates in oneself is askew to the principles of Do. That CATSD demonstrates their commitment to the principles of Do reflects this school's commitment to open-mindedness.

CATSD distinguishes itself from numerous other martial arts schools because it has a collegial attitude towards other martial arts. The school embraces other traditions, it humbles itself to its visitors, and it works together with other schools. Unfortunately, these attributes aren't fully appreciated until after Jason's visit. But these observations aren't observed only here. They are also observed on Jason's return home, where Jason expresses his fondness towards the atmosphere and the people of the organization. He understands, like many at CATSD do, that the CATSD is an extraordinary place to be.

**“One sees great things from the valley,
only small things from the peak.”**

By Greg Johnson

The title for this paper is a quote from "The Little Zen Companion" which is a small book I have on the shelf at home. Writing a paper always stirs the philosophical juices and this saying got me thinking about our Purple Mountain Dojo.

There is a peace and comfort to wandering in a narrow, beautiful valley, gazing at scenery and the great purple mountains that surround, breathing in the clean clear air, and meandering the path dictated to you by the surrounding hills. One might think of extending their Ki to the nearest obstacle, a hill or a tree in the distance, to reach out to embrace

the familiar objects within view. The mountains that encompass the valley are grand in scale; their sheer mass exudes the weight of tons of granite & ice. They are majestic yet appear still. The heights are attainable to those wishing to expend the energy and the focus to ascend the daunting flanks. In order to make the decision to leave the comfort and safety of the valley, I believe an individual must recognize a value in this act, a self cultivation or improvement to their well being, be it an improvement in their stamina or the pleasure of taking in a grand vista.

To study Aikido one must settle into a peaceful resolve of climbing a difficult hill in order to attain the knowledge O-Sensei set out to teach. The routs up the mountain may take on many forms. False summits are common and may actually be endless, for there is always more to learn. One sees a great master, a pinnacle of their art, operating near their "Peak" performance, a mountain of knowledge.

To seek and obtain a mountain of knowledge gives one a completely different view. From a vantage point high on a mountain I imagine it much simpler to extend Ki to the far horizons, beyond view, and feel the weight underside of the tons of rock, water & ice below, the vastness above. The potential energy contained within the body after being hauled to such height is now a powerful natural resource that may be stored in a restful state, extended beyond oneself, or united with another. Nuances in the movement of a training partner stand out like invitations to a seminar. It is the small simple things in the periphery that become more important than the towering mass that no longer looms above.

I have yet to climb high on the mountain of Aikido, yet I sense the spirit of harmony with the "Small things" when, once in a great while, my technique feels effortless.

Stillness in Motion

By Justin Buchanan

I talk a lot; it's plain and simple. This has been a problem for me because I have always had such a big mouth all of my life. I talk involuntarily; I just speak my mind. It's funny because from what I have learned so far from the small amount of time I have been training in Tang Soo Do, is that you're not supposed to think when you move or execute a technique. The technique should be involuntary, just like my mouth when it starts running.

I have asked my instructors about what they think I should write about for this particular newsletter, and the answer presented was: "what does stillness in motion mean to me?" I have had a lot of time to think about this concept, and it still confuses me. To me, "stillness in motion" means being observant and learning from what you see directly in front of you. The only catch for me is keeping what I notice and learn to myself.

I tend to blurt things out while I am training, or laugh when I make a mistake, and since I make mistakes all the time, my mouth is always running! I think I have gotten better at this ever since my instructors have been giving me subtle hints on what stillness in motion means to *them*, and how I should try to incorporate it into my everyday training. In simpler terms, your mind is constantly running even while your body is still, listening, learning, and observing. There is also an opposite application of this concept by the body being in full motion while the mind is completely still. This is what stillness in motion means to me and I am sure this will change seeing that I have a lot of time to think on this. Tang Soo Do is hard, and I have accepted the fact that if I am to improve my entire life and strive for perfection in everything that I do, it is going to take long, hard work. Frustration plays a role during my training, just like anyone else's. There are so many things to be mindful of when you

are training that you lose track sometimes of the details.

For example, today I got to the dojang and changed into my uniform, got onto the mat and immediately started stretching. I thought I was doing the right thing, but I wasn't thinking. In the changing room I left my cell phone out and on the loudest ringtone possible. I left my clothes all over the place like it was my house, and I started stretching during an Aikido class. It was like all of my etiquette went down the drain in one fell swoop all because I wasn't thinking. If someone were to check out our school that has trained before, they might not have thought very highly of our etiquette. They would have made stereotypes and assumptions based off of the actions of one person. I intend to work on these frustrations knowing that they will only improve me in the long run. Tang Soo Do is slowly becoming a way of life for me and not just something I do four days a week. Tang Sooooo!

Tangsoology Creed

By Wisdom Stacker

"I pledge to contribute my spiritual, intellectual, and physical improvement to the human race, in order to unite and cooperate with others to ensure a more peaceful society, to recognize falseness, and align myself with truth, to lend assistance to others less fortunate than myself, and to further the teachings and traditions of Tangsoology."

To me the Tangsoology creed is more than just a sentence that we recite at the beginning of each class, it is a commitment that one must make in order fully understand the study of Tangsoology. The pledge is a solemn promise or agreement that one must make to their self. Simply put Tangsoology training is not about competition with others, but competing with yourself. Not just in the dojo during training, but in your everyday life.

As humans, we know how easy it is to fall victim to all of the negativity that the world brings with each day, and this is where the contribution of

spiritual improvement comes into play. When the average person hears the word spirit they may think religion, but it's not about that at all. Your spirit is an attitude or principle that inspires, animates, or pervades thought, feeling, or action. It is one's own responsibility to maintain your spirit with a positive attitude and it truly does take sincerity and great effort to maintain a positive attitude. It is no easy task to overcome feelings of laziness, worthlessness, depression, or mental agitation but with excessive ambitious behaviors this can be accomplished. You must maintain a consistent practice always doing your best during training and it is no different outside of the studio when you are not throwing punches and kicks.

Of course knowledge of basic terms for training and the lineage of your Tang Soo Do is a part of your intellectual improvement or how would we be able to further the teachings and traditions of Tangsoology? Then there is basic knowledge of cause and effect, balance, and simple muscle coordination. To me, the contribution of intellectual improvement is understanding how to use Tang Soo Do to do more than defeat one's enemy or show off. It is nothing for someone to learn a technique and use it to their advantage to gain money, power, or respect, but in no way, shape, or form does this help you to unite and cooperate with others to ensure a more peaceful society. You must know when, how, and where to use the art at all times, and that is how you gain true power and respect. No matter where the idea or temptation to use the art in a negative manner may come from, you must be able to concentrate and keep a clear head, because the mind is more powerful than any technique you may learn. Often times we blame others for the situations that we end up in, but it is your own intellect that will determine the outcome.

I feel as though physical improvement is self-explanatory. Physical improvement comes easy with training and much practice. Through physical endurance you learn to overcome pain but you also learn that you can be stronger than you had ever thought you were. Once you push yourself during

training to accomplish something you had never thought was possible, you learn a lot about yourself. I feel as though physical improvement also teaches one responsibility. As stated earlier, physical improvement comes not only with training, but with much practice. Sometimes waking up to stretch and practice is not what you have in mind, but you gain responsibility by maintaining a consistent practice schedule. I feel as though physical improvement also teaches one to recognize falseness, and align you with truth. It's easy to go out and party all night but you know that it's your responsibility to be truthful to yourself and do what you know is right. Besides, if you stay out all night enjoying what you believe to be a good time, you may end up showing up late for training. The training will lead you to a higher form of physical improvement.

Once you have learned to sincerely contribute your spiritual, intellectual, and physical improvement you will be able to ensure a more peaceful society. You will be able to lift other's spirits simply with your own. You will have the intellect to assist those who are less fortunate and do not understand how to overcome feelings of laziness, worthlessness, depression, or mental agitation. You will always be able to recognize falseness, align yourself with truth, and help others to do so as well. Most importantly, you gain the physical ability to further the teachings and traditions of Tangsoology and that is what the Tangsoology creed means to me.

Instructor's Thoughts

Colored Belts, Why Bother?

By Sabom Nim Vernon A. Medeiros

Lately I have been thinking of all sorts of social subjects that tend to perturb my mental state. One such subject surfaced as I was searching the net and the subject of colored belts came to the

forefront. Some martial art schools (clubs, associations, federations) frown upon the use of colored belts for the lower ranks, however a vast majority of schools utilize colored belts to great effect. As an important point, color is perceived differently around the world within different cultures.

For example in Korea the color green symbolizes renewed energy, youthful, or a fresh new beginning. The color white also carries strong cultural undercurrents because Koreans in the past wore a white dobok to be a symbol of their deep patriotism, hence the white dobok for most martial arts of Korea. White dobok's are also common in Japan and Okinawa. But the color white can also denote purity and innocence, in contrast to the white chrysanthemum, which represents death. Black is also the color of death. Hence the color black, as well as white, is worn for burial rights in Korea. Yet black is considered the proper form to write calligraphy, and red is always used to autograph the calligraphy.

In western culture, the color black also represents the color of death. However in the wide field of western fashion, black has been considered fashionable and very stylish. A women dressed in black is viewed as elegant. And what is a man without a black suit or a black tuxedo? You guessed right...a loser! The color red in Korea, for example, is not a very lucky color. However in China, red is considered the color of passion.

What is all the controversy about colored belts in the martial arts today? Well, that would depend on which side of the fence you decide to place yourself. Some students (as well as lay person's) of martial arts see colored belts as a lame process. They might say it is a well thought out scam to take students hard, earned money. And it may be a partial truth that other schools (commercial and otherwise) use colored belts to get more money from students, but my view is that most traditional schools use colored belts for their express intended purpose: to represent or illustrate a student's progress and accomplishments with their chosen art.

Putting aside all the controversy for or against the use of colored belts, (because I am tired of writing examples to illustrate my point of view) our school follows the principle that a belt should be a visual log for a student's progress with their martial art. Also there must be a logical reason for the color choice. Our school *does* have a purpose for all the colored belt choices.

For our Aikido art, the colors and the rationale for each are:

7th kyu, white – innocence, a person new to the intricacies of the art

6th kyu, orange – ambition and enthusiasm, a person happy to continue the pursuit of the art

5th kyu, orange w/blue stripe

4th kyu, blue – harmony and trust, a person needs to look deeper at the art

3rd kyu, blue w/purple stripe

2nd kyu, purple – spirituality and transformation, the journey in the art becomes more difficult

1st kyu, purple w/black stripe

Shodan and beyond, Black – this is a major step toward understanding your abilities and prowess. Your abilities must be continually honed but tempered with ethical knowledge and the wisdom of compassion and empathy.

For our Tangsoodo art, the colors and the rationale for each are:

8th gup, white - innocence, a person new to the intricacies of the art

7th gup, yellow w/y trim – action and optimism, a person happy to continue the pursuit of the art

6th gup, green – success and hope, a person reflecting on their accomplishments

5th gup, green w/green trim

4th gup, brown – stability and endurance, a person striving to improve their standing in the art

3rd gup, brown w/brown trim

2nd gup, red – dynamic and energizing, a person that must temper their new found abilities

1st gup, red w/red trim

Chodan and beyond, Dark Blue (also known as Midnight Blue) – quiet, confident and serene. Your abilities must continue to be developed and your strength, credibility and authority tempered by seeking the knowledge of nature. A reverence for nature is paramount for future development in the art.

After twenty-three years of owning a martial arts school, I have inherited most of what I have used for colored belts. However, the root of my decisions for using color is that there should always be a firm reason for the color choice no matter how color is viewed by other cultures. It is a big world out there and it is getting larger. We are all destined to offend someone with our choices but what I believe is important is that each of us knows what our colored belt system means for us.

The Pursuit of Perfection

By Sabom Nim Mike Parenteau

One of my favorite movies, “The Last Samurai”, has a scene where one of the main characters, Katsumoto Sensei says, “To search for the perfect cherry blossom would not be a wasted life.” I submit that the search for perfection, one of our Tangsoology precepts, is an important one, not only for our development as Tang Soo Do practitioners, but as a basis for becoming a better human being.

There are many analogies regarding the pursuit of perfection. However, I like the aforementioned statement that Katsumoto Sensei uses. The reason is that he likens it to a search. Each one of us knows that we as individuals will never be perfect in anything that we do or say. However, the drive to improve ourselves becomes the catalyst for this search to begin and continue.

Sabom Nim has said many times that, "...anyone can kick and punch and hurt someone." The reason I bring this up is simply this: without our desire to improve ourselves and have self-control, we can easily degenerate into a thug. Imagine having the knowledge of how to kick or to strike and then using this to hurt someone. Now imagine more and more people with this knowledge and using it to hurt others. That is why martial artists such as Funakoshi Sensei, Master Jong H. Lee and Sabom Nim have made a point to share the philosophical reasons for practicing a martial art and that is for the "search for perfection" or another way to say "character development".

An example to ponder: Karate Do, Tae Kwon Do and Tang Soo Do all have forms we perform to demonstrate the roots of our art. We demonstrate them to show the power we can generate, our knowledge of the art, our timing, our knowledge of tempo...the list goes on. When you finish the form you just performed, do you ponder what you just did? Do you search for areas of improvement, or do you just start again, not thinking about perfecting what you just did? It should be obvious that the search for perfection dictates we analyze our practice of the art and then find ways to improve.

As instructors and those who share the art by leading class, the pursuit of perfection challenges us to find creative ways to share the art with students and motivate them to join the search as well. Finding ways to make a class interesting can be challenging! But, it is an important ingredient in keeping students engaged.

What does this all mean? The pursuit of perfection is an essential concept in Tangsoology and provides the basis for our practice of Tang Soo Do. It challenges us to improve ourselves not only as practitioners of the art we practice, but as individuals. By improving ourselves, we can inject positive energy into our community.

Training

By Sensei Ryan Goettsche

It's amazing to me how much martial training has changed since I first started. It seems that the gym mentality has become more prevalent over the years and the newly termed "me" generation has become more dominant which I believe can be attributed to the advances in technology. The attitude that "I want to do what I want to do, when I want to do it and how I want to do it" is everywhere and is not the correct way to approach training. If one chooses to train in a martial art, one must truly desire to learn the art. The first step to learning the art is to be humble to the fact that, being a beginner, one knows nothing. Knowing nothing means just that, one has no experience or even more so, no experiences. Just because one has read books upon books based on the art they desire to practice, does not mean that they know how to train. Training is about learning... so how can one learn anything if one doesn't listen to and respect the position of the instructor. If one doesn't humble themselves to the art and the instructor, then they don't really want to learn, they want something else. This something else is not truly known, so they become the fool and will prove this fact in due time.

Humility is the foremost quality of ANY student of the martial arts, and this humility is what opens the mind to new ways of thinking. This new way of thinking opens the soul to understanding, and this understanding is what opens the body to the unification of mind, body and spirit. The lessons of each and every class are important, and are presented to the student whether they are ready to

see it or not. If the student is accepting to the lesson then they will progress, if they are not, then they will become more combative. In the long term, this delays their progression, or even forces them to stop training because they believe themselves to be more knowledgeable than the instructor. They may become frustrated with the fact that what is being offered is not what they believe they desired to learn. The lessons in any "Do" based martial art are deeper and broader than anyone can imagine, so to read a book, and think that one understands it all, is ignorance at its peak. The act of stepping into, asking to train, and then begin training in a dojo, is where true learning occurs. The act of throwing, being thrown, getting up off the mat time and time again is what matters and listening to what the instructor provides is paramount, even if at that moment, one doesn't agree to what is being shared.

I can remember many times sitting in seiza for hours listening to Sensei and wondering what he was talking about and even disagreeing (in my own conscious mind, not vocally) only to realize many years later that what he had said was 100% correct. The humility expressed by not arguing/debating the subject is what allowed me to think about the lesson; even if it was something I didn't believe at the time, which is what allowed the subconscious to ponder the lesson over time. It's difficult to change, to accept the necessity to change, and to know that one needs to change. The ability to let go of self-comfort, look at oneself objectively, and polish the rough edges, is what martial training provides. The thought that walking into a dojo, believing that it is just a place to solely practice self-defense, or just have a physical workout, is inaccurate. A dojo which trains in "The Way" is about far more than physical prowess and must be approached with the respect and humility that it deserves, because it represents far more than what one sees on the surface.

A Path of Non-Violence

By Sabom/Sensei Jude Miller

Our society is one that encourages and glamorizes violence, whether it is through sports, movies, or other media. Violence is a form of entertainment, and has been so since ancient times. It should be noted, however, that the "violence" our society values as entertainment is contrived. Fighters wear gloves, football players wear pads, and there are rules in place to promote safety and protection. When the members of our society are faced with unscripted and malicious violence, they are appalled. I find this phenomenon to be as hypocritical as it is puzzling. Perhaps people are fascinated by violence because they are afraid of it. There is a need and a desire for personal safety and self-preservation. However, it is my belief that pursuing fighting and over-concerning oneself with violence imbalances the mental and spiritual aspects of the self.

When I first started training martial arts at the age of 13, I was afraid of being bullied or beat up in school. I was focused on the violent aspects and fighting, as it was all I could see based off the gross movements of kicking and punching. I was originally taught, by instructors in the eclectic fighting American style I was training in at the time, that martial artists train so they know how to fight. In actuality, I have learned the exact opposite is true – martial artists train so they do not have to fight.

With the glorification of violence being a current practice of our society, I can see why an inexperienced martial artist may develop attitudes and thoughts that are overly focused on violence and fighting. After all, I was in a similar position when I first started training. Too often, I read articles in martial arts publications focused on violence as it pertains to fighting. These articles all tend to state the same message ad nauseum: attackers are violent and merciless, and as a result, the only way to protect yourself is to reciprocate.

These self-defense and street survival articles always inevitably demonstrate and discuss techniques to “save your life”. Everything is about survival by means of fighting and conflict, although all fighting and conflict should be ended as soon as possible. It is the same formula time and again. As I became more experienced and mature in my understanding of the martial arts, I found myself asking questions like “What streets are these gentlemen always walking down where they are attacked?”, “Why do they always need to survive violent encounters?” and “Why not just be aware of your surroundings and avoid the conflict?”

As I learned more, it became apparent that the reasons these survival articles and combat systems exist are many, but none of them sustain as a result of the need to survive so much as they are a means to express ego and make money off of the ignorant. These articles would have you believe that being set upon by crazed attackers is a common occurrence that you will have to deal with many multiple times in your life.

There is enough violence and conflict in nature as is. We, as human beings with the capacity for higher thought and actions, should learn to rid ourselves of primitive concepts such as fighting, domination and malicious violence. By training in martial arts, I have learned to value life and safety. I have realized that I would never want to strike another human being or inflict harm. I have learned long ago that training does not make a martial artist invincible, as some “fighters” would have you believe. In fact, training has showed me how vulnerable the human body truly is, mine included. I have no need or want for fighting, competitive or otherwise. Violence, whether simulated or real, is a burden to me. Competition inspires brutality.

I was concerned, even fascinated, by such things at the age of 13. Now, I train without such obsessive and self-defeating thoughts. Violence, and the fear surrounding it, is not conducive to self-betterment. I do not fear for my survival, therefore I am able to dedicate my thoughts to more

worthwhile pursuits, like character development and assisting others in need. Martial artists should not focus on felling opponents and conflict. There are no opponents in “Do” arts. There are only imperfect human beings who are in need of guidance and help from time to time.

Cooperation vs. Competition

By Sabom Nim Tim Speaks

In the martial arts community there seems to be an ongoing debate amongst practitioners regarding the validity of competition in traditional martial training. Even within codified martial arts systems, disagreements exist on whether competitive tournaments, such as forms and sparring, are a great way to gauge progress, or a colossal waste of time. Those against competition say that focusing on competition as even a part of training detracts from the greater meaning of the martial arts, and that cooperative training is the key to accessing your highest potential. Competitive tournaments of any kind are seen as not only a waste of valuable time and energy, but as harmful to the spirit. Those that are for competition say that competition breeds excellence, courage, and that the best will rise to the top. Competitive fights, point sparring, or even forms, are seen as a useful test of skill.

Furthermore, the overwhelming popularity of competitive martial arts for entertainment seems to suggest that many people enjoy watching fights. This is nothing new and is not a strictly Western phenomenon. It’s just that we have easier access to these spectacles than our ancestors did a few hundred years ago. They had to actually go someplace, perhaps an abandoned warehouse, to see people kick the holy \$#%! out of each other. Now days, a short time spent perusing YouTube will demonstrate competitive forms of martial arts be practiced all over the world, including Asia. Thus, in the court of public opinion, it would seem the jury is out that everybody loves violence, and everybody loves competition. We can all pack it up

and go home, or go to a tournament and start winning some trophies. Well, maybe not just yet.

The American Heritage College dictionary, 4th ed., the one I happen to have on my book shelf, defines the word **compete** as, “to strive against another or others to attain a goal.”

The same dictionary also defines the word **cooperate** as “to work or act together for a common end or purpose.” It would seem that these are opposite methods of attempting to achieve some end goal. I would further argue that they are both valid methods or strategies of pursuing some particular goal, but that the suitability of the given strategy depends on what goal you’re pursuing. It also depends on whether that goal is shared, or can be shared, by the pursuers.

Perhaps that’s the problem in a nutshell. All of the sudden we have this goal thing that must be defined before we can decide what strategy is best to pursue. The crux of the argument is that there is no real argument. It’s simply people utilizing their martial arts training for differing goals. Each individual must determine for themselves what it is they wish to achieve with their training. Training will amount to a lot of energy being spent over a period of time, be it a single sporting season, or a lifetime of study. Therefore it is important for a person to identify where their interests lie.

Thus, you may ask the question: what are some common goals or reasons for training in traditional martial arts?

Some common reasons for training are:

- To learn to defend yourself against forces that would harm or destroy you (This includes crazy people, hurricanes, etc.)
- To improve oneself by developing self-confidence, self-awareness, self-reliance, and self-control (Stop acting like a hateful chimpanzee and start contributing to a better more peaceful society)

- To become physically, mentally, intellectually and spiritually stronger (“There is no spoon”)

With this list of reasons you should ask yourself: does striving against others best achieve these goals, or would working together with others serve better?

For example, if I am striving to better my skill through beating or defeating my fellow students at a particular game, and they are likewise striving to beat or defeat me, a certain percentage of the time we will each be successful. When I am successful, I will have the thrill of victory. When my opponent is successful, I will have the agony of defeat. In order to avoid this shame of defeat, and gain the glory of winning, both my opponent and I will strive to gain the upper hand by “perfecting” those techniques that best exploit the rules of the particular game we are playing. If this strategy is employed in “realistic” martial combat, someone will get badly hurt and further training will be interrupted. If it is employed in sportive point sparring, the participant’s techniques will be narrowly limited within the rules and they may develop a false sense of confidence in their technique.

In contrast, cooperative training allows for a broader range of techniques to be practiced among partners in a safe manner. Many techniques that would be useless or unsafe in a rule bound competition, but very practical and useful in self-defense, can be studied and refined to the highest level of skill. Not only that, but everybody is successful all of the time because they are giving and receiving these advanced techniques in a cooperative manner. They are actually helping each other get better faster. There are much fewer injuries to interrupt long-term continuous training and so progress can be made indefinitely. In fact, unlike many sports, cooperative martial arts training can be done to a ripe old age. You won’t see too many old men doing MMA or Kickboxing, but you

will see plenty of them doing Aikido or traditional Tang Soo Do.

Ultimately, to improve oneself and become a contributing member to a more peaceful society a person needs to practice cooperation. If your training goals prioritize winning prizes, trophies, recognition, etc., then the competitive approach has all those trimmings. Keep in mind however that struggling against others for dominance leads to negative feelings and selfish behavior. Cooperation leads to harmony, and harmony is the way of nature, despite what some people would have you believe. We at the Center for Aikido and Tang Soo Do Studies practice cooperation, and the way of harmony, in or pursuit of refining ourselves as martial artists and as human beings. Not only is this a more efficient approach to self-defense training, but it's a superb character building exercise worthy of a modern "Do" art.

Questions

By Kyosah Nim Gihan Fella

Who is to say one choice is better than another? If we chose one, it alters our path one-way. If we chose something else, our path changes accordingly. We choose to do what makes us happy inside. We choose to do what will help others be happy. When asked, "Why do we train in our chosen art?"... answer with depth and honesty. The reason may change from day to day, or year to year, but still we train. It is the journey that allows us to do so. Who can answer this question, except ourselves? Others may make assumptions based on what they observe, but that does not mean they are correct. This question is also applied to all areas of our lives.

Why do we do what we do? What we are doing is not as important as why we are doing it. "You should feel the importance of yourself. Be yourself, be your true self," is a quote from the guru of the blissful refuge in Mysore, India. This quote is from the film, "Enlighten Up!" So, how can this viewpoint be taken and applied to us? This quote

does not relate to being selfish, but instead on understanding that the actions we take and the thoughts that we think are related to how we observe and understand the world around us. As I work with young adults with developmental disabilities in my new job, I can only guess at why they are acting in the unpredictable manners that they do. As I live and grow with my children, I wonder the similar thoughts, why are they doing that? What on earth were they thinking? As I train in the martial arts, I ask myself, "Why can't I do what was just shown? How could I have forgotten this basic step?" Life is full of important questions. Why do we only live so many years? Is it because that is how long it takes us to figure out why we are who we are? Life has neither simple definitions nor simple answers, and that is the beauty of the whole experience. Never stop learning, never stop loving, and never stop experiencing. These are my simple words of wisdom for this newsletter submission.