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Tenets and Tikanga

The purpose of this essay is to discuss the similarities of the tenets of Taekwon-do and Māori Tikanga. In order to achieve the purpose multiple items will be discussed. Firstly, the essay will give a brief background into why this topic was chosen and the importance, Secondly, it will discuss the tenets in Taekwon-do and how these are portrayed in the martial art. The essay will then continue to define and explain what Tikanga is in te ao Māori. Lastly, the essay will aim to define the tenets and show the relationship and similarities between the tenets and Tikanga Practices. The Tenets are: Courtesy, Integrity, Perseverance, Self-control and indomitable spirit. Tikanga practices that will be used include: Manaakitanga, Tika and Pono, Manawanui as well as others where applicable.

Why this topic was chosen. While at the University of Waikato I studied and majored in Tikanga. As well as this and being a Māori women, I believe that like most concepts and morals, Tikanga can be seen in the tenets of Taekwon-do. This is an important comparison in Aotearoa, although Taekwon-do is a Korean martial art, it is important to remember the culture and whenua (land) of which we train and practice and to have an understanding of the culture that impacts our day to day lives. This topic can further be explored into the ways in which Māori whanau are included into this martial art and related to.

Tenets of Taekwon-do

“I shall observe the tenets of Taekwon-do ”

From the very first time we step into a Dojang we are exposed to the tenets of Taekwon-do through the student oath. This student oath is one of the first things we learn as we start our journey, it is engraved in our memory just as the tenets are without us knowing. The tenets cover basic morals and values that our parents teach us from when we are young, through Taekwon-do we are given the opportunity to expand this knowledge and continue our individual growth.

The five tenets of Taekwon-do, as we are taught through the Colour belts are: Courtesy, Integrity, Perseverance, Self-control and Indomitable spirit. These play an important role in the practitioner journey, through life inside and outside of the Dojang. The encyclopedia states “The success or failure of Taekwon-do training depends largely on how one observes and implements the tenets.” It can be assumed that if these are not observed then one should not be able to participate in this art or may need to reconsider their choices.

As already mentioned the tenets are similar to morals and values a person has. Collins dictionary defines morals as “Principals or behavior in accordance with standards of right and wrong.” As the essay continues it will be clear to see that the tenets do contribute to this definition.

Tikanga

Tikanga Māori can be defined as customs and cultural values of Māori that are practiced by many. Tikanga can also be connected to the “right” way of doing things or the “tika” (correct) way, this can be seen in the very name its self with Tika being included.

With colonisation Māori Tikanga was impacted deeply. The Tohunga suppression act 1907, meant that many customs were lost as masters in their craft were no longer allowed to practice.

With the revitalisation of Te reo, it has meant that all parts of te ao Māori can be practiced leading Tikanga to be used on a regular basis.

In a nut shell, for Māori the practices are in place as a way to ensure we are being true to ourselves, have respect for all things and know what we are doing is right as a whole.

Without Tikanga our knowledge as Māori would be lost and in turn the culture that makes Aotearoa unique would be lost. Tikanga allows us to have our unique identity in the 21st century where many other countries have lost theirs.

Courtesy - Ye Ui - Atawhaitanga

The first Tenet that is taught is Courtesy, spelt Ye Ui in Korean and the direct translation is Atawhaitanga in Māori.

The condensed version of the Taekwon-do encyclopedia defines Courtesy as “an unwritten regulation prescribed by ancient teacher of philosophy as a means to enlighten human being while maintaining a harmonious society” . It is then continued to include that Taekwon-do practitioner should be polite to one another, To encourage the sense of justice and humanity as well as respect others possessions. As this is the first tenet it is seen as one of the most important, if we are not kind to one another we are seen as not showing human compassion.

One Tikanga aspect that is similar to Courtesy is that of Manaakitanga. Mead (2003) states that all Tikanga practices are underpinned by the value placed of Manaakitanga, this is due to it being the focus of how people treat others, nurturing relationships, looking after people and being aware of how other are treated.

It is clear to see that the tenet of courtesy and the Tikanga of Manaakitanga are similar as they are both centered around the idea of treating other well and ensuring that right is being displayed.

Integrity - Yom Chi - Ngākau pono

“One must be able to define what is right and wrong and have the conscience, if wrong to feel guilt.” This definition of Integrity is taken straight from the encyclopedia. This tenet

can be viewed as the underlying principal of a human being. Right from when we are born we learn what is right and wrong, this guides us through our lives. The second part of this definition is interesting as it states that “if wrong to feel guilt.” From a wider picture this statement can be viewed as a little hard for an individual to undertake.

In relation to Tikanga integrity is similar to the definition of Tika and Pono in te ao Māori. Tika and pono according to Mead are the underlying values of Tikanga which in turn can be seen as the underlying values that human morals are created on. Mead defines Tika as “right or correct” Pono is defined as “true or genuine.” Not only must we do what is right or correct for ourselves but also for those around us.

One translation of Integrity is Ngākau pono, this can be described as loyalty, dependability and Integrity. This translation has the Tikanga word or Pono in it, this shows that there are direct connections between the two concepts.

Perseverance - In Nae - Pūnoke

Kia kaha, Kia maaia, kia manawanui - Be strong, be brave, be steadfast.

This tenet is focused on being patient and driving towards a goal one may have in their life. The encyclopedia of Taekwon-do states that there is an old Oriental saying “Patience leads to virtue or merit” . Every individual has experience perseverance in their lifetime, in Taekwon-do this could be training to move to the next belt, working on getting a technique correct or for outside of the Dojang, completing an assessment with a good grade. There are different levels of perseverance and the examples just expressed show this.

In te ao Māori there is a Tikanga called, Manawanui. According to the Māori dictionary the definition of Manawanui is to be persistence, staunch and committed. This is very similar to the definition of Perseverance as described above. Manawanui is expressed by an individual in order to reach their goals or complete a task for the betterment of the iwi.

The te reo translation for Perseverance is Pūnoke, according to Māori dictionary Perseverance can also be translated into Manawanui.

Self-control - Guk Gi

One of the most important tenets inside the Dojang and out in the world is Self-control. This is important inside the Dojang as it dictates how practitioners should behave, an example from the encyclopedia is “a loss of self-control can prove disastrous to both student and opponent.” If practitioners do not follow this tenet it can lead to a lack of respect and damage relationships with other members. Not only can you lose self-control in the world of Taekwon-do but you can also in your everyday life. When people tend to not have things done or completed in their way their emotions take over and control is lost.

The Taekwon-do explanation for Self-control focuses on what the student shouldn't do rather than what can be achieved if self-control is managed.

Mana Motuhake, is a relatively new Tikanga practice which came about with the colonisation of Aotearoa and the signing of the treaty. This concept is defined as Māori having the right to self-govern their people and control their destiny as well as customs, this was outlined in the Tiriti o Waitangi, Article one. There are numerous times in Aotearoa history where Mana Motuhake has been used as more people are now aware of it.

Although not entirely related, Self-control and Mana Motuhake can be seen as having a deeper connection. Self-control is about an individual and Mana Motuhake is about the collective group/hapu/whanau or iwi being able to have their right to control what is theirs. Just as an individual has the right to control their own emotions and behaviour so do the Māori have a right to control their people and lands. Mana Motuhake does relate more to a government practice and instilling the rights that Māori are allowed to have based on the reo version of the treaty. But Self-control can also be seen as a human right, the ability to have control over yourself and actions. The sense of having the ability to control one's own actions is the similarity here.

A translation for self-control could not be found. Although, when looking for a translation of control, Mana was one option. This shows that there is somewhat of a connection.

Indomitable spirit - Baekjul Boolgool

“Kāore te kumara e kōrero mō tōna ake reka” The Kumara does not say how sweet he is.

Indomitable spirit is on the harder scale of how to explain this tenet, to be able to understand this a little better a couple of definitions were looked into. This tenet according to Collins dictionary can be defined as a person who never gives up despite the odds against them. In the world of TKD it is referred to as when a person and his principals are pitted against him at all odds. These two definitions express the same idea. It can be viewed as being similar to the idea of perseverance in that you need a high level of perseverance to then be considered to have indomitable spirit. Indomitable spirit in a sense is an aspect of what make an individual unique, it can be seen as an ideal that is bestowed upon an individual by another. It is an earned aspect of oneself. An example of this would be that no matter how many times a person is knocked down, whether that mean literally in a fight or by aspects in life, they get up and carry on with what they are set out to do.

It was very hard to find a Tikanga that is either a direct translation or similar to the definition of Indomitable spirit. After much thought it was clear, that if viewed from the outlook of an individual, Indomitable spirit can be seen as a close relation to Mana.

Mana is defined as someone who is viewed as a leader, influential, spiritual, authority and control. In te ao Māori people and object can both have Mana, mana can be earned and also

people are born with it from their tupuna. Those with high levels are usually in leadership roles within their iwi, they are trusted within their specialties as well as respected by others.

Indomitable spirit and Mana are similar when viewed from the outlook of a bystander. It can be assumed that a person in a leadership role or of high status such as a master in TKD or a Tohunga in te ao Māori would have both indomitable spirit and a high sense of Mana, brought on by the respect and admiration of their associates/iwi/hapu/whanau.

A translation into te reo Māori for indomitable spirit could not be found. The whakatauki (proverb) above, “Kāore te kumara e kōrero mō tōna ake reka” The Kumara does not say how sweet he is, is an example of what I believe a person who would have indomitable spirit would portray. They are humble and keep trying no matter the outcome.

Courtesy, Integrity, Perseverance, Self-control and Indomitable spirit are the five tenets of Taekwon-do these are what every member of Taekwon-do are taught and what they are to follow, not only are these for Taekwon-do specifically but they also guide us in a way of life. This essay has expressed the similarities of these Korean martial art morals with the customs and protocols of Māori, through the identification of Tikanga practices, Manaakitanga, Tika and Pono, Manawanui, Mana Motuhake and Mana. This essay is a good example of how different cultures a distance away from each other share ideas that are the same. Without the tenets and Tikanga the people who follow and recognise them will be lost.

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