

# The Tenets of Taekwon-do: What they have done for me

***“I shall observe the tenets of Taekwon-do”*** is the first line of the student oath. My understanding of this is that we must gain a full understanding of the tenets. Once we've learnt them thoroughly, we should apply them to our everyday life. Taekwon-do is not only a sport but an art or a way of being. The tenets we have are principles that we can live by and incorporate into our lives to make us better people. I believe that they should be applied not only in training, tournaments and seminars but at school and at home with our family and friends. When you first start Taekwon-do, the tenets are introduced to you very briefly by your instructor. They are Courtesy, Integrity, Perseverance, Self Control and Indomitable Spirit. When you start to progress through the ranks, they are reintroduced to you again when you become a red stripe, this time in more depth. Over the duration of time that I've been doing Taekwon-do, I've noticed that these tenets have changed me and moulded me into the person that I am today. In this essay, I will go over the tenets Courtesy, Perseverance and Indomitable spirit as I feel as though these tenets have impacted me the most. I will discuss what they are, my experiences and how they've changed my life.

## Courtesy

Courtesy is defined as the showing of politeness in one's attitude and behaviour towards others and maintaining an appropriate etiquette inside and outside of the dojang. My interpretation of this tenet is that everyone, whether it be a friend, a fellow student or a stranger on the street, should be treated with respect and kindness. As I play other sports such as rugby and football, sportsmanship is essential. Win or loss the opponent should be treated with respect. They should be honoured for the effort they put in for the match.

The stakes at the World Championships are so much higher. People travel from all over the world. Before travelling, they would've been training for hours, had setbacks, had finances to take care of etc. You have to sacrifice so much to get onto the mats. So losing should not be an option, but unfortunately, someone has to lose. That's the downside of every competition. There is always a victor and a loser. If you win, you progress, and If you lose, that's it. There is no second chance. This was always what I thought about when I was going to compete in a very

important competition, but I was always told that no matter what the result, you must shake the opponent's hand.

I remember my first patterns bout in Germany at the World Championships. I had won the first round, and our last pattern for the bout was Ge Baek. My opponent had missed a movement and had, unfortunately, forgot the pattern. I remember seeing her face fall out of the corner of my eye, and although I was happy that I had won, I knew exactly how she was feeling. I have been in that position many times, and I don't think anything is more disappointing than that. When I got off the mats, I went straight to her, shook her hand and hugged her. She was crying, and I remember saying "You did an amazing job, don't give up."

Having good sportsmanship in victory and defeat is an excellent quality to have. Shaking their hand means that you've acknowledged them for being able to compete with them. Being humble in victory shows that you respect the opponents you've faced. That winning a match isn't the most significant part of competitions and sports. Having good sportsmanship in victory and defeat shows how good of an athlete you are, more importantly, how good of a character you have and the person you are. Sports like Taekwon-do teach you how to be better people. Through competition, Taekwon-do has taught me how to be a better athlete/person inside and outside of the ring. It has taught me the importance of courtesy and respect in the ring and the dojang but also in everyday life.

## Perseverance

Perseverance is described as being persistent despite difficulty or delay in achieving success. Perseverance is essential in all areas of life as we are constantly being faced with new challenges so persevering will allow us to achieve our goals whether that be to run a 2.4k run in under 12 minutes or writing a 2000 word essay. Being an athlete requires me to be perseverant. Training for selections for Nga Kaponga was challenging as there was a higher level of intensity in training. I trialled for five events. They were: Individual Patterns, Power Breaking and Special Technique as well as this I trialled for Team Power Breaking and Special Technique. On top of hard training, I was in competition with a lot of other talented athletes. The best people who do Taekwon-do in New Zealand were all fighting for a spot in the most elite squad to represent our

country on the world stage. Being new to this process it was very intimidating, nerve wracking and overwhelming

So as you can imagine, training for selections was a very gruelling process. I feel as though most people leave out the bad parts of their journey and just focus on the highlights such as getting a new personal best, but the truth is all athletes have struggles. There were many days where I became frustrated and felt as though I was making no progress and where I wanted to give up. There were days where I couldn't reach our starting heights for special technique or when I couldn't complete my breaks or when I couldn't nail a difficult sequence from a pattern. There were days where I didn't want to get training in. This is the reality of it all. Every time I felt like giving in, I remembered the goals that I had written in my journal at the very start of my training and knew that I would only achieve them if I persevered and kept working hard. I put in the extra work in out of class training, setting time aside during the day to get a workout in and focus on building the muscles I needed to jump higher. I conditioned my tools and practised my routines over and over again so that I would have the best chance of breaking my boards. I recorded myself doing the hard sequences of the patterns. I took notes and practised it until I got it near perfect.

Being perseverant has taught me that no matter how hard things may get, that all the hours in and out of the dojang, that all the blood, sweat and tears (yes there were tears) are all worth it in the end. Persevering and pushing towards your goals will allow you to accomplish them. The tenet of perseverance has helped me discover that I have a better mental toughness than I initially thought and has helped me through personal problems with my mental health. I was able to see that if I kept on trying and didn't give up, I would eventually reach a place where I was happy once again and struggling with depression and anxiety being able to see the light at the end of the tunnel is difficult. I was able to overcome the dark times I was experiencing

## Indomitable Spirit

Indomitable Spirit is a tenet that up until recently I didn't know very much about. When looking through the coloured belt syllabus handbook, I read through the definition given and realised that I actually could make sense of this tenet. The syllabus defines it as, and I quote:

“Indomitable spirit is shown when a courageous person and their principles are pitted against

overwhelming odds” It also talks about students being humble and modest, having no fear or hesitation when faced with an opponent who is hostile or aggressive. One instance where I feel that this tenet was displayed was my first bout of patterns at the World Championships.

Going into the tournament I was very nervous. It was my first ever world championships, and although I was nervous I was itching to get out on the mats and compete. Approaching the ring, I saw all the other competitors in my division and to be very frank it was very intimidating seeing all the people who had the same goal in mind of becoming the Individual Junior Female Patterns Champion. But I gathered up the courage to put myself out on the world stage and here I was at the side of the ring, ready to give my best performance. I quickly noticed that I was one of the smallest and youngest competitors in my division but I didn't let that faze me. Although my mind was racing with a million thoughts and my heart was pounding, I managed to keep a calm and a smile on my face.

I think the thing that overwhelmed the most was that a whole year prior to being at the World Championships was that I did not expect to be here. I had won a few competitions but nothing that I thought would bring me here. I was a normal girl who had come from a club in Wellington who didn't really have big ambitions for this sport as I was always leaning towards Rugby or Football. The more I trained and I saw myself make huge amounts of progress from only being able to muscle my way through patterns which were not technically correct to improving my entire style of patterns. I think over time I developed the drive to be able to perform well. I was not expecting anything big from being here and I think others would agree that I was in a very competitive division and that I'd be lucky to even make it past the first two rounds. I had my doubts too. In regional tournaments, I never won. I would win the odd bout but I was never consistent so I had a negative mentality in the lead up to the World Championships. But when I was standing at the edge of the mat, my eyes looking at the judges, waiting to be called up, I had a rush of adrenaline and all I was thinking was that I had trained so hard, I had put in the work, my instructors had given up all their time just to train me and all I wanted more than anything was to make them proud.

The syllabus refers to defeating a belligerent which is an opponent who is hostile and aggressive but my opponent was not a physical person. It was my own mind. It's difficult to overcome the things that go on in your head especially for me as I always had high expectations

of myself. It's different for many people but personally I found it difficult to find enough courage to fight the thoughts in my head but representing my country and showing everyone but more importantly myself that I could do this was all I could think about. I pushed away all the negative thoughts in my head, all the doubt, all the people that said I wasn't good enough to do this, the people that lost faith in me. I pushed that all to the side and said to myself that I am stronger than this. I can beat this, I will be positive and go out there and give my best performance. This shift in my mindset which I didn't even think was possible helped me get as far as I did

Taking the mats was one of the most scary but also most exhilarating moments of my entire life. The first pattern that I was given to perform was Eui Am which was one that I was very confident in. It wasn't my best pattern, I admit but Mrs Patterson always told me that your first pattern is going to be your worst because you're getting your nerves out, getting used to the mats and getting a feel for things. I won that round, I was ecstatic and that gave me a confidence boost and my nerves faded. My second pattern was Ge Baek and that was one of the best Ge Baek's I've ever performed. During the pattern, my American opponent had forgotten the pattern and I knew I had won the bout. Ending with the last punch, hearing all my supporters cheering me on was amazing. I was over the moon with the result, I had won my first ever World Championships bout which in itself is a great accomplishment.

This tenet has taught me that I have the courage to overcome things when I am doubting my abilities or thinking about the worst that could happen. I play Rugby and I tend to hesitate a lot when I'm playing but when I have a small breather when the play has stopped I remind myself to stay positive and that gives me the courage and boosts my confidence allowing me to perform better.

In conclusion, these tenets have taught me so much over the years of me being a Taekwon-do practitioner. The tenet of courtesy has taught me that it is important to treat everyone with respect, no matter who they may be. The tenet of perseverance has taught me how to be resilient and that pushing through difficult situations will end in rewarding experiences. Finally, the tenet of indomitable spirit has allowed me to understand that even in moments where I feel scared or doubtful and the odds are pitted against me, I have the courage to overcome my thoughts and remain positive.

I believe that there should be more teaching around the tenets. Establishing a curriculum around the tenets and having these ideals being taught in the gup ranks should be compulsory. Having the tenets taught at gup level will ensure that by the time you grade for black belt that a better understanding has been obtained and they have been fully understood. The tenets are things that we are expected to know about but they go so much deeper and although they may seem like simple concepts, they can be interpreted in different ways as we are all unique and different. Taekwon-do is an art form and every aspect of this art form should be studied in depth but it is not only an art form. I believe that it's a way of life, the "do". These tenets can be integrated into our everyday lives so by gaining an understanding through teaching, we will be able to see how these tenets are present in the small things we do. The tenets are ways in which we can go about becoming better versions of ourselves and building character. By becoming better versions of ourselves, we can contribute better to society