

## Protocol in Martial Arts

In traditional Martial Arts, protocol is of vital importance. The protocols spring from the tradition of each style and from the tradition of the Martial Arts in general. Without protocol, there would be no preservation of tradition. Without tradition all we would have left is perhaps a game or a physical fitness program. Martial Arts is bigger than that. The reason it is bigger is because we preserve those good things about our Art that have been proved true and useful throughout the centuries.

Let us begin by seeing what a protocol is. Protocol is simply put “the right way to act.” We know that when someone we meet says hello to us we are expected to smile and say hello to them in return. It is common courtesy. If we did not observe this protocol, people would wonder if something was wrong with us. What if you were to get a chance to meet the Queen of England or the President of the United States? How would you act? Well, there is a specific set of rules concerning how to behave in the presence of heads of state or country. The same holds true in the martial arts. You would certainly not be allowed to go near Him or Her without a good lecture about proper protocol. You have to know that gentlemen bow (and ladies curtsy) to the Queen. You have to know what to say and what not to say to the President of the United States. You would need to know how to act at the table if you had the honor to have a meal with the Queen or the President. Such protocols have evolved down through history. There is a reason that they are observed. In this case, an important reason is this: The Queen represents everyone in Great Britain and the entire British Commonwealth. The same holds true for the President of the United States. The same would hold true of a General in the military. If you offended Him or Her, you would be insulting everyone in the Commonwealth, Country, or particular branch of the military! You have to know how to act. In the Martial Arts, we have to know how to act, too when in the presence of seniors and especially Master and Chief Instructors. The protocols of Martial Arts were originated for good reasons. At some point they began and were found to be valuable. Therefore, they were kept as part of the Arts. Martial Arts protocols have stood the test of time.

We know that the martial arts were originated at least as far back as the time of Christ. Surely, if the protocols we observe in martial arts were not of good use, they would have been discarded long ago. Therefore, in the interest of preserving tradition and getting all we can from our study, we should observe the protocols which have been handed down to us. If you don't see the value of them, do this: Take it on faith that it is the right thing to do. That is know that common courtesy, self-control, self-discipline are part of your training in the martial arts. Later on, the value will be apparent to you. Also know that the word “martial” stands for military and the Chinese character for that word is called “Moo” which means in a broader sense to live a virtuous life or stop both external and internal conflict by following a code or creed of proper behavior. The word “Do” in Tang Soo Do means to follow a path or way of action which leads us to a more virtuous and disciplined life. The connection to the military is clear. That is, just as there is a chain of command and a proper way to act in the military so to is there a proper way to act in the martial arts in general and in Tang Soo Do in particular. It is hard to imagine a soldier, new cadet, or new officer finding success in the military or the path of military honor while showing disrespect and being insubordinate to a superior officer. Without knowing it however, many martial arts instructors and students are disrespectful to their seniors by not acting in line with the traditions and protocol of our art. Unfortunately, in many cases, these traditions were not passed down from teacher to student.

Before we jump into the specific protocols, let us speak more of tradition. What is tradition? Let me use Christmas as an example. Christmas is no doubt the biggest tradition observed in the western world, perhaps in the whole world. If you took away all the tradition in Christmas, what would you have? What if you could take away the religious meaning of the day and have no decorations, no tree, no green and red colors, no spirit of giving, no carols? What would be left? This: We would all have a few days off and sit around and eat too much. Would that be of nearly the same value as the real Christmas? Not hardly. We can easily see that if you remove tradition, you may be left with a pitiful shell of the real thing. The same is true of the Martial Arts. If you take away tradition (and the protocol that springs from that tradition) then we might as well have a boxing club or maybe just get together and work out a little bit.

The real meaning of what we do would be lost. Even if we became good boxers or kick boxers, the meat of martial arts would be lost. We have learned from the greatest Masters that the real essence of martial arts has very little to do with “fighting.” If we lost the tradition and protocol, we lose at least 90% of what it is truly all about. Some might say it is like popcorn without salt, but it is more like having salt with no popcorn and telling yourself that you are having salted popcorn. The tradition, that carefully stood the test of time for centuries, is the real meat of what we practice.

A vital tradition in Tang Soo Do is that the purpose of training is to benefit the “whole person.” We are trying to learn effective self-defense, but not that exclusively. We want to become better people. One can see by casual observation that this is not a major goal in sports. Just look in the newspaper and see the latest antics of football, baseball, basketball, soccer and boxing people. Their goal is to win and yet if they misbehave on or off the field it doesn’t matter much. In our art, the whole person concept is far more important than the results of a contest. In our art, mental discipline and physical discipline must go hand in hand. Would we as Tang Soo Do black belts celebrate a fighting champion who embarrassed us all by disgraceful behavior? Not a chance. In our art, we wish to promote justice and to transform everything we touch into something better. Tang Soo Do training is hard and takes a long time. Indeed, it is never finished. Life, similarly can be a challenge. Although nature is beautiful and perfect, humans are not perfect. We have plenty of faults and the chief fault is that we are selfish and full of misplaced pride (negative ego). We are on the right track if we realize this and remain humble. One of the purposes of our training is to be at peace with nature (our own) and to stop inner and outer conflict. We need to adjust our misplaced pride so that we will be in tune with universal truths and the rest of nature. That is one of the reasons for our protocols. They keep our misplaced egos in check.

Imagine that you want to be a serious musician. You may have some natural talent, but the best way to learn is to study with someone who not only knows, but is also an excellent teacher. It helps to study with other students so that you can see your relative progress in the various aspects of the art. You have someone to practice with. Through dedication, study and practice you learn and grow. In time, you may in an orchestra, with the music you are playing blending harmoniously with everyone else’s. If it is done right, it is a thing of beauty. If one player tries to “steal the show” it ruins the whole piece. You may notice that the leader is never the 3<sup>rd</sup> seat oboe player, but a master of music who knows all the parts. He understands the music as a whole and all the instruments. Again, he knows and understands all the parts! This is why we study together under Master instructors and why we keep the traditions we do. It is a tried and true system that has worked well for thousands of years. Times may change, but people are the same. When all parts work together music is perfect and a joy forever. It is our goal to learn to fit in with the rest of creation the way our creator intended. This, too, is a vital goal of our training. The ultimate Master who leads the great orchestra is universal and omnipotent. Fitting in with His nature is not only pleasing to Him, but it is the only way to live successfully. When we let our selfish natures rule us, we are “swimming upstream.” We are actually trying to learn to live the way that works. What is more important, this or the score a game?

In Martial Arts, you do not choose to teach or not teach like a baseball player might do. You must teach what you have been taught. It is a sacred trust and you are passing on this knowledge and wisdom that you have been taught. A true martial artist realizes that he is passing on the art for the benefit of those he teaches and for the benefit of mankind as a whole. We want to live at peace with all creation and to improve ourselves as human beings not write new history based on our understanding of it.

Another aspect of martial arts tradition that I find quite inspiring is worth mentioning here. Since martial arts began, practitioners have been handing it down from teacher to student, who becomes teacher and so on. This has been going on for two thousand years. Your master instructor had a first day on the floor as a white belt. He had his master, and that master had his. Our Head Master, John St. James, learned from Grandmasters Young K. Kwon, Young H. Kwon, Moon Ku and Hong Ku Baek, and Jae Chul Shin. Indirectly, they all learned from Grandmaster Hwang Kee.

Each generation learns, adds something perhaps and passes it on. In a way, we are all taking lessons from the great Hwang Kee himself, through his students (our teachers). This is very humbling. It should be more humbling that in the same sense we are getting lessons from the original masters.

Let us look closely at some of the common protocols that we observe in Tang Soo Do.

Bowing: When we enter the training floor we should remove our shoes and salute the flags. We should bow toward our instructor. Remember that in saluting we are pledging allegiance to our own flag, but at the same time we are showing respect for the flag of Korea (where our art originated). We bow to the instructor to show that we recognize his/her position and that we respect their accomplishments which are greater than our own at present. If by some chance we were to have a thought that our skill was in some way superior to the teacher, bowing should help us to shove that unworthy thought (misplaced pride/negative ego) away and remind us of the importance of humility. When we advance on to the floor to warm up, we should recognize each Dan (Black Belt) senior to us by bowing and perhaps shaking hands and saying hello "Sir or Ma'am" (but at least bowing). You may receive greetings from other students as well. Everyone's bow that you receive should be returned with warmth and humility. The act of bowing is also a sign of one's commitment to their training. It is a way of saying "I am here to say that I am in the right frame of mind to give my best and learn with an open mind and a humble heart." "I do not hold back and I do not see myself as superior to anyone let alone the teacher."

Comment on bowing: Occasionally someone (normally a new student) will think that "all this bowing" is foolish and they do not want to do it. They are here, after all, to learn self-defense. They want to earn a black belt as quickly as possible and then move on to their next challenge in life. We should understand that they can go to the boxing club and feel that way but it will never fly in the dojang (training hall). If you cannot humble yourself you have already missed 99% of the lesson, the art, and our traditional program. Nothing else you could accomplish could possibly matter compared to this area of failure. You simply cannot be in traditional martial arts with this attitude. It is like wanting to attend church when you don't believe in God. It won't work and it is a huge waste of your time and everyone else's. Bowing, proper greetings, saying hello "Sir or Ma'am", raising your hand before asking a question, showing proper respect to seniors, is done to show humility, respect and courtesy. These are foundation blocks that underlie everything we do in traditional martial arts and particularly in Tang Soo Do.

Beyond bowing, it should be understood that the martial artist should show respect for others at all times, in the dojang and out. It goes without saying that we should respect our seniors, but that also goes for juniors. If we have risen to the rank of Dan, we should have developed the wisdom to see that everyone deserves respect. Likewise, out of the dojang, when we encounter the public (both friends and strangers) we should show courtesy and respect for all. This becomes us as well as people and martial artists. It makes us respectable and also shows our art in a favorable light to others. By so doing, we are being faithful to the Arts and doing our part to perpetuate them. We can never do as much good practicing and or teaching physical techniques as we can by setting a good example for other people. We should note that the great Okinawan Master Funakoshi said "Karate begins and ends with courtesy." For courtesy to work it must be used!

#### More on Proper Protocol

When a student enters the dojang after class has begun, he quietly enters and stands by the door. He bows in the direction of the flags, then remains at attention with his hand raised respectfully until recognized by the instructor. After being recognized by the instructor, he walks behind the lines and takes either his appropriate place in line or the lowest place in line if so indicated by the instructor. Whether in or out of the academy, if a student happens to receive personal correction by the instructor, the junior member and or student should stand at attention (if appropriate and or possible) and should listen carefully. At completion of instruction, the junior member should bow and say "thank you sir/ma'am."

### More on Proper Protocol

Generally speaking, a junior should never correct a senior (especially an instructor) in or out of the dojang. As common courtesy dictates, it is okay to agree to disagree but this should always be done in private and with the utmost respect in mind. During class, if a student has a question (or needs to be excused for any reason), the student should raise their hand and wait to be recognized by the instructor. The student should then address the question with the utmost respect and courtesy in mind given the situation and circumstance. This is considered in traditional martial arts as being mindful of the “teacher/student” relationship. That is, we can never learn anything until we are ready to empty our own cup and listen with an open mind and pure heart.

After such question is answered, the student should say “thank you sir or thank you ma’am.” If the student is excused at that point, the student should stand and bow then act accordingly. When the student is able to rejoin class the student should follow the normal procedure for late arrival. If, during the class, the Master Instructor or the Chief Instructor should enter the Dojang, the most senior member on the floor should call the class to attention and then command the class to bow toward Sah Bom Nim or Master Instructor. After a class is over and all ceremonies are complete, each member of the class should bow to the instructor.

### More on Traditional Protocol

On visiting the instructor’s office, always knock on the door and wait to be invited in. Never just enter the office uninvited. Upon seeing the instructor, the student should bow and say, “Hello Sir and or Hello Ma’am”. The student should remain at attention throughout the conversation unless invited to sit by the instructor. The instructor should show the student respect by inviting him to take a seat. When the conversation is over, the student thanks the instructor and walks (traditionally in earlier years backward to the door not showing his back to the instructor) away. When he reaches the door he should stop and bow and then exit the office. No student should sit down at the instructors desk at any time, whether the instructor is there or not. The conversation should follow normal patterns of respect for the instructor regardless of whether the participants are in Do Bahk or street clothes.

If a student(s) should go to a restaurant to meet their instructor, they should always arrive earlier than they expect the instructor. When the instructor arrives, they should stand and bow and say, “Hello Sir and or Hello Ma’am.” The instructor should be seated first and then students should begin sitting rotating from the left of the instructor according to rank. Seniors sit down first and others follow. If already seated, a student should rise and remain standing until seniors are seated. The placement of seating is flexible, but it is normal for seniors to be placed near the Head Master or Chief Instructor. Students should not smoke or drink while the instructor is present unless the instructor has given his permission. When food is served, students should wait until the instructor begins to eat and then they may begin to eat. If the Head, Chief, or Grandmaster is present, students should wear appropriate dress clothing. The Head, Chief, or Grandmaster may, of course, waive such rules and approve more casual clothing for the occasion.

If a student is speaking on the phone or emailing his instructor, his manners should be a continuation of normal class manners. That is, proper respect and courtesy is expected at all times. Remember, the dojang or true training hall does not end at the mat or the dojang door.

When communicating by letter or email students should observe the following protocol:

Address the letter by including the title of the person you are sending the letter to. If he/she has no title, use Mr., Mrs., Miss, or Ms.

## Proper Protocol Con't

If a Senior writes to a Junior, he should address to: Kyo Sa John Doe or Mr. John Doe. A Junior to a Senior: Kyo Sa Nim John Doe or Sah Bom Nim Doe. (If that is the appropriate title). Actually, in Korean, the person's name goes before the title. For example: Doe Sah Bom Nim. For the salutation of the letter use these rules: Seniors to Juniors should use "Mr. Kyo Sa Doe" or "Mr. Doe". For Juniors writing to Seniors the first name may be used. "Dear Kyo Sa Nim John Doe." The proper name with no title may also be used when writing to juniors, such as "Mrs. John Smith." When Juniors write to Seniors they should use the full title: "Dear Sah Bom Nim or Kwang Jang Nim John Smith."

When you close the letter use the following rules. When you write to a Senior, no matter how high your rank is, sign only your name (John Smith). Do not put your rank or position. This shows disrespect for the Senior. It is better to remain humble and not flaunt your title. When a Senior writes to a junior, he simply signs his name. ("John Doe" instead of "Master John Doe"). The student may sign his letter thusly: "John Doe, your student", but do not list your rank at all. Also, when a junior writes a senior, he or she should use a closing such as "Respectfully Yours", or "Sincerely Yours in the Martial Arts".

We need to remember that in traditional karate, winning is living the victorious which means virtuous life. That means proper respect and courtesy. In other words, following proper protocol. Keeping score in a small game is just a diversion. When that game is over it is forgotten and we move on to the real game—life. I think it is highly instructive to review a list given us by the great Okinawan Master Ginchin Funakoshi. The fact that Funakoshi is not from our style does not matter at all. As a traditional Master, his philosophy is of great benefit to us. From his list of "Twenty Precepts" we find real wisdom. A few samples for our enlightenment:

- Karate begins and ends with courtesy.
- There is no first attack in Karate.

Note: This pertains to verbal and non verbal/physical and non physical.

- Karate is an aid to Justice.
- First control yourself before attempting to control others.
- Spirit first, technique second.

Note: This also means heart first and intellect second.

- Accidents arise from negligence. Negligence arrives from lack of proper protocol.
- Do not think that karate training is only in the Dojang.
- It will take your whole life to learn karate and there is no limit.
- Karate is like boiling water. If you do not heat it constantly, it will cool.

Note: Traditional Karate is also like drinking tea. That is, it is hard to enjoy the flavor unless you first empty your cup and enjoy the gift.

- Victory depends on distinguishing vulnerable points from invulnerable ones.

## Proper Protocol con't

- Always think and devise ways to live the precepts every day.

Let us remember that the protocols and traditions of martial arts are more important than the physical aspects. We should recall that karate's purpose is to improve our lives by making us better people.

It is proper protocol that one never makes a senior (especially an instructor) look bad in or out of the dojang. You would normally not even correct a senior if you knew or thought he/she was wrong. You would leave this up to one of their seniors. At most, you politely ask for private meeting at the instructor's convenience to discuss a concern. An exception to this must be noted. In the case where a child outranks an adult, it behooves the adult to treat the child like a senior member in the dojang. However, in certain cases children use poor judgement and may be indulging in activities which may be ill advised or even dangerous. In such cases adults of lower rank may have to take charge if higher ranking adults are not nearby and take steps to bring things back to good order. Adults who see the need to do this should be sure there is a compelling reason to take charge if so just do it. Child Black Belts should instinctively listen to the lower ranking adults and comply with their requests immediately and with courtesy.

This is a good time to mention that the principle of respect for elders is time honored the world over (and especially in Asia). It is consistent with the guiding principles of the Martial Arts to show respect for all elders, no matter if they are students of the Arts or regardless of rank. Age brings wisdom, and it behooves the younger person to show respect for the older person, particularly if there is a significant age difference. As wise man once said, "it is not for the benefit of the elder to which you show the respect but for your benefit

The following virtues are consistent with the martial arts:

Patience—patience is a great virtue. Good things do not always come fast or easy. We should be reminded not to be overly ambitious. Stay in your proper place. In the right time, you will be invited to come up into the higher place. Do not press. It does not help at all to press and in fact it hurts your progress. Just do your best and show the right spirit. Things will work out. This pertains to testing. While all students should know and be able to report if asked when they will test next, a junior should never tell or imply to a senior/Master (especially organization head) when they would like to test or when they would prefer to test. This is in traditional martial arts considered showing a lack of patience, self control, and respect.

Respect--- Remember to show respect for everyone in and out of the dojang.

Humility—All arrogance is wrong. Great leaders and teachers show us clearly and repeatedly about the value of humility. Be humble! At a banquet, do not sit down in a high seat. You will have a seat of high honor when the master of the feast calls you and tells you to come and take it. Then you will go to take it with honor. Be content that those ahead of you have learned their place. Even if you are superior in some ways to your seniors, be humble. We are not in a boxing club. Your time will come. If you are a better fighter than another member who is senior to you, just be humble and realize that he is your senior and he might always be your senior. Conduct yourself with dignity and humility. This system is tried and true.

In closing, please remember that how you look (your uniform) and how you act, speaks volumes as to whether you are trained properly and understand the art or "do" in the word Tang Soo Do. To lead you first must understand how to follow. Following proper protocol is the first step in this process. Once, you have learned and conditioned these most important traditions, you are well on your way to learning and someday hopefully mastering the art of Tang Soo Do.