

## THE ART OF TAEKWONDO: ADVENTURE IN SELF-DISCOVERY By GRANDMASTER MOO YONG LEE

### THE MANY FACES OF TAEKWONDO

Taekwondo is a traditional Korean martial art which, translated literally, means "the art of hand and foot fighting". It combines sharp, strong angular movements with graceful and free-flowing circular motions to produce a harmonious marriage of beauty and power. With the addition of its own devastating kicking techniques, Taekwondo is a complete, integrated, and unique system of self-defense and personal improvement.

It is no wonder that Taekwondo is the fastest-growing martial art in the world today, for its appeal is universal. As a practical means of self-defense, as a satisfying and complete regimen of physical conditioning, as an aid to improved concentration and mental performance, the art of Taekwondo offers its riches to anyone who sincerely undertakes its study. Within the training hall, there are no age, sex or racial barriers: all begin equally, as "white belts". Under the watchful eye of the Master Instructor, each progresses at his or her own rate, according to individual effort and ability.

### THE AIM OF TAEKWONDO: BODY, MIND, AND SPIRIT WORKING AS ONE

Taekwondo training addresses the whole individual - body, mind, and will -- and involves a great deal more than mere physical technique. To be sure, the student of Taekwondo is expected to develop strength, stamina, quickness, flexibility, coordination, and balance. Along with a variety of effective hand and foot self-defense techniques, these physical skills are fundamental to the art, and can be perfected only through dedication and tireless practice. However, the road to true mastery also requires that formidable physical accomplishments be balanced with the equally important mental characteristics of patience, humility, self-control, perseverance, concentration, and respect. These, too, must be practiced faithfully, both in and out of class. Gradually, the lessons of the training hall begin to color other aspects of life. Mind, body, and spirit become unified and transformed, and living becomes richer and more enjoyable.

### MARTIAL ARTS "MAGIC": THE LONG ROAD TO HONEST ACHIEVEMENT

"How long will it take?" This is the question we all ask when starting out. "How long to Black Belt? How long before I can do those fancy spinning kicks?"

The only possible answer to such questions is that it takes as long as it takes. There are no magic shortcuts, no secret techniques, no mystical practices or occult books that will instantly transform a person into a martial artist. Public attention tends to focus on the flashy aspects of

the martial arts, the dramatic breaking techniques, and razzle-dazzle demonstrations. In actual fact, training consists of very little "flash", and a great deal of hard work - constant, dedicated practice, and tireless physical conditioning. With correct instruction and sufficient perseverance, anyone can attain their full potential in the art of Taekwondo, achieving that level of skill which, to the uninformed, appears to be "magic".

It usually requires at least several years of serious study and practice to reach Black Belt level. Gaining in skill, the student's advancement is marked by the award of colored belts which signify class rank; Hard won, each new badge of promotion can be worn proudly as a symbol of honest accomplishment, but, of course, it remains only a symbol. The truly successful student is the one who has learned to enjoy walking the path, rather than worrying too much about the destination.

#### TAEKWONDO AND TRADITION: THE PROUD HERITAGE OF THE HWARANG DAN

Although the name "Taekwondo" is only about 70 years old, the origins of the art reach far back into Korean history. During the Sixth Century, A.D ., the Korean peninsula was divided into three kingdoms, Shilla, Baek Je, and Koguryo. Shilla, the smallest, was in constant peril of being overrun by her more powerful neighbors, and in response to this pressure assembled an elite fighting corps chosen from among the aristocracy, known as the Hwarang Dan, or "Flower of Youth". In addition to the regular military training of the day, the Hwarang subjected themselves to rigorous mental discipline and severe physical hardship in order to condition the body and will to great strength and long endurance. Legend has it that they went into the mountains and along the seashore, studying the fighting styles of wild animals, and adapting the techniques of nature to their own advantage. New movements were added to the existing form of weaponless fighting known as Tae Kyon, popular among the common people. In addition to these new hand and foot techniques, the Hwarang also incorporated into their art certain Buddhist exercises in intense concentration, in order to achieve a harmonious integration of mind and body.

Modern Taekwondo owes much to the valorous Hwarang Dan. Although no one can say exactly how the technical skills of today's practice compare with the killing techniques used to such great effect on ancient battlefields, some strong similarities certainly exist. There is no doubt at all that the ethical spirit of the art may be traced directly to the five-pointed code of conduct of the Hwarang, which emphasized the virtues of fidelity, courage, patriotism, obedience to lawful authority and a deep and abiding respect for all life. To consider Taekwondo as simply a "sport", or just another means to "get in shape" is to deny the proud heritage of almost 2000 years. The combined thought and experience of centuries has produced our modern art, which continues to draw strength and stability from the past.

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**COMPETITIVE TAEKWONDO: AN EXCITING INTERNATIONAL SPORT** The phenomenal growth of Taekwondo has brought about a strong demand for public demonstration of the art, a need which is met by tournament competition on local, state, national and international levels. On one hand, these events offer the general public a breathtaking view of Taekwondo in action, and at the same time, they provide an opportunity for interested practitioners to test their skills in tough, hard-fought competition. Well-managed tournaments also serve the purpose of bringing together Taekwondo enthusiasts in an atmosphere of fellowship and mutual good will. Largely through the efforts of the World Taekwondo Federation, Taekwondo as a competitive sport has made great advances in recent years -rules have become standardized, the quality of judging and refereeing has risen steadily, and increased emphasis has been placed on the safety of competitors. Junior events, especially under the AAU/USA Junior Olympics Taekwondo program, offer youngsters of all ages and skill levels an opportunity to experience the thrill of public performance. The acceptance of Taekwondo by the International Olympic Committee has spurred great interest throughout the world, and men and women of all nations are helping to bring the art to the international arena.