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**The World Hwa Rang Do® Association Annual Event 2019
Part 3 – Black Sash Conference & Seminars
(Conclusion)**

By: Marco Mattiucci
Photos By: Claire Davey

After already a long three-days of events, the Black Sashes, serious Hwa Rang Do® and Tae Soo Do® practitioners, the Instructors and the Assistant Instructors remain for another five-days of intensive training on all aspects of Hwa Rang Do from morning until late hours of the night with one unified goal of improving themselves mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually to better others, serving humanity through the teachings of Hwa Rang Do.





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Starting from dawn on a daily basis, intensive training, obstacle courses, breathing exercises, and meditation starts off the day. For the next four days, there will be three seminar sessions each day on various subjects, which include weaponry, joint manipulation, grappling techniques from takedowns to submissions, and standup fighting taught directly by Supreme Grandmaster Dr. Joo Bang Lee (Dojoonim) and his eldest son, Grandmaster Taejoon Lee (Kuksanim). Then, in the late afternoon, the participants are divided into Hwa Rang Do Black Sashes taught by Dojoonim and the Tae Soo Do Instructors and Hwa Rang Do Color Sashes taught by Kuksanim. They review the material of our core curriculum and when they show proficiency and understanding, they are taught new techniques. Followed by a group dinner, sharing and discussing what we have learned as well as strengthening our familial bonds. We even had the privilege to attend an evening at the local Opera House where they invited an opera company from South Korea. These times are most

precious to us as we have the opportunity to be in the presence of the Founder and the Heir of our art all in one place. It is truly a rare historical moment, which we cherish with all our hearts every minute we can spare.

The last day started with a group discussion with Kuksanim and then the Hwa Rang Do Black Sash Dan Promotional Examination. They start with a two-hour written exam, then an intensive oral examination where all the high-ranking Black Sashes are able to ask questions on the candidates' goals, purpose, commitment, and loyalty. After which they spend another three-hours in demonstrating their physical and mental proficiency and strength. After the completion of a successful Black Sash Promotional Examination, we met for our final group dinner, closing banquet, and the coveted Black Sash Ceremony. It was a beautiful ending in the most accommodating setting, overlooking the majestic rolling hills of Tuscany where countless ancient battles ensued now covered by waves of vegetation and vineyards that provide life, nourishment to the region.

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We have learned many valuable lessons and corrections, which we should all treasure. What we all realized the most was that there is always room for improvement, especially when we have so many techniques to learn. Kuksanim stressed the point that our goal is perfection, that no one is perfect and an imperfect being can never achieve perfection. However we must strive for it and that is the path of a warrior. He does not enter battle, thinking that it will be the last battle; he fights so that he can fight again. The goal is to persevere, not through small obstacles or weak opposition, but to overcome great odds, then look for even stronger foes.

Even with one technique there are so many ways it can be done, but as we train year after year, we get closer to doing it right. Dojoonim teaches us that we can never give up; that we must always move forward; that when we climb a mountain and reach its summit, we then clearly see that there are so many other mountain peaks to climb. Therefore, we must humble ourselves and retreat from the summit until we are at bottom, then again begin the climb once more until another summit is achieved, then repeat. People today give up too easily and do not even reach one summit and if they have summited one mountain, they feel as though they have conquered the world, blinded by their ego, by their accomplishments to see the other peaks beyond and remain entitled in their delusions of grandeur.

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On the last day, Kuksanim closed the event with these thoughts:

“You will not like what I am about to tell you, but I am not here to please you, I am here to share the Truth. What you like or don't like really has no value. You cannot base your life decisions on your likes and dislikes and that's what's wrong with your life. Think about it! You didn't like to eat broccoli when you were a child and your parents had to coerce you to eat them by saying, 'Oh look, they are like little trees. Aren't they cute? Here try one.' And, now all grown up you realize it's health benefits and being a trendy vegan you not only enjoy them, but you are a champion of social change, reducing your carbon footprint, being more humane, gaining the support and adoration of your peers. Some of you never liked sushi and confessed you'd never eat it. 'Raw fish, are you kidding me? I will never touch that stuff.' I remember one of our Black Sashes here who went with us to a Sushi restaurant and asked if they had French fries. It was so embarrassing. Now, he loves it, however, being a novice sushi eater he will eat it at every

opportunity unable to discern whether of good or bad quality. More the better! And, who would have ever thought that these changes would ever take place. We never think we will change and hold fast to our opinions as truths, yet our opinions change like the seasons.

Today, our whole world, society, governments encourages us to make decisions on what we like and dislike. The popular slogan these days is 'Do what you like and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Pursue it no matter what.' This type of hedonistic, self indulgent, narcissistic culture only benefits big companies, big businesses, big money. It has become a culture of consumption where the big companies with lots of money spent on advertising molds our way of thinking, living, and doing anything and everything through social media and technology. We are glued to our phones. There's a recent statistic that stated that on average a person looks at their phone 86 times a day.

A device that allows us to text, make calls, watch, listen to music, browse the internet, and stay connected on social media all on one device is too tempting and





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exploits our human propensity for addiction. Now, we are fed constantly 24/7 with information that shapes and molds our opinions on everything. Yet, we think it was our idea, our independent opinion. That is what is subversive, in the dark, which is evil contrary to the good, which is always in the light, in plain sight. We are being programmed, conditioned, and it's almost impossible to realize it unless you unplug, disconnect, separate yourselves, detach from all media and seek for the Truth on your own.

What we like has nothing to with what is true or with what is right. Everything is made to be quick and easy, creating a society of people who seek for immediate gratification, superficiality, reduced attention span, who only seek pleasure without any deep purpose or meaning, taking advantage of our human need to seek comfort and security, surrendering all our birthrights, privacy, and freedom, which in the process robs us of any meaning and value. It is no surprise that the statistics of suicide have skyrocketed in the recent years with no remedy in sight.

I asked you at the beginning of the week what is the value of your training? I will bet that most of your

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answers are superficial, that you do it because it's fun, or that because you like it, it keeps you fit, etc. We have lost the ability to think deeply, remain steadfast on a quest let alone to even have one, to persevere against resistance, to work hard, to commit, and more importantly to maintain our commitments, often known as loyalty. When striving to satisfy the self of its likes in order to achieve a temporary false sense of happiness, it is the same as in the pursuit of a drug induced high. That feeling of bliss, of pleasure becomes the most important thing in our lives. The pursuit of happiness is no different than the pursuit of addictions by drug addicts.

Therefore, we should not seek to be happy, but to seek for what is right. You cannot seek to be liked by others and to please their opinions of you. Not only do we seek to please ourselves, but

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also we want to please everyone else. This is impossible as no matter what you do, how great of a task you accomplish, how magnificent your work may be, how noble and humane your efforts are, there will always be others who criticize, who slander, who belittle, and profane you. Everyone has an opinion and it means absolutely nothing! It's just that, an opinion and there are as many opinions as there are people in the world.

The only opinions that should matter are from the people who know you best, your parents, closest of friends, hopefully your teachers, and even from amongst them you must be selective to choose who is truthful. Yes, that's right, not who agrees with you, but who most tells you the truth. The reason why you stop listening to your parents and attempt to leave the house to live on your own as soon as you legally can is so that you don't have to hear your parents complaining about you all the time; because what they say is true, not because they're wrong.

You seek then the rest of your life for people who agree with you, who like you, who does not upset you, who pleases you, and from these people you seek advice, adoration, support, equating love with likes. You surround yourself with sycophants and anyone who disagrees; you call them names and classify them as outdated, old-fashioned, unprogressive, archaic, bigot, racist, phobic, etc. etc. I have also said many times to my

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“Do not correct a fool, or he will hate you; correct a wise man and he will appreciate you.”

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students that you do not need permission to do what is right. That they may take action, voice their opinion, disagree with me or any other senior rank when they think they are in the right. However, there's a catch, you must make sure you are right. And, since you don't know for sure, all you can do is dislike and complain about it. Then most often than not, you pass a presumptuous judgment without full understanding and inquiry, send an email or text and quit. We have been reduced to a culture where breaking up of our relationships, our commitments, our (seemingly) forever friendships, and eternal love is even made quick and easy without a face-to-face discussion, seeking of resolution, but with only an impersonal digital message.

Yes, most often truth hurts more than feel good and when your parents and teachers who are good tell you things you do not like to hear, but are true, you run from them. You have imaginary friends online who are of similar age and issues whom you seek for advice. Think about it, how crazy is that?! They lack wisdom and the life experiences necessary to give any advice to others. We all desire to be loved and to love, but love has nothing to do with being liked as liking and being liked

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is selfish and being loved and loving is selfless. It is said in Proverbs, 'Do not correct a fool, or he will hate you; correct a wise man and he will appreciate you.' Finally, you may ask, how can one know the Truth, what is right? You have to detach and seek continually, relentlessly until you find it. And, surely if you only seek to be happy, to be pleased and please others, you will never find it."

Dojoonim's and Kuksanim's teachings and their words have impacted us deeply. As teachers, as parents we all struggle from what we should do and what we ought to do. Our teachers, our martial art parents constantly remind us

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Hwarang Forever and God Bless!

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that we must always strive to do what we ought to do and that is why we must always seek to understand what is True, what is Right as not all things can be true and right. Truth and Righteousness cannot be that which it calls itself if it is subjective and if being subjective is what is true, then there is no truth and nothing is right.
Hwarang Forever and God Bless!



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