



Hwa Rang Do

The Lost Art of Learning

By: Grandmaster Taejoon Lee

My father, the Founder of Hwa Rang Do® Supreme Grandmaster Dr. Joo Bang Lee, used to tell me stories of how he was trained by his master Suahm Dosa, who was a Buddhist monk, practicing hermitage in the mountains near Seoul, South Korea. My grandfather gave to Suahm Dosa two of his sons to be trained in the ancient martial and healing art of the Hwarang Knights, which was passed down for 57 generations to Suahm Dosa. My father started his training at the ripe young age of five years old.

“Learning, striving for perfection, achieving excellence is not a destination but a journey, a path, the way”

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GM Taejoon Lee

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Korean Tradition



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He told me that Suahm Dosa hardly ever spoke a word and that he would show him a technique only once. Then, he'd have to practice it until it's perfect and if he didn't do it right, he would get lashings and harsh physical discipline. There were no detailed corrections, no insightful remarks, no breakdown and analysis of the mental and emotional states, no discussion at all. Just the beating, then sent away to practice, until finally he succeeded, which then was rewarded with another technique. No praise, no high fives, no compliment, no pat on the head, no consenting smile, nothing. This was also my father's method of teaching. He would show a technique only once to me and I would have to practice as long as it took to get it right. However, there were no lashings, no beatings, just harsh criticism and discipline. Although, not to brag, but I really never experienced

much negative consequences or harsh discipline from training. All my memories of training as a child are filled with happy, excited, and enriching moments. My discipline came not from training or on the mat, but for mistakes in life and my behavior off the mat. This would prove true into my adulthood.

In addition to the rigorous daily training, my father also had to tend to all the daily chores of cooking all the meals, cleaning, and labor no matter what the weather conditions were like. In Korea, there are four distinct seasons with the summers extremely hot and humid and the winters freezing cold and wet. There was no complaining or whining, nowhere to run and no one to cry on. He had to persevere and show that he deserved the discipleship; quitting or failure was never an option.



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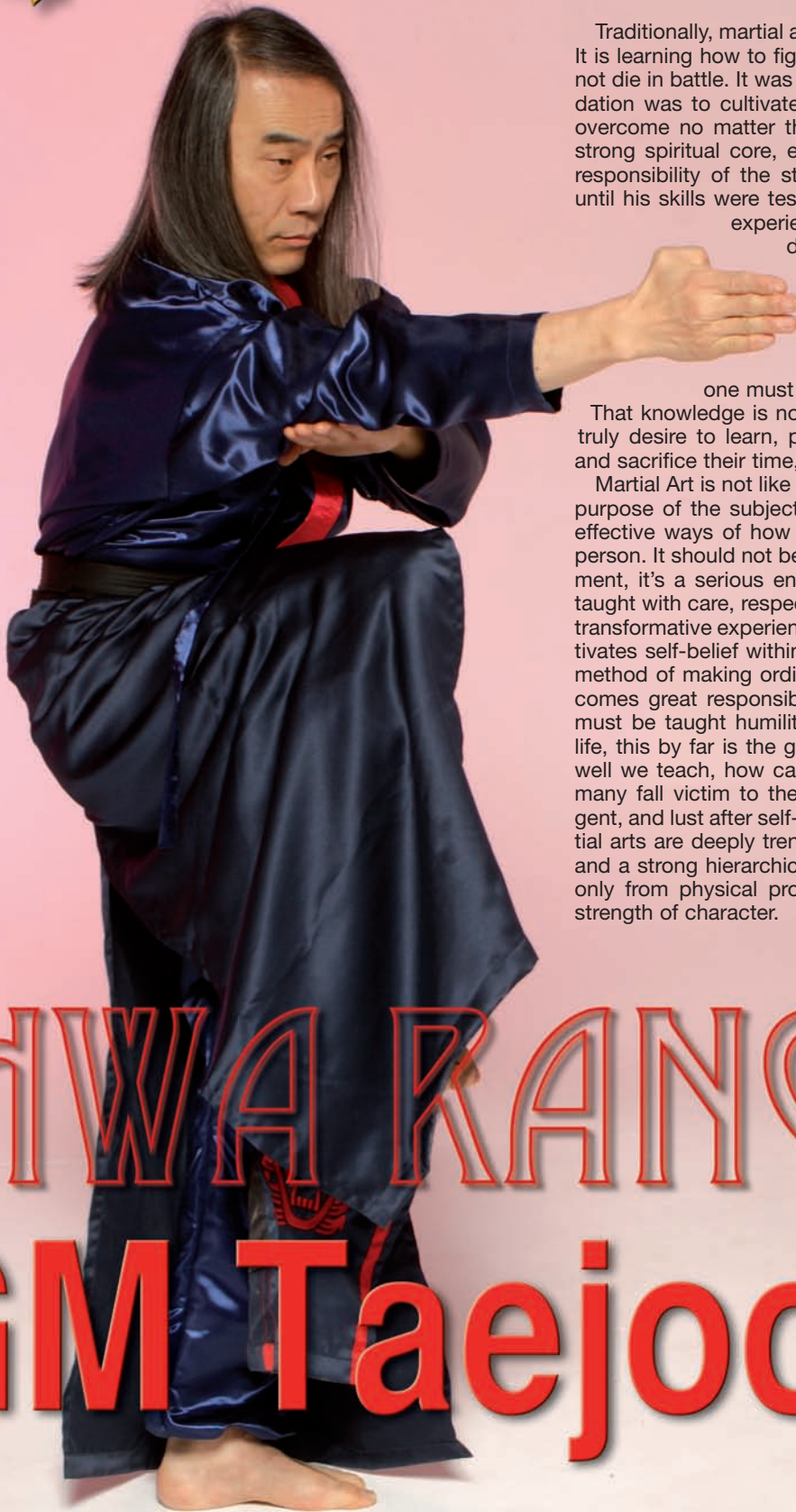
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Traditionally, martial arts have always been taught this way. It is learning how to fight, how to be strong, how to live and not die in battle. It was a serious endeavor, which in its foundation was to cultivate a determined will to persevere and overcome no matter the odds, a courageous heart, and a strong spiritual core, embracing one's mortality. It was the responsibility of the student to watch, learn, and practice until his skills were tested by having to fight a more senior, experienced student. If he holds his ground, do not coward in fear, or even win, and then he would be promoted. If he loses, freezes in fright, or surrenders, then he must go back to training until the next challenge.

There is a saying in martial arts that one must steal the knowledge from his master.

That knowledge is not freely given and only the ones who truly desire to learn, paying attention, commit to practice, and sacrifice their time, that only then can one excel.

Martial Art is not like other sports or hobbies. Consider the purpose of the subject matter, its aim is learning the most effective ways of how to hurt, maim, and even kill another person. It should not be for fun, for entertainment, or amusement, it's a serious endeavor, which must be pursued and taught with care, respect, humility, and reverence. It is a truly transformative experience that empowers the powerless, cultivates self-belief within the unbeliever; it is in many ways a method of making ordinary people extraordinary and with it comes great responsibility. First and foremost, the student must be taught humility and respect for others, for human life, this by far is the greatest challenge and no matter how well we teach, how careful we disseminate our knowledge, many fall victim to the ego, becoming arrogant, self-indulgent, and lust after self-glorification. For this reason true martial arts are deeply entrenched in tradition, etiquette, formality, and a strong hierarchical structure where rank is gained not only from physical prowess, but also due to wisdom and strength of character.

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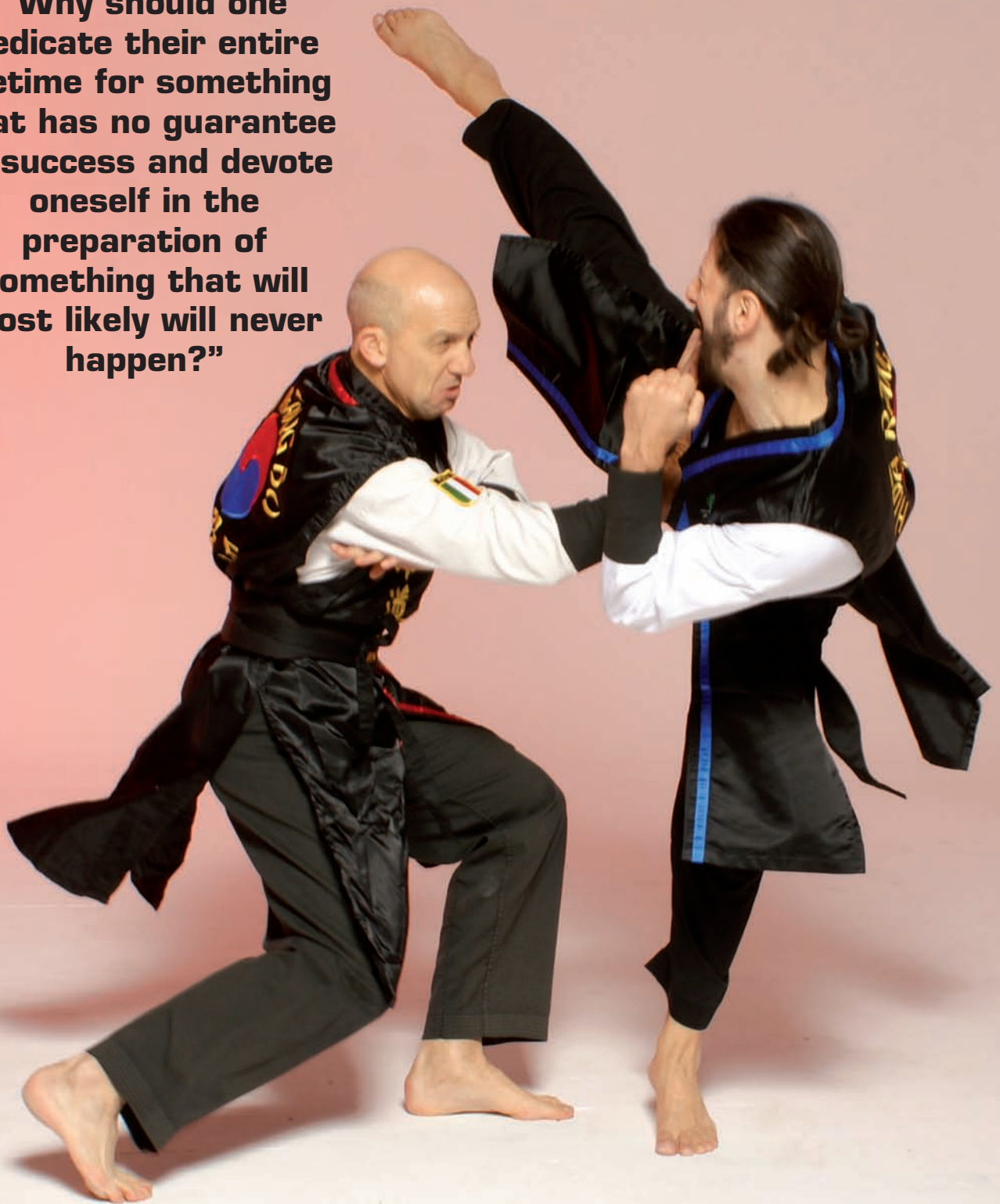
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“The higher the rank the greater the responsibility and burden.”

Unfortunately, many of these important aspects of martial training are being lost due to commercialization and the glorification of combat based sports where the main focus is on the physical outcome and not on the development of human character based on strong moral, ethical foundations. God forbid, that a person will ever have to encounter even a single violent attack on the streets during their entire life span. However, martial art is essentially training and practicing for something hopefully will never take place. The reality of a vicious, violent attack where your life is threatened can never be duplicated on the mat and there's no full-proof way of preparing for it. It is delusional to think that a few medals or trophies under your belt will guarantee survival in the streets or in real battle. Even the most experienced martial artists cannot guarantee that they will not hesitate and freeze under such violent circumstances and come out of it alive. Of course their odds are better, but it would be delusional to think that one can be ready for all possible situations. Then why should one train in the martial arts? Why should one dedicate their entire lifetime for something that has no guarantee of success and devote oneself in the preparation of something that will most likely will never happen?

“Often times, people say to do the best that you can, but how do we know what is best and when we have reached it?”



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"It is for the development of human potential."

This phrase has become cliché and many say it but what is the human potential? Is it to be the best that one can be and what is that bestness? To whom does being at your best serve? For what reason do you want to be the best? And when you say best, then you are comparing yourself to something, so what are you comparing to in order for you to be best? Often times, people say to do the best that you can, but how do we know what is best and when we have reached it? When you delve deeper into this conventionally accepted statement, one finds that it really has no merit, or meaning and it renders itself frivolous, reduced to a cheer or another motivational acclamation.

This statement is referring to the idea of aspiring for perfection, to be God-like. This has been our struggle since the beginning of human history with the original fall of man. To the youthful zealous self, he/she believes that they can attain it, that they can be gods: To the wise, they realize that it can never be attained and are humbled by God. However, today there is a growing consciousness of a third paradigm, that we are all gods and that whatever we choose to do is what is right, true, and should be respected.

"Knowledge is power" and in this information age where the collective knowledge of the world lies within our fingertips, we have become entitled with the delusions of grandeur and power. Our technologies have devalued what is the most important asset, power, and endowment of humankind, knowledge. The greatest attribute of human beings in comparison to all species of life is our intellect, our consciousness. This is what makes us the most powerful in the animal kingdom.

Thomas Paine who has paved the way for the American Declaration of Independence was quoted once saying, "What we obtain too cheaply, we esteem too lightly." The value of all things is measured by how difficult it was to obtain it, by what sacrifices have been made to earn it. The thing, which is of the greatest strength and power for human beings has been reduced to a cheap commodity that no one has to work for or earn to gain. When a person wanted to learn something before the Internet, they had to seek out the knowledge, travel to a library, look through countless rows of bookshelves, find all the books that they can and then study them one by one. Today, all one has to do is Google. Think, study, go learn, all these phrases has morphed to "Google it".

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This has created a generation that cannot form proper questions and possess the ability to seek for knowledge and unless one seeks, they will never find it. It is God who has given us the intellect, the ability to reason for one ultimate purpose to know the Truth, to know Him. The massive endless information that exists online surrenders the will to seek for the truth to a state of ambivalence and agnosticism. There's too much to know and everything can be true and everything can be false so I believe in nothing. This is the state of our minds today for most. And, it is this state of uncertainty that no matter how good our living conditions are, how fortunate we are in our lives, we are unfulfilled, unsatisfied, and fall into darkness.

It is due to the hard, strict training that my father received and which he has imparted onto me, that we appreciate and value the knowledge we possess. The silence of Suahm Dosa, the unapproachable demeanor, the inability to escape or to quit, the countless chores and responsibilities all served a purpose to motivate my father, the student, to think, to seek for the answers by asking how and why, then finding the solutions on his own accord as well as instilling the value of learning through dedication and sacrifice. Learning, striving for perfection, achieving excellence is not a destination but a journey, a path, the way. It is this way "Do" (in Korean and Japanese) or "Tao" (in Chinese) that is the true nature of martial arts and only by ridding oneself of the ego and pride can one discover peace, beauty, appreciation, and God.

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