



A Hwarang's Path – Overcoming the Fear of Death (part 2)

A sword fight is not about pummeling your opponent unconscious, to tackle and grapple to submission, to lose and fight another day; it is for either life or death. Imagine as vividly as you can, facing another person with a sword only inches away from you, staring into their eyes. What do you think you would be thinking about?

Can you actually stand there not thinking about death, that you are sure you will somehow win unscathed, uncut? That is impossible unless you are completely delusional, sociopathic, psychotic, and narcissistic.



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The only way is to accept and embrace death. A swordsman, a warrior, a Hwarang does not battle to just to survive, but to fight for a cause and to protect and if necessary to die in the process, sacrificing their lives. By this definition, the nurses and doctors, the public volunteers, first responders and law enforcement personnel during this crisis deserves our respect and praise as they have put the lives and well being of others ahead of their own. They are truly our modern day warriors, another example that courage and strength comes from self-sacrifice and not from self-centeredness.

If one's primary goal is self-preservation, then they could not face the swordsman, having nothing to sacrifice for except for the self, which is self-defeating, they will run to live another day. This is why in many sword duels the fight is won before it begins. It is the one who is more committed to dying that will prevail as they have made peace with death; making them calm, clear minded, without distractions, purely present on the target ahead.

The one who wants to live is crying out in his mind, repeating the mantra, "I DON'T WANT TO DIE!" The mind will be full of distractions of all the reasons why they can't die, about their loved ones and family, all the pleasures they will be deprived of, all the things which are unfulfilled, and there will be no room to think of anything else. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, because they were afraid to die is precisely why they will die.

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The courage and strength to overcome the fear of death comes from the purpose of living, of their beliefs, for others, and most supremely for God.

What about the one who wants to die, who is suicidal? Surely, they are not afraid of dying and so they must make a good swordsman? Wanting to die does not mean one has overcome fear; it just means they are afraid of living. A person does not want to die because they feel they possess meaning, purpose, value, it's exactly the opposite. They feel worthless and devoid of value and purpose. They are also running away, just in the other direction. In both cases of the swordsman who's afraid to die and the one who wants to die, they both suffer from self-centeredness, believing that they have power over their lives and it is up to them whether they live or die. Hence, they are both irrational as they both function out of fear.

The true swordsman has dedicated himself to train the mind and the body in the practice of swordsmanship in order to increase the odds of survival with the full awareness and humility that he may die, but with the satisfaction of knowing that he did the best he could. In swordsmanship there is no trying, only doing. You cannot truly practice sword fighting, as that would mean getting cut, maimed, or even die. Practicing with wooden or bamboo swords can teach you the movements, but it cannot teach you how to prepare and train from being cut or maimed.

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One slight mistake can result in death. There can be no mistakes as every mistake can mean death.

Think about living this way where every mistake you make, the consequence is death; that is the Way of the Sword, the Warrior's Path. The consequences of a mistake are extreme and dire for a swordsman, a warrior, a Hwarang, it would mean the life of oneself, the one he's protecting, or both. This required a warrior, a Hwarang to be always mindful to never make a mistake. And surely, that is not possible to never err or never make a mistake as we are all human, but it forced them to take all their decisions and actions seriously.

**“To think that we will never die,
to wield nature to our will is absurd
and completely irrational.”**

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Today, martial art schools have become a haven for motivational memes, new age self help remedies, and just ways of enhancing self-esteem and fitness centered more on effort rather than results based all on positive reinforcement, striving to keep their students happy to increase their membership. Of course, this is only a reflection of our current society, which once again strives to create a utopia where everyone is happy and flourishing by playing gods. This time there is no God to blame, but only ourselves so we devise another plan as gods to control nature, namely the weather, then we can save the planet and save ourselves.

To think that we will never die, to wield nature to our will is absurd and completely irrational. So, it is not that we don't think that death is imminent that makes us panic in fear, but it is because we lack the control to determine when we die. And, there lays the absurdity to think we have control over death. That is the same for a swordsman, a fighter, who thinks so highly of himself, that he is the best, invincible, and can never die.

To think that life should always be good and nothing bad can happen to us is also completely absurd. However, by teaching children early on that it's okay to make mistakes, to do wrong, only reinforcing through positive affirmation



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deludes them to think they can do no wrong. They never learn how to deal with criticism and negative consequences, so when they are confronted with the harsh realities of existence, which is more often cruel and painful, they either lash out with anger or panic in fear.

The truth is that man is a fallen being that we are imperfect, thus no matter what we try to do to solve a problem with the best of intentions will always bring about unforeseen negative consequences. You cannot derive perfection from imperfection just as mortal beings cannot be immortal. It is because we are imperfect that we should strive always for betterment, seeking to learn and improve without arrogance of omniscience, as we should strive to live each day with gratitude, making the best while we are alive without fearing our mortality.

Of course we no longer duel and fight with swords, but the ethos and wisdom gained from swordsmanship is the true value of martial arts yesterday and is still today. It is not to inflate our ego and delude our minds with enhanced self-esteem, but it is to be humble and to prepare our lives so that we may die well, not in panic, but in peace. As martial artists we train everyday, all of our lives learning how to fight for a fight that may never come. As we advance, we come to realize that we do not have anything to prove to ourselves or to others and we never seek or provoke a fight, avoiding it at all costs, realizing the value of our training is not fighting, but in the inner peace, calmness, and humility which it instills. At least that is how it should be. However, when the fight, the enemy comes we hope to be prepared, to be ready not with techniques as surely we know countless many, but that we may face our enemy, our demon with courage, ready to die and not coward, panicking with the fear of death.

In contrast, a person who is not a martial artist relies on others, primarily the police, the government to protect them from harm, taking the risk that the probability of them never being in a violent altercation is on their side. This offers them a false sense of security and well being, allowing them to live out their lives in some comfort. However, when the unexpected attack takes place, they panic and rely on their instinctual fight or flight response to save them. This is the condition we are facing now, a whole society of people acting out on instinct without any reason or thought.

This is how we as teachers and practitioners of martial arts can be a positive force within our society by teaching how to overcoming our primal fears. Then, we must show how to apply these principles and values learned on the mat into their daily lives to live as a warrior, as a Hwarang (A Flowering Knight). Not to live in arrogance and defiance, but by being respectful and humble to the fragility of life and the supreme power of God, living our lives mindfully striving to always do our best with what we are endowed for each of our purpose on earth in order to honor our Creator.

"...And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?"

Luke 12:25

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