

What Colour is Your Belt??

So, it's Thursday night. Training night. You don your trusty Gi, throw your equipment bag in the trunk of the car and head out to the dojo. As you put on your Obi, you start thinking about the upcoming grading, what is expected, do you know your kihon, maybe enough kata (if you do them), do you remember the fine points of O-Soto-Gari, and how to perform a wrist throw from a cross hand grab. You really want that next belt, but are you good enough?

It's a pretty good class but you can't help but notice how the younger, more flexible students can perform flying jugari rolls over 2 or 3 people, heck, there's even one guy who can perform midair somersaults and land on his feet and start fighting without missing a beat. Is your technique really good enough to get you to that next belt level when there are many other people that are stronger, faster, younger and more flexible than you? Don't you think you'll look pretty silly out on the floor next to these guys as you try to muddle through your breakfalls and come-alongs? What the heck are you doing here anyway?

Most people have had this train of thought at some point or another. Either you start your Martial Arts career later in life, maybe you have asthma or some other physical or health issue, maybe you just have a little trouble grasping the concepts of Martial Arts. One of the most important things my Sensei taught me in the early stages of my training is that Martial Arts; Karate, Jiu-Jitsu, Kung-Fu or whatever style you train in shouldn't be about ego or competition. The goal of martial arts is not to be better than the next person, but to be the best martial artist that YOU can be. If you have some success in tournaments or other competitions that's great, but it shouldn't be the centre of your core training.

Bruce Lee said; "Knowledge of martial arts actually means self knowledge. A martial artist has to take responsibility for himself and accept the consequences of his own doing....To me, ultimately, martial arts means honestly expressing yourself. Now it is very difficult to do. It has always been very easy for me to put on a show and be cocky, and be flooded with a cocky feeling and feel pretty cool and all that. I can make all kinds of phoney things...But to express one's self honestly, not lying to one's self, now that is very hard to do".

So how do you train and practice martial arts "honestly"? How do you do anything else "honestly"? It simply means you get out on the floor and do the best you can do, all night, every night. Don't try to be something or someone that you're not. You're not in the dojo to impress anyone else. You're not in the dojo to show off how good you are, or to make excuses for what you can't do. You're there to train, to learn, to pick up a tip here and there. Your Sensei will do everything in his/her power to assist in the learning process but ultimately it's up to you. Being honest with yourself means training hard in what you know and EXTRA hard in what you DON'T know. Being honest with yourself means

knowing you can work a little harder and doing it, to make yourself a better martial artist. Training honestly means getting off the couch, even though it's been a long day and you'd really rather just kick back and watch the ball game, but you go anyway and train as hard as you can to make yourself a better martial artist. Conversely, knowing that you have bad knees or a bad back and trying to show off a flying jugari roll is really taking a risk that you are going to get injured, so maybe you better not try it. It's not about being better than the next person or making excuses, it's about training honestly, to the best of your ability, to be the best martial artist that YOU can be. Period.

So, what colour is your belt? Who cares? As Miyagi said in "Karate Kid", a belt is to hold up your pants. Whether you're a white belt, yellow, orange or whatever, it doesn't matter. What matters is honesty to yourself in your training and integrity both on and off the floor. Be YOUR best and you will be THE best.

Cheers!

By Sensei Gary Hollman, Instructor, 8 Wing Trenton Martial Arts Club, CFB Trenton, Ontario.