

## **Statement of Philosophy**

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As I prepare for my test for Decided Black Belt, I have had a chance to reflect upon my practice in Hapkido. Specifically, I have thought about the differing levels of ability in a diverse group of people in a Hapkido club. I have come to two conclusions: that, regardless of natural ability, Hapkido offers something for everybody, and that because of that, persistence should be emphasized over performance.

Hapkido is not just for gifted athletes and naturally coordinated people. People with all kinds of limitations are going to walk into your club asking to learn Hapkido. Should they be turned away if they are overweight, weak, over 30 years old or physically disabled in some way? Of course not - I think everyone would agree that self-defense skills should be learned by everyone interested in doing so. In fact, it could reasonably be argued that those who don't resemble college football players might need to know self-defense skills even more than those who do.

We should ask ourselves what the purpose of teaching Hapkido is. Is the end goal of teaching Hapkido to turn out perfect martial arts machines, capable of executing flawless techniques at lightning speed and falling with the grace of Olympic divers? Is the goal to instill the values of self-confidence, self-control, and self-discipline? Is it to help others get into shape while making new friends? Or is it something much simpler? I believe that the purpose of teaching Hapkido is to teach self-defense to as many people as we can reach. The many natural side benefits to practicing Hapkido should not be overlooked; however, exclusive of those great side-effects, the main point of teaching Hapkido is to teach self-defense to others.

Often, students with less natural athletic ability, if they persist long enough to become advanced rank, make the best teachers. Students for whom everything comes easy often don't understand why everyone else can't "just do it" like they can and become frustrated when trying to teach others. Teachers who have had to struggle to learn each technique can often immediately identify a student's difficulty and offer suggestions because they experienced the same difficulty themselves.

I think that as teachers, to encourage those students to whom success does not come easily, we should emphasize dedication over the ability to learn quickly. The mark of a good club is not how great its students are when they begin Hapkido, but rather how good they are after practicing for ten, twenty or more years. Regular class attendance, enthusiasm and persistence in the face of difficulty are all attributes that students can control, unlike natural aptitude, and are characteristics that should be rewarded with praise and encouragement. Persistence will be these students' salvation, because in the long run, persistence is the great equalizer.

I believe that persistence is the key to long-term success in any area. It has been said that "Ninety percent of success is just showing up." There is no substitute for working out in class two or three times a week, every week. It is possible to advance through the ranks by training hard for a few months after long absences (I know this because my own attendance record has

been spotty at times due to work, graduate school and a recent surgery), but this method will not lead to real mastery of Hapkido techniques. Consistent attendance is the best way.

In order to be able to do anything in a consistent way, it is necessary to discover a pace and intensity that you will be able to sustain over the long run. When many students first start Hapkido, they work out with a vengeance. However, that pace may not be sustainable for a long period. “The candle that burns twice as bright burns half as long” is an old proverb that still holds true.

I recently read an article in a sports magazine that said that when top athletes were asked what the most important factor in their successful training has been, the answer most of them gave was: To be able to train consistently, which depended mostly on avoiding injury or illness. For Olympic-level athletes who train for hours every day, illness is the major problem since overtraining lowers immune resistance, although injuries do occur as well. However, for Hapkido practitioners, injury is the demon we all face every time we let someone throw us. How many students have each of you known personally who quit Hapkido after an injury?

The very nature of practicing Hapkido exposes us to the risk of being injured. There is no way to entirely eliminate that risk, no matter how careful everyone is. In truth, there is risk in any goal that is worth achieving. However, there are ways to mitigate risk. In the case of Hapkido, learning how to fall correctly, performing techniques in a controlled manner until you have learned them well, teaching students to respect the safety of other students above all else – these are all ways that Hapkido can be practiced more safely. Practicing safely may not sound very exciting, but it reduces the risk of injury and increases the chance that students will be around for a long time. Everyone knows the story of the tortoise and the hare.

To persist in any endeavor, one also must set moderate short-term and long-term goals. Setting goals that are attainable is key to having the desire to continue working at something over a long time. For instance, a good short-term goal might be to attend class two or three times a week, or to test for the next rank at least every six months. An attainable medium-term goal could be to reach the rank of first-degree black belt in four or five years. A long-term goal could be to continue practicing Hapkido for the next twenty to thirty years. If you must move to a city with no Hapkido club to practice with, you might want to start one yourself, with the goal of training hundreds or thousands of students, much like the example of Master Pak. These are all worthy goals that are not unrealistic for anyone who has the interest and persistence to complete the incremental steps necessary to achieve them.

Today is a significant milestone in my life, and not just because I am fulfilling a longtime goal of mine to earn the rank of Black Belt. Today is also my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. Now that I am “over the hill,” I am considering the effect that growing older has had and will continue to have on my practice of Hapkido. I can already see the effect of the six and one-half years that have passed since I began Hapkido. I have put on a few pounds (a trend which I hope to reverse or at least halt), my joints ache a bit more, I am slower to recover from the stress of falling and my techniques and entire attitude are less aggressive. Like any change, there are both good and bad sides to aging. I have become more self-confident as I gain the wisdom of experience and I hope it will make me a better teacher.

To be able to persist in Hapkido for many years, it's important find a way of practicing that will allow for the natural changes that accompany aging. For instance, relying on strength, agility or quickness to do techniques effectively works fine for a 20-year old, but the same strategy might not work so well for a person in their sixties. Emphasizing simple techniques that utilize the principle of unbalancing your attacker might be a more effective way of approaching self-defense for older students.

It will be an interesting experiment to see what works best for me when I am forty years old, or fifty, or sixty. Nothing is guaranteed, but I truly hope that I will be able to persist in my practice of Hapkido through the celebrations of those birthdays. I also hope that I will be able to teach self-defense to many students of differing abilities in the coming years.