

Statement of Philosophy
Beth Cody
October 16, 1999

Balance in Hapkido and Life

As I have practiced Hapkido, one of the things I have become aware of is the importance of balance. Balance can have many different meanings for different people and in different contexts. As a white belt, balance was something physical I thought of only as it related to my own body movements. If I could execute a technique without losing my balance and falling over, I felt I was doing quite well (in fact, I still feel this way!).

In the five and one-half years since I began practicing Hapkido, balance has come to mean other things to me. Physically, I now try to pay as much attention to my attacker's balance as to my own, attempting to manipulate his or her balance to my own purpose. I have seen larger, stronger Hapkido students do techniques effectively without emphasizing this unbalancing of the attacker; however, I believe that being of smaller size makes employing this principle crucial for me.

There must be balance between slow and fast execution of techniques. As beginners, we all learn techniques in different ways. Some more coordinated students develop speed and a snappy technique as green belts, but lack the understanding of how pausing or slowing at certain points of a technique actually makes the throw more effective. They often throw their partner so quickly that the throw is way ahead of the partner's fall and the result is an awkward-looking throw that may injure the partner. Other less aggressive students, and I write from my own experience here, often lack speed and power in their techniques even as advanced students. Their throws always appear to be at half speed and they seem to be in no hurry to change this. However, I believe that the differences between the two types of students eventually smooth out. The slower student eventually gains confidence in his or her techniques and executes them faster, and the lightning-fast student begins to understand that faster isn't always better.

The same balance is important in strength. Often, bigger, stronger students will do fairly well at first by relying on their strength to muscle their partner into submission. However, smaller, weaker students sometimes have an advantage in that they never had superior physical strength to rely on. They may have an easier time understanding the principle of non-resistance. But they also could often benefit from spending some time in the gym lifting weights, because physical strength can be an asset, not only when dealing with an attacker, but in day-to-day living. Again, both types will eventually become more similar as they work toward mastery of techniques. At a certain point, the strong learn to yield and the weak become powerful.

As I have prepared for this test, I have trained to be in the best physical condition I can be in. I have not only worked out in class, but have also lifted weights, done cardiovascular exercise and worked on my flexibility. During this process, it has become clear to me that to constantly train would lead to a state of overtraining, which would result in reversal of gains made. Athletes must also rest. Stress and recovery, stress and recovery – that balance is what all great athletic training programs have in common.

In any club there must be balance between students in their backgrounds and abilities. A balanced group of white belts should include a 40-year-old lawyer and a 17-year-old high school student; a college athlete on wrestling scholarship and a stay-at-home mom trying to get into shape; a construction worker and a post-doctoral fellow; a police officer seeking to learn how to safely control violent offenders and a 5'2" woman who wants to learn how to defend herself. Each has much to learn from and to teach the others in their group. Physically, the stronger will learn control and the less-athletic will learn coordination. Socially, there are important benefits from exposure to a diverse group of people. Younger and older students can learn to trust and respect each other through working out together. Graduate students, often surrounded only by professors and other graduate students, have the opportunity to better understand reality by spending time with average, non-college-educated people, who in turn stand to benefit from exposure to the interests of college students. Men and women can see and accept the ways in which they are similar, as well as different. There is a place for everyone in Hapkido.

As I become more advanced in Hapkido and try to set a good example for those who have recently joined our club, I realize that there must be balance between teaching and learning. Like everyone who has written one of these papers before me, I thought when I started that becoming a black belt would mean that I really knew what I was doing and had all the answers. Of course, now I know that I am really just beginning to learn in earnest. However, I *have* learned enough to start teaching other people what I know, and must balance my time between working out in class and teaching others so that other advanced students may work out too. I have also discovered that each time I teach a technique to a beginning student, I also invariably learn something about the technique that I didn't previously know.

I also have become aware that the principle of balance is applicable to areas of life other than Hapkido and the physical realm. For instance, I have been working in a corporate job for a little over one year now, and have discovered that I must pay attention to the balance between work and life outside of work. "All work and no play makes Beth a dull girl." The demands of my job upon my time and focus must be counter-balanced by my other interests.

I have realized during my one-and-a-half years of marriage to my husband how important it is that there be balance between partners. One person cannot always have things their way. Both must make compromises so that each will be happy. This is seen in the dojang as well – everyone not only works on throwing their partner, but must also let their partner throw them. This maximizes everyone's benefit from class.

I have tried to be as physically and mentally tough as I can be, but have come to realize that no one can always be strong, everyone must lean on others at points in their lives. There must be balance between self-sufficiency and letting others know that they are needed.

There must be balance between planning and action. Those who become successful in any area must spend time planning what they wish to do, but must also act upon those

plans. People who spend their whole life planning but never implementing their plans will never get anything accomplished, and those who act without planning will be forever without direction. A corollary to this is fear. Feeling fear is our body's way of letting us know that we should carefully consider what we are about to do, instead of pushing ahead without thinking. Fear is the great balancer between caution and action.

There must be balance between the physical and the intellectual. I began to practice martial arts originally not just for self-defense and to be able to take care of myself, but also because I knew that my intellectual goals in college must be balanced by physical ones. My physical training now balances nicely with my job, which mostly involves sitting, thinking and using a computer.

There are many other areas in which I have become aware of balance: Now that I have income from my job, I must balance spending and saving. I try to eat a balanced diet. At work, I spend quite a bit of time trying to get assets and liabilities to balance on the balance sheets of my financial models.

Finally, as the leaves begin to turn color and fall to the ground, I have become aware of how nature balances each year between growth and new life in Spring and withering and dying in Autumn. Our club membership seems to ebb and flow in a similar manner. Each semester many new students join our club. Some, like annual flowers or baby rabbits, will practice with us for only a short time before disappearing. Some, like squirrels or hardier plants, will work out for several years before graduating or moving away. A few, like sturdy trees, will remain as black belts for many years. All of us eventually move on or decide to focus our energy on other parts of our lives at some point. However, the important thing is that enough students start, enough students stay and enough stay long enough to teach. With that balance the club remains a vibrant ecosystem in which all students can thrive and learn.

The word balance can mean many things. I have touched on a few facets of what the term means to me in this paper. I know that my understanding of balance will change over time and as I gain a deeper understanding of Hapkido and life.