

Statement of Philosophy
By: Mike McDonald, October 2003

When I started studying Hapkido I thought that if I became a black belt I could defend myself from any attack and be known as a ‘tough guy who you didn’t mess with.’ As I learned more techniques and how to do ones I already knew in different ways I found many imperfections. Sometimes my grip would be lost from sweat on my partner’s wrist or I would lose my balance and have to start the technique over. I became somewhat scared at the realization that no matter how good I became at Hapkido I would never be invulnerable.

I asked myself if I should just quit and start taking a full contact mixed martial art like Ultimate Fighting Champions do to become as tough as I could. But if I dedicated my life to being able to beat people up what kind of man would I be? If I was living a great life that I enjoyed very much would losing a stupid fist fight make life not worth living any more? Of course it wouldn’t, I should concentrate my time on what I enjoy doing instead of worrying about something so trivial.

I don’t need to fight to prove myself. I have learned that there’s so much more to me than just martial arts. When I learned that fact is when I realized there’s more to martial arts than fighting. The three principles of Hapkido have greater meaning than just ways to defeat an opponent. I haven’t just learned self defense, I’ve learned respect for others, self discipline, and the importance of continuous improvement. Life is not like climbing a mountain where you can reach the top and rise no further but rather like swimming upstream. There is no end to the water current but it’s not about finding the end, it’s about growing ever stronger by always pushing yourself forward. My many instructors still attend seminars to learn new ideas despite how much they already know.

They pass this knowledge onto others like myself and not only improve themselves but the community around them. I respect them not only for their martial art skills but also for being great all around individuals.

I believe that when I originally joined Hapkido and wanted to be a 'tough guy' I was looking to gain respect by taking it from others. Fighting will not make others respect me but fear and hate me. Fighting destroys others instead of improving them. I can gain respect by respecting others first. If after improving myself I use what I have learned to improve my community maybe I can set an example that others will follow.

I now know that the journey of continuous improvement is never ending and that I must do my part to improve others as others have done for me. I must always push myself to learn and stay alert to the lessons being taught around me. While I have learned much more than self defense in Hapkido I know there may still come a time when I must physically defend myself and will do so without hesitation.