

## What Black Belt Means To Me Robyn Goodwin

If someone would have asked me as a white belt what Black Belt meant to me, I would have answered very differently than how I answer that same question today, weeks away from demonstrating for my black belt rank. As a white belt, I thought black belt was the end. I thought it was a place of having arrived! I truly didn't think there was much to learn after reaching that level. Today, however, my thoughts are vastly different. After collectively studying Martial Arts for over 3 years, the closer I get to earning my 1<sup>st</sup> Dan black belt in Tang Soo Do, the picture is becoming much clearer and my perception has changed tremendously. Black belt is not the end, it is truly the beginning.

Yes, I have worked diligently to get to the level I am at. I have spent numerous hours in the dojang and at home doing basic drills or fundamentals over and over again. I have been faced with techniques that I thought were so challenging I would often wonder if I would ever be able to do them. Being a true Martial Artist though means not backing away from a challenge. You must go forward and do it and so I would. No matter how awkward the technique seemed or how incredibly inept I would feel in the attempts to execute them, I would do it. And with each attempt, improvement would follow. As improvement happens, confidence is built. I eventually learned that I would just have to do it and the rest would follow.

This principle can be applied to other areas in life where challenges arise. None of us are guaranteed a life of ease. In fact, I would dare say that each and every person has areas in life where they doubt their ability to make it through. Sometimes in life the valleys seem low, the road seems rocky, the air seems dry, the heat seems unbearable, the mountains un-scalable and we feel all alone. It is during these times that we must look within ourselves and search to see what we are made of. Are we victims or are we conquerors? Are the circumstances we find enveloping us going to determine our attitude and how we respond, or are we going to instead recognize and accept that circumstances are not always within our control, but that our response is?

In Martial Arts, one facet is breathing. Anyone who has studied Martial Arts learns that the key to power, to execution of techniques, and to controlling our energy and endurance is to control our breathing. The parallel in other areas of life is to apply this same principle in our thought process. Rather than allowing our emotions to drain us or to move us to respond irrationally or out of control, we must harness our thoughts and emotions the same way we control our breathing. In fact, I have learned that when my emotions begin to overpower or consume me, the faster I recognize this and simply focus on my breathing, the easier it becomes to rein the emotions in and think logically and analytically.

Another facet of Martial Arts is *kyuk-pa*, or breaking. We learn that breaking is more mental than physical. Yes there are some physical things to consider when breaking, such as position and what area we strike with, but the most significant aspect is mental. When we approach the board or the brick, we must *see* the hand or the foot going through the object, prior to doing it. We must *go through* it. If we

do not see this prior to executing the technique, we will more often than not limit ourselves and stop short of breaking. The simple fact is that we already decided in our mind that we could not break and therefore we have created a self fulfilling prophecy. It should not surprise us. There is yet again, life application here. For in life we are faced with obstacles. We must approach them in this same fashion. We can look at the obstacle and see that we are going to go through it and thus come out the other side of it, or we can choose to believe that we will not make it through. If we choose the latter, it should come as no surprise when we do not succeed.

Still another facet of Martial Arts is forms. Forms are a series of individual techniques combined and choreographed into a pattern. As a beginner student, these seem so overwhelming, just the memorizing of the pattern alone can be intimidating. It is common to start out very rigid. As we move up in rank though and do form after form and as the techniques become second nature, combined with our control over our breathing and the focus of our ki power or energy, the forms become our own. We become one with the form. Though two people standing side by side may execute the same form, each will look different because it is personalized. Eventually there comes a point where one goes from thought first movement second, to movement first thought second. For me personally, it is just now at this level of candidate for black belt that I am beginning to understand and feel the art in Martial Arts. The life application here is simply to recognize each individual's uniqueness and gifts. We are no better or worse than the person standing next to us. We each have varying talents and gifts. The choice lies within whether or not and how we utilize them.

So as I demonstrate for black belt and earn this rank, I am humbled. I am beginning to feel the foundation under my feet. This is what black belt means to me. It is an exciting and humbling place, for with this rank comes responsibility, responsibility to live out the values and to teach others. It means that the foundation has been built through hard work and dedication on my part, but even more so through hard work and dedication of all who have contributed to teaching me. I am very much looking forward to adding to that foundation, brick by brick, layer by layer. I am blessed by the individuals who recognize the warrior spirit within me and who are willing to dedicate their time and energy to teaching me. We share in this journey together. It is an honor and pleasure to share this day with each of you.

In life we will always have trials. Remember that though we cannot control everything around us, we can control our response. As I approach the next step on this journey, I am reminded of the poem "The Flowering Warrior" written by Robert J. Ott. I read the poem in the biography of Master Robert J. Ott, "Certain Victory". Reading this book was a turning point in my life because it showed me that even when it seems all odds are against you, you still have a choice. The choice is to view yourself as a victim and surrender to the assailant, whether it be a person or circumstance, or to search deep within the recesses of your heart and realize that you are a warrior and that a warrior never surrenders.

### **“The Flowering Warrior”**

When the wind and the cold air cuts through the skin while the endless surrounding of  
blackness encompasses our existence

In life we must then learn to see the true light.

For in life no one can take away our lust, passions, drives and dreams.

Nor can they take away the strength, courage and Indomitable spirit that we all carry inside.

Ultimately, the love of life and others will persevere through all of the challenging journeys that  
are faced.

In all we hold that of a Flowering Warrior who will never surrender.