

TKO Karate Code – Relation to classical Bushido by Shihan Ceci Cheung

The reciting of the Karate Code at the beginning of every training session is to heighten our awareness that the karate we practice is a powerful fighting tool and can readily endanger others if we do not exercise proper control. We train diligently to such technical proficiency that our body can become a dangerous weapon. Without being cognizant of the need to maintain peace and compassion, we and our action can be detrimental to society. Hence the Karate Code is a poignant reminder for us to develop self discipline while seeking a character with integrity and honor thereby maintaining a nonviolent existence at all times.

Let us consider the TKO Karate Code that we adopt and explore the meaning therein:

Henceforth I shall faithfully train to strengthen my mind and body.

As stated, this precept teaches us to be loyal to our commitment to karate, to improve and refine our body and mind so that we are prepared to act with bravery and sincerity.

I am willing to endure rigorous training to achieve my goals.

This is our pledge to truthfully dedicate ourselves to karate-do, to gain self discipline and to persevere in our training so that we can achieve our goals with diligence and honesty through persistence in action.

As my strength increases I shall seek to cultivate a gentle heart.

Vital to the essence of karate-do is attaining the attitude of kindness and compassion, especially when we become increasingly stronger and more effective in our karate skills. This precept reminds us to be humble and to extend ourselves to others with benevolence.

I shall not use my skills outside the dojo except in the most extreme circumstances.

This precept emphasizes the need for us to exercise proper judgment and be extremely hesitant in using our skills except for a very good and justifiable cause. The ability to arrive at an appropriate judgment under adverse circumstances is dependent on our understanding of what constitutes justice and truth.

At all times I will try to avoid inflicting injury upon another person.

This is a reminder for us not to unnecessarily harm others without a reasonable motive. Instead we want to show respect by demonstrating politeness and compassion towards others.

I will not brag about my skills nor use it maliciously.

As we become proficient in our physical skills, we must exercise self control and not be boastful of our ability. By attaining self esteem, there is no need to promote self aggrandization.

I shall train in the spirit of humility.

As we adhere to the Karate Code, we strive to let go of arrogance while humble ourselves to uphold a character of honor and humility.

Thus the TKO Karate Code, not only prompts us to achieve proper behavior and respectable attitude, but it also shapes us into a character that is built upon faith, steadfastness, perseverance, courtesy, honesty, courage, compassion and integrity. These same words are indeed depicted on the Shomen wall at the hombu dojo. In this modernized and affluent society, we are spoiled by life's good offerings taking things for granted. We become careless ignoring principles and err with little consequences. We often are nonchalant and avoid responsibilities unless it is to our own advantage. Self discipline is but a distant echo. So following the Karate Code faithfully may not be in our agenda as it requires sincere motivation, commitment, effort and perseverance. Karate-do is a discipline that can realign our thinking and our character. The Karate Code helps us to be responsible and accountable, guides us to have the passion to excel, and steers us towards becoming contributing members of society.

It is no coincidence that the Karate Code has precedence. Historically this code of ethics is seen in the Warrior's Code followed by the Samurai of the 16th century. This Code, referred to as Bushido, was strictly adhered to and regarded as the 'soul' of the Bushi. As interpreted in the book, "Bushido: The Soul of Japan" by Inazo Nitobe, Bushido symbolizes the attitude of respect, politeness, benevolence, loyalty, veracity, sincerity, honor and humility, and bravery. These are the same traits that are emphasized in our Karate Code. One may reason that the sword-bearing Samurai were retainers whose duties were to loyally protect and kill if necessary. Therefore it is out of necessity that they followed a strict set of principles that would allow their peaceful coexistence in a society marked with chaos and redress.

On the other hand, in the 21st century we live in an orderly society aimed at peace and harmony. The Karate Code may be superfluous as we no longer settle disagreements with killing and destruction. However, although we may not be killing in the physical sense, we are indeed capable of killing mentally and spiritually. Killing others' mind, passion, hope and spirit are much more deleterious than killing their body. As a karate practitioner, we attempt to steer clear of this behavior. The Karate Code serves as our guide in this endeavor.

So, as we recite the Karate Code, let us not stop at interpreting the words superficially. It may be worthwhile to reach further into the inner values of the Code and reflect upon its meaning and how we could apply it towards building a character of honor and integrity. Ultimately, it is up to us to accept and incorporate this code into our life.