

The Tradition of Kun Gek Do

A tradition is a custom that is memorized and passed down from generation to generation, originally without the need for a writing system.

Whether cultural or organizational, a tradition may include one or all of the following: dance or specialized movements, ceremonial clothing, ritual, tests or challenges, and a code of conduct. Like many martial arts, Kun Gek Do was born from tradition and includes all of these. We practice stylized movements (hyung, one-steps), wear specialized clothing (dobok), salute our flag, meditate and bow to seniors (ritual), participate in rank grading and tournaments (tests / challenges), and behave in a prescribed way with our peers and seniors (code of conduct).

Unfortunately, modern societies are changing quickly, constantly striving for the new and improved, making it much more difficult to keep a tradition alive. There are still some cultures that continue to "live" their traditions every day, but very few. Most try to walk both lines - the modern way and the old way, and it's a tough balancing act. One side will always tend to dominate (usually the modern) at the expense of the other.

As students of Kun Gek Do, we also walk both lines - living our normal lives with one set of rules and then switching gears to enter the martial arts culture with a completely different mindset and customs. Many adults, especially beginners will quit training after a short time. They may be put off by the formalities of bowing and responding with "Yes Sir / Ma'am" because it makes them feel subservient and uncomfortable, or they may have underestimated the time and dedication required to properly learn the art in a traditional environment, as opposed to getting the quick results promised with many new non-traditional, reality-based systems.

In the end, time will always be a factor in determining the effectiveness or value of any given thing. Traditional martial arts have stood the test of time for a reason. They are effective in the real world and they also have a positive, beneficial effect on other areas of our lives. That's a winning combination. The question will continue to be, is the tradition and formality what one really wants or needs and is it worth the time and effort?

Everyone will have to answer that for themselves, but for those that consider traditional training of little value or useless, I would say this - The Boy / Girl Scouts are different than just going camping on weekends with a friend of the family and learning how to pitch a tent. Graduating from a Police Academy is different than completing a two week course on police tactics and the use of firearms. And finally, what it takes to earn the right to be called a Navy SEAL pretty much needs no explanation. The greatest value of tradition, I believe, is in what you become, rather than what you get, and that is a very important distinction shaped by time, quality of training, curriculum, organizational structure, protocol and of course the participant's attitude towards it all.

National Karate Institute | 9 West Main Street | Moorestown, NJ 08057 | 856-866-8665

nkikarate@moorestownmartialarts.com

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Last Updated: 1/10/2011