The Hovering Threat 2

I tend to balk at Tae Kwon Do schools whose main purpose is not to teach a martial art so much as to indoctrinate kids into traditional values. "Mr. Smith," the Sa Bum Nim orders the 8-year-old, "Stand and thank your parents for bringing you into the world and keeping you well! Now receive your black belt from Sa Bum Jones!" I felt so often that the sentiments were forced, corny, and unnecessary. I am art-oriented and feel that the study of a traditional martial art automatically comes with certain social customs and attitudes that do not need to be overemphasized to produce positive, life-affirming students. However, I am re-thinking my opinion.

Today the hovering threat of bullying, terrorism, political extremism, road rage, social conflict, entertainment violence, and other anti-harmonious pastimes overwhelm traditional social values. Perhaps the TKD schools, whether or not they emphasize martial training, are A-OK precisely because they support the proper respect for parents, teachers, and the kind of society that makes a wholesome life possible.

Whether Korean, Japanese, Okinawan, or Myanmarian (Burmese), traditional martial arts seeded themselves in Western soil just at the time when the traditions that bound Western society were being lost. We are no longer publicly Judeo-Christian, publicly patriotic, publicly in favor of free enterprise, or publicly proud to be part of the Western Tradition. We have accepted multi-culturalism to such an extent that we put down our own culture in order to make another culture feel more welcomed. And yet, ironically, it is another culture—or several Asian cultures—that have come to the Westerner's rescue and have produced students who stand for something more positive than bullying, terrorism, political extremism, road rage, social conflict, entertainment violence, and other anti-harmonious pastimes.

How exactly the martial arts do that is the subject of my book *The Road to Mastery*, excerpts of which are available on our book page. Important to this essay, however, is that traditional martial arts with their social hierarchies, their blatant manifestations of respect and their culture of achievement offer a traditional direction to both child-development and adult self-development in a world that suggest any direction is as good as any other and "Don't you dare criticize my direction, you racist traditionalist, you!" Far from wanting to criticize the directions free people take in a free society, the traditional martial arts offer their own direction that people are welcome to adopt if they feel it will benefit them. And thank goodness they do. If it were not for the traditional martial arts, who would teach simple politeness and respect of others except for schools, houses of worship, and families? Many families have differed to the schools while the schools have differed to whatever is politically in fashion in the society or socially in fashion in the adolescent mentality. That leaves the houses of worship and, ironically, the traditional Asian martial arts.

Both have their own problems. I certainly am not blind to how easily authority in a religious institution or in a martial arts school can be abused, but in my opinion, the cultural pendulum has swung like a tentatively

gripped staff. If we don't take hold and bring it back the other way, we'll lose control and it will injure some innocent…or maybe a whole culture of innocents.

I am not suggesting a rush to fill dojo, dojangs, kwoons, churches, synagogues, mosques, and Buddhist temples. I am suggesting something much simpler: address the hovering threat of a disrespectful, potentially violent society by choosing for oneself and one's children that which is respectful, that which favors life-affirming values, and that which holds violence as a last resort. Hmm, do we know anything that might fill that bill?