

Pain In Taekwondo and Life Builds Character

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Enduring pain in taekwondo and in life helps a person become stronger and teaches important life lessons in the development of our character.

The Dictionary describes pain as physical suffering or discomfort caused by illness or injury and mental suffering or distress. Training in any discipline, whether it be Taekwondo, hockey, or ballet, can teach you about life. I am a martial artist, and I train in Taekwondo. I am grinding out my journey of becoming a Black Belt. Like any sport there is pain that comes with participating, training and competing in Taekwondo. In Taekwondo you will experience pain. This pain comes in many different forms, such as mental and physical. Enduring pain in taekwondo and in life helps a person become stronger and teaches important life lessons in the development of our character.

Training in Taekwondo has a lot of exercises that build strength and flexibility because Taekwondo is a physical activity; it requires me to move. Even if I previously trained on the court, soccer field, ice rink, or in a gym, chances are some of the muscles I am going to move in taekwondo, I may have not moved or trained before. Taekwondo requires me to have good rotation and power. I need both for blocks, punches, kicks, and single legged stances, to name a few. A lot of these moves felt weird and uncomfortable at first. To help these moves feel more natural I do these moves repeatedly—a lot! This repetitive motion is one of the reasons I feel physical pain. Another reason I feel physical pain is from sparring. Sparring is like an active dance with your partner—except that in this dance you are trying to kick and punch them. Most people do not come into the studio familiar with what it feels like to be hit with a punch or a kick to the head. I know I was not. When I first blocked someone from hitting me, it hurt. Taekwondo also challenges me with the pain of learning to break a board, as well as the regular everyday type of injuries that come with doing sports. I once broke my toe while I was undressing from hockey practice. It is a funny story that involves a toilet, but that is for a different time. As I am

writing this essay, I am struggling through a different injury, this time to my hand. I broke my thumb. Training has become more difficult since then because I had to limit myself and learn to do techniques with a brace on. Dealing with the physical pain is all part of the journey in taekwondo. I have learned that pain is part of the process, and at times necessary. I have found that goals I want to accomplish take hard work, and striving for them often puts me in situations that produce pain.

I am practicing taekwondo to become a Black Belt, so I have felt my fair share of pain in the past, present and I am sure the future, too. You cannot escape physical pain if you do something physical, so you need to learn how to deal with it. This is a daily challenge for all martial artists. One example of this is a place that all White Belts find themselves in. An open hand form is a memorized routine where you use your hands and feet as weapons. We do not learn the whole thing at once, so we have to hold stances in place for what felt like hours. A common place to get “stuck” in the White Belt Open Hand form is in a middle stance—time moves slow here. A middle stance is like a squat, but your legs are further out than your shoulders. My first time in a middle stance felt like I was stuck there for hours. It was hard; I felt burning and shaking in my muscles. I felt like my legs could start a bonfire. The middle stance is a great place to develop my patience. While I am waiting in a middle stance trying to ignore the smell of bonfire smoke, I wait on others to finish the rest of the Primary Open Hand Form. I have also found that this situation can produce peace in me, as I have found myself striving to calm my mind through the burning.

Learning to deal with physical discomfort is a mental game, but Taekwondo also has tasks that challenge your memory and mental focus. Open hand forms, which I mentioned before, require memorization, as do weapons forms, drills, and basic techniques, to name a few.

All of these have specific ways to move. Some have dozens of moves in a specific order that I must remember. This is painful because remembering them all is not easy. It is very frustrating at times; I have shed a tear or two in frustration over some of these forms and drills. The memorization is an on-going process, but there are other areas I am still trying to conquer.

I am also required to perform in front of people. I much prefer doing taekwondo with my family—they train too. I think performing and being judged is stressful and at times makes me feel anxious. Or should I say made me feel anxious? I have learned that the best way to reduce the fear that circumstances may bring up is to face them head on. Throughout my training I have been required to perform in front of people—over, and over, and over. Now I know do not need my family to get through a performance. Facing my fears has given me confidence in my martial arts. I still get nervous at times, and that is okay. My training has equipped me to handle the challenges of life, both on and off the mat.

Taekwondo is filled with many things that require me to be mentally engaged, such as learning the proper way to care for my body in order to avoid injury. Taekwondo is a physical sport, and I have come home from class tired, hungry, sore, and on many occasions, stinky. Caring for your basic hygiene may not be something immediately connected to training; but eating right, and getting the proper rest, and showering, are important. Plus, your family will thank you for not smelling like an old pair of shoes. Another area I need to remain focused in is proper body positioning. Learning to make a tight fist, or tucking your tailbone while in a middle stance, and engaging your core, to name a few, are all intended to prevent injury. One of our character components at Challenge Martial Arts is *Respect*. The motto of *Respect* is “show proper respect to everyone.” This includes me! Taking care of my body both in and outside the studio is how I show proper respect to myself.

I am required to do weight training to improve my strength and cardio training for my heart and lungs. This type of training helps with the speed and power of different moves as I advance as a martial artist. It is in the way I train that I learn how to deal with both the physical and mental. For example, when we are doing all the exercises for the five-minute fitness (a timed high intensity workout every Recommended must pass) and I get sore, tired, or at times have a poor attitude, then I can take a break or use positive self-talk, and then come back to the activity with a better attitude. This helps me become more disciplined and gain strength physically and mentally.

Throughout my journey it has been hard at times to have the energy and desire to make it through classes. As I got better, my strength and endurance improved. I found holding positions while waiting for other people was not as difficult as it once was. Remember the broken toe? Well, when I broke it, I didn't stop training—I still had to push through and do my Taekwondo classes. These challenging situations and setbacks have grown my confidence. I realize now that I can handle more and accomplish more than I originally thought I could.

Taekwondo will build in you more than physical and mental toughness—it builds character. Confidence is a key theme of our character components at Challenge Martial Arts. Confidence can be built in me when I push through and overcome difficult situations. Throughout my journey I am faced with many challenges and have learned that being diligent is required for me to be successful. One of my dad's favorite quotes related to diligence is, "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time!" At Challenge Martial Arts, we define Diligence as "detailed and determined." The elephant of my story is to become a Black Belt. Much like eating an entire elephant, becoming a Black Belt as a whole seems overwhelming. Achieving this goal is not going to happen overnight—it requires being determined through all the little details,

challenges, and pain. I will need to take one small bite at a time out of my elephant. A Black Belt is more than someone who “mastered” the basics. They can demonstrate the whole curriculum with a high level of skill, has character, and can endure physical and mental pain. In Recommended class, we call this *InNae*, which is Korean for perseverance. When I look back at these themes and character components, and reflect on the struggles of Taekwondo and life, I see that I have gained the confidence to take on big challenges. I will need to rely on diligence and perseverance to eat my next elephant.

I have heard my dad and Mrs. Fritsche jokingly say, “Quitting is always an option.” Some days you do not want to get out of bed, go to work, or school, and some days you do not want to go to Taekwondo. In all situations, there are consequences for not persevering. When I quit pushing, I won't get good grades in school, I don't get paid from my summer job, or I will never achieve my Black Belt in Taekwondo. In life and in Taekwondo you must be disciplined and persevere through tough days and situations, so that you can achieve your goals and create healthy patterns and thoughts in your life. In life, you earn awards or promotions, and in Taekwondo, you get better at specific techniques and can earn your next Belt. I have been committed to learning in Taekwondo at Challenge Martial Arts and achieving every Belt with my final goal being to earn my Black Belt. Even when the process is hard, I push through.

It is important to endure pain. When you can endure pain in all areas of your life, you can achieve the goals that you have, which make you feel happy and proud. You get stronger physically and mentally, so that the next time you face a challenge it is easier to tell yourself, “You’ve got this”, and keep going. Overcoming the mentally challenging aspects of Taekwondo has helped me grow in my character by producing resilience, confidence, diligence, and being less shy. Overcoming challenges physically in Taekwondo has helped me become better at hand-

eye coordination, the ability to perform difficult moves correctly and avoid hurting myself. The journey is not over—which means I can continue to grow in these areas as well as others. That means I will continue to experience the pain of training. My Black Belt journey has been hard up to this point. I have had to work through both physical and mental pain. Enduring pain in Taekwondo and in life helps a person become stronger and teaches important life lessons in the development of our character. Being able to endure physical and mental pain in Taekwondo can build mental toughness, like perseverance, pain management, and working through everyday challenges and discomfort.