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A Hwarang's Path – Overcoming the Fear of Death (Part 1)

By: **Grandmaster Taejoon Lee**

Due to the recent events, as the world regresses into a state of panic and pandemonium caused by the pandemic outbreak of the Corona Virus Covid-19, I was compelled to deliver a message of the true meaning and value of what it means to live life as a martial artist, a warrior, a Hwarang, as I feel it is most relevant in these uncertain contemporary times!

I am not going to discuss here the Covid-19 virus, as I am not an expert in the field of medicine, but I urge you to seek out credible sources on your own and get the facts rather than reacting to misinformation. However, what I will address is how we, as martial artists, warriors, as a Hwarang should deal with the fear of death as that is the main root of all fears.

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There is a saying in our Korean culture, “If you live long enough, you will endure all sufferings (or in this case all absurdities).” I have never thought in my wildest imagination that I would live to witness that one-day people would be hoarding and fighting over toilet paper, leaving the market counters desolate of any trace. How could one possibly imagine such insanity, such crazy hysterics where men, women, and even the elderly are battling it out over toilet paper, as though they are fighting for their lives? What madness can drive people to such desperate, insane behavior?

As I sit back and watch these events unfold, I could not help but to be disappointed with the human race as we are losing our sense of humanity, regressing into social behavior far worse than of any lesser animal species. Why toilet paper? We could try to reason by considering that one might be afraid the chain of production of toilet paper will cease because the majority of it is manufactured in China. Yes, but that could be true for many other items, so why toilet paper? From what I have gathered, I first mention of it was online, which started in Japan of such a rumor and the people were reacting to it by hoarding.



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This is evidence to the fact that there is really no way to rationalize irrational behavior, as it is never based on truth or facts, but out of fear. Fear is all consuming and it feeds the imagination to create the worst scenarios rooted in personal phobias, which is constantly supported by the nonstop streaming of games, movies, entertainment filled with violence, horror, gore and the apocalypse. The more one lacks proper knowledge and awareness of the Truth, the greater chance he/she will succumb to fear, although it is just an unreal imaginary fantasy, will justify it to be real no matter of the facts or the truth. Many people who were hoarding the toilet paper in the markets were asked why and not even the minority, but no one had a clue. Some of them didn't say anything as they rushed off to see what else they could hoard before it's all gone and some others said because everybody else was doing it.

Another important fact to realize from this is that we are all connected, connected through the Internet and the power of social media. Not more than a couple of days later, the same insanity was happening here in Luxembourg, Europe, UK, Australia, and in the US. Interestingly, I have heard that in South Korea, one of the three countries with the most infections of Covid-19, they have not yet started to hoard. That's some good news and I hope it will remain so, but we will see in due time. No one is isolated, no one is truly detached, and no one can escape or hide from the affects of mass hysteria, the collective consciousness, and the technology that binds us all. No one person is an island or a single bubble, unaffected by what happens in the world. We are all connected socially, economically, technologically, and what affects one person will affect us all, which Covid-19 perfectly proves, as we all live within one bubble, Earth.



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I am ashamed and appalled of our behavior as human beings, but the fact remains that I am part of the human race and I cannot just mock and criticize others. I needed better understanding for myself so that somehow I can be part of the solution and not the problem. Thus, as I was addressing an email to all the members of the World Hwa Rang Do Association on the facts of the corona virus and what measures they should take, it gave me an opportunity to share with you, the members of the martial arts community our true value within our society, especially in these uncertain, chaotic times.

It is sad but so true that only in times of crisis, weakness, tragedy, imminent threat of harm, suffering, and death that the true underlying self is revealed. In all the rest of our days we can pretend, fake, lie, deceive, manipulate, and delude ourselves to seem normal, happy, and self-righteous to others. However, deep down inside, buried at the core of our subconscious lies the demon of fear, doubt, waiting to lurk its ugly head when it's survival is threatened. We as a society, as humanity is showing its true colors and this is most disturbing.



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The way of the sword is the foundation of martial arts. With the coming of the Bronze Age came the sword and with it came the beginnings of civilization and the advancements in technology to modernity. For millenniums, it was the warrior class, which was the highest social caste who led our society in all areas of civility and governess. The tradesman, entertainers, shopkeepers, they were all of lower social status as they sold their services and themselves for money. The warrior class was the keepers of honor, nobility, and loyalty, ready to sacrifice their lives for God, King and Country, for a cause, a belief. Even as warriors, the ones without an allegiance to a King who killed only for money were not considered worthy of honor or nobility as they killed for profit rather than sacrificing for a cause.

With the advancements of technology and the introduction of gunpowder, it paved the way for mass destruction without the use of hand-to-hand combat. Warfare was no longer personal and did not require face-to-face confrontation, becoming impersonal, without emotion, and compassion. As technology surged ahead into the Industrial Age and Postmodernism, Kings and knights were abolished with the rise of states and giant companies.

Science attempted to prove that God was dead as man became more confident to control its own destiny by improving living conditions, extending longevity of life, creating abundance of leisure, and increasing of pleasures. With the destructive force of the World Wars and the ending of the Cold War, the belief of any political ideologies were subdued, paving the way for Globalization. In the process we have lost our independence, becoming completely dependent on government and technology, trading horses for cars, farms for markets, books for computers, living off the land for consumerism, and our privacy and freedom for comfort and security.

It is in my opinion that the current state of insanity, the mass hysteria is a product of our fears derived from dependency and the sense of helplessness, which comes from it. We cannot do anything without technology and government and everyday, every moment we are reminded of this fact through the mass media via Internet and smartphones. At one point in our human history, a single person possessed all the knowledge necessary to live and raise a family on his/her own. They knew how to start with nothing and by using whatever was available they provided for themselves the necessities of life. Of course this was a hard way of living, yet they knew exactly what they had control over and what was beyond their means as the reality of death was always near.

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Today, we are deluded by the advancements in the sciences, which have supposedly enhanced our way of living, surrendering any responsibility, logic or reason to the experts in their fields and leaders of government. We have become over confident, over indulgent, hedonistic, spoiled, Godless people with only greater arrogance leading to delusions of immortality and invincibility. We are somehow comforted to think that we can avoid what is the inevitable, that somehow we have control over our destiny, nature, and our lives. The truth is that there is no way we can have full control over anything; we can have some resemblance of control, but in the end the wisdom is to accept that we are powerless as it is reflected in the poetic definition of wisdom – “Wisdom is when you realize you know nothing.” Therefore, when we as individuals, as a society begin to panic it is when we are unexpectedly confronted with the reality that we are truly powerless.

Essentially, the practice of martial arts is dealing with our primal fears and learning to overcome them that give it value. It is not in winning trophies in competition, not on being the best, not learning to defend or beat another person senselessly; it's not in self-aggrandizement and creating delusions of grandeur, which it has been reduced to in modern times. Furthermore, there are many other activities, which can accomplish the same result of self-confidence and enhanced self-esteem. The most important facet of martial training is in overcoming the self, primarily of fear and ego – the fear of death. For this reason we must understand the “Way of the Sword.”

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