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4th degree Black Belt Thesis

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**The Use of Taekwon-do
for Self-Defence**

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss an issue that is traditionally thought to be at the very heart of Taekwon-do and martial arts; self-defence. It will be submitted as I test for my 4th degree black belt. A summary of my training history is included in Appendix A.

Almost all descriptions of Taekwon-do refer to its use for self-defence. Indeed, General Choi Hong Hi's condensed Encyclopedia⁽¹⁾ is entitled 'Taekwon-do, the Korean art of self-defence'. In the chapter titled 'Definition of Taekwon-do⁽²⁾' it states that 'Taekwon-do is a version of unarmed combat designed for the purpose of self-defence.'

Given General Choi's own words describing the purpose and use of Taekwon-do, one might think that there is no debate to be had in this thesis. However, Taekwon-do has often been accused of being impractical and ineffective in real situations. It has been suggested that Taekwon-do practitioners can be obsessed with technical perfection at the expense of practical application. Other accusations are that it is purely for show, with its high kicking, often acrobatic techniques that are unlikely to be useful in a real self-defence situation. A simple internet search will reveal many examples of such discussions.

Other arguments against self-defence being at the heart of Taekwon-do in the 21st century are that it is now more of a sport than a martial art designed for self-defence. Certainly, the boundaries between martial arts and sports are somewhat blurry, but the fact that Taekwondo (WTF style) is now an Olympic sport and the popularity of tournaments add weight to that suggestion.

In this thesis, I will discuss the way Taekwon-do is, or should be used for self-defence. I will highlight the importance of power and the correct application of technique, whilst commenting on its effectiveness and practicality. I will discuss the various components of Taekwon-do (such as patterns and sparring), to see if and how they contribute to self-defence. I will also try to compare Taekwon-do with some other popular martial arts in their use for self-defence. Finally, I will try to answer the question hinted at above, i.e. is self-defence the primary purpose of Taekwon-do?

To enable me (a humble 3rd degree black belt) to discuss these questions with any authority, I have e-mailed a few short questions to a number of Taekwon-do Grandmasters and Masters around the world, to try and gain a broad view of the subject from the people with the most knowledge and experience of it. Although the number of responses I had was fairly small, it has been sufficient for me to create a meaningful debate. As well as the masters from around the world, I have also questioned Master [REDACTED] (VIII) and most of the senior instructors in [REDACTED]. The questions I asked and the responses I received are included in Appendix B. What was immediately clear though, is that there are a broad range of opinions, even within [REDACTED].

As well as the input from the Masters and senior instructors, I have tried to include some meaningful quotes from a few books and websites. After discussing each point, I will try to draw some conclusions and state my own opinions.

Firstly, I will attempt to define self-defence. The first definition given on dictionary.com^[3] is 'the act of defending one's person when physically attacked, as by countering blows or overcoming an assailant.' Personally, I consider self-defence to be the reaction you make to protect yourself from an attacking opponent. The key point in that is the word 'reaction', which implies something that happens quickly and is at least partly instinctive. I read somewhere [source unknown] that self-defence is what you do in the first five seconds when someone attacks you, after which, if nobody has won, it becomes fighting or combat.



2. Power and Application

My instructors have always taught me the importance of using each technique for the correct application and particularly the importance of hitting a vital target point on the body. I remember attending a seminar with Grandmaster Rhee Ki Ha a few years ago, where he emphasised this point very strongly. He actually demonstrated the point on me in front of the class, quickly striking several points on my body with little effort, but with significant and lasting impression.

The condensed Encyclopedia discusses the importance of vital spots (Kupso). General Choi writes, 'It is essential that a student of Taekwon-do has a knowledge of the different spots so that he can use the proper attacking or blocking tool. Indiscriminate attack is to be condemned as it is inefficient and wasteful of energy^[4].'

In their e-mail responses to my questions, Mr [REDACTED] and Mr [REDACTED] (both VI) made the point that Taekwon-do give you knowledge of where best to strike, (i.e. vital spots).

One of the e-mail responses I had [REDACTED] was from an assistant to Grandmaster Choi Chang Keun (GM C.K. Choi). Mr [REDACTED] helped GM Choi to write his book, which is entitled 'The Korean Art of Taekwon-do and Early History^[5].' I was told that GM Choi teaches that 'the focus for self-defence should be on the quality of each technique not the number of techniques learnt. For self-defence, techniques must be delivered with knock out power.'

In my telephone interview with Master [REDACTED] he also made the point that 'how you perform techniques and exercises is very important' when we discussed the effectiveness of Taekwon-do in self-defence.

I believe that the point about techniques being delivered with knockout power is of key importance in Taekwon-do self-defence. The obsession with technique that some instructors have is sometimes accused of detracting from the importance of power, but the reason such detail was developed was to maximise the power of each technique. In the condensed Encyclopedia, General Choi writes that 'Taekwon-do training will result in obtaining a high level of reaction force, concentration, equilibrium, breath control and speed; these are the factors that will result in a high degree of physical power^[6].'

In a self-defence situation, I believe Taekwon-do is designed so that a single strike or kick should be sufficient to disable your attacker. The best example of this that I have come across appears in the book entitled 'A Killing Art,' by Alex Gillis^[7]. It tells a story about Grandmaster (then 2nd Lieutenant) Nam Tae Hi (GM Nam) fighting in the Korean War in 1951.

GM Nam's men were surrounded and greatly outnumbered by Chinese soldiers on Yongmun mountain, near Seoul. On the second night of the

battle the Chinese attacked GM Nam and his soldiers in their trenches. It was so dark that they couldn't use guns for fear of shooting each other and nobody could tell friend from foe. The only way GM Nam could tell if someone was an enemy was by the length of their hair. The communists all had crew cuts, but the South Koreans' hair was slightly longer. GM Nam felt a closely shaved head and struck. The man fell and GM Nam moved on. As the two armies fought in the trenches, GM Nam continued to fight in this way all night. If he felt short hair he struck, using only his hands. If it was longer hair he pulled back.

The same happened the following night and GM Nam fought in the same way again. He had no idea how many men he had hit or killed. The battle continued into a third day, but he kept fighting until he eventually collapsed from exhaustion. Afterwards, he wandered past a spot where he had been fighting the previous night. He found many dead bodies, of which more than two dozen had no bullet or knife wounds. They were the ones he had struck in the dark.

The story of GM Nam's battle on Yongmun mountain demonstrates the deadly power of Taekwon-do (even though it had not been named by then) when it is used to its full potential. Single strikes to vital spots on the body, delivered with power, had deadly effect. Although this was true combat rather than the kind of self-defence most of us are likely to experience, when Mr Gillis interviewed GM Nam in 2001 he said it was clear that GM Nam had expected to die and was defending himself against each opponent that he encountered. He was not using formal techniques, but acting instinctively, punching, striking and kicking whatever targets were available.

The final example I would use to demonstrate the importance of application and power is in the practice of self-defence / release hold (Hosin Sul) movements in the class. Too often, as an instructor demonstrates the technique for a release, or wrist lock, or similar, the student fails to understand that such techniques require speed, force and especially correct application to be effective. The chances are that if someone grabs you in a bar, they will be bigger and stronger than you, so you cannot rely on your strength to defeat them. As General Choi writes in the condensed Encyclopedia, 'releasing is performed in three different ways; either by a direct attack to a vulnerable spot, breaking the joint of the attacking hand or arm, or by a logical releasing motion, which is usually accompanied by a counter attack^[8].' He goes on to stress that against a physically strong opponent, the defender should try to make use of the opponent's momentum and coordinate body movements with those of the hands. This makes the point that the correct application of technique will be successful, where mere strength might not.

3. Body and Mind

Several of the e-mails I received made the point that for Taekwon-do self-defence to be effective, both the body and the mind must be strong. Mr [REDACTED] told me that one of GM C.K. Choi's favourite sayings is 'Train body and mind.' He said it is important to train the body first, learning techniques and becoming physically fit. Then, as training continues, the student learns mental discipline, including control over the techniques and when to use them.

Mr [REDACTED] identified 'mental and physical improvement' as one of the benefits of Taekwon-do. Mr [REDACTED] (V) also pointed out that Taekwon-do had both mental and physical benefits and I think Mr [REDACTED] (V) hinted at it, when he said that 'Taekwon-do gives you a knowledge of you.'

In the condensed Encyclopedia, General Choi devotes a whole page to the mental effects of Taekwon-do^[9] and refers to it throughout much of the book. Some of the benefits he lists are humility, courage, alertness, accuracy, self-confidence, grace, flexibility, balance, self-discipline, adaptability and self-control. There is clearly a mixture of mental and physical attributes amongst that list, but when reading the chapter, it becomes clear that there is a natural link between them and each skill or benefit complements the next.

GM C.K. Choi states in his book that 'Tae kwon do training aims to achieve the highest level of physical fitness and mental discipline^[10].' He also stresses the importance of meditation as part of Taekwon-do training 'as the power of the mind is as important as the power of the muscles^[10].'

It is clear from all the above examples that Taekwon-do cannot be considered to be a purely physical activity. Rather, it aims to strengthen both the body and the mind, to reach a perfect balance between 'ying' and 'yang'. In my opinion, this is what differentiates a true martial art from a sport.

As hinted at above, the application of mental and physical training gives the Taekwon-do student the ability to control their power, apply it correctly and so successfully defend themselves against attack.

4. Taekwon-do Components

It has often been suggested that components of Taekwon-do such as patterns and sparring, which occupy a large proportion of the training time in a typical lesson, actually contribute little or nothing to self-defence ability. Patterns are thought to be useful to practice technique and to develop balance and power, but to have no practical application. Equally, sparring is sometimes thought to be unrealistic, concentrating on high kicks rather than the ability to deal with credible attacks.

Mr Stuart Anslow's book 'Ch'ang Hon Taekwon-do Hae Sul⁽¹¹⁾' is dedicated to finding the practical applications of the patterns practised in ITF style Taekwon-do. Whilst I think he is often flawed and over-complicated in the applications he suggests, I support his philosophy that to fully understand a pattern, you must understand how each technique can be applied.

In my opinion, the techniques learned in patterns can be helpfully applied to self-defence situations, so long as the student understands that the techniques must be adjusted to fit the situation and/or the opponent. The techniques performed in patterns can be considered to be the example used in the ideal situation, i.e. where the opponent is of the same size as you and attacks from a perfect distance and angle for the technique to work.

Practising fixed sparring techniques makes you apply the techniques learned in patterns and basic movements to a real opponent, who might be of a different size and shape to you. The fixed nature of the exercise allows you to apply power and precision (attacking vital spots), in relative safety.

Free sparring then allows you to train against an opponent who moves in an unpredictable way, which teaches you to judge distance and apply techniques (albeit a limited range in competition sparring), whilst they are fighting back at the same time. Sparring also develops speed, agility and physical fitness. Finally, I think that breaking teaches you to apply technique accurately, at the optimum distance, with great power.

I received quite a mixed range of opinions on the application of Taekwon-do components to self-defence. Master [REDACTED] told me that he thinks all of the Taekwon-do components contribute to self-defence ability. However, a lot of people practice for the wrong reasons. He said that he thinks one step sparring is the best type of training for self-defence, whilst free sparring also helps, but less so.

Master [REDACTED] (VII) [REDACTED] in Ireland told me that he thinks the various training components contribute only slightly to self-defence. He said that he prefers to use techniques designed specifically to practical situations, including knees, elbows and head butts, etc.

Mr [REDACTED] stated his opinion that 'free sparring kills your self-defence,' but said that fixed sparring aids blocking and counter attacking at different distances, whilst patterns give you an idea of how to move from one attack to another. He made the point that fights very rarely involve the use of proper techniques.

Mr [REDACTED] pointed out that sparring has the benefit that it makes you accustomed to being hit and keeps you fit.

Mr [REDACTED] stated that free sparring will improve your reaction time and fixed sparring teaches you to strike with the correct tools at vital targets. He said that patterns do not contribute to self-defence, as people tend to concentrate more on looking good than visualising destroying something.

Mr [REDACTED] said that patterns are used to hone techniques. Fixed sparring brings an element of realism to the techniques by applying them in moving situations and free sparring adds continuity.

Mr [REDACTED] (for GM C.K. Choi) said that different types of sparring are valuable, so long as the eventual focus is on realism. However, he said that patterns are not practical for sparring (and I think he implied for self-defence too), but they are beneficial for exercise.

Finally, in the condensed Encyclopedia, General Choi describes the relationship between the components of Taekwon-do^[12]. He describes how fundamental techniques develop into patterns, which are then applied to moving opponents through sparring. He suggests that eventually, through this development of technique and conditioning of the body, the student can test themselves against spontaneous attacks. i.e. self-defence. He stresses that even the most experienced students must still maintain their fundamental training to sustain proficiency in self-defence.



5. Other Martial Arts

Taekwon-do is one of the world's most popular martial arts, as well as an Olympic sport. Whilst I believe that all genuine martial arts should teach someone to defend themselves competently, they often use very different techniques to do so. I would classify Taekwon-do as an aggressive martial art, designed primarily for use at a distance from the opponent, which uses powerful strikes and kicks. Karate and most forms of Kung Fu are based around similar core techniques, although they have slightly different methods of producing power.

Arts such as Ju-jitsu and Aikido are designed more for close-up fighting and use throws, holds and locks in preference to kicks and hand strikes. To the untrained eye, therefore, it seems that there is little relation between these arts and those such as Taekwon-do. However, an experienced Taekwon-do student does learn throws, locks and holds, just as someone who is proficient in Ju-jitsu may be able to kick well. Thus, both arts teach the practitioner to cope with a wide range of situations. The difference is in the core techniques, which beginners learn and which are most instinctive to a black belt.

The advice I received was again quite varied. Mr [REDACTED] stated that he thinks Taekwon-do is a bit more scientific than most martial arts, which makes it efficient, dynamic and powerful. Mr [REDACTED] said that he thinks modern Taekwon-do is sadly lacking in self-defence compared to other styles and added that he thinks it has diminished in the years that he has been training.

Master [REDACTED] told me that he does not think Taekwon-do is designed for self-defence in the way that other arts such as Ju-jitsu are. Master [REDACTED] also stated that he thinks Taekwon-do is less oriented towards self-defence than arts such as Ju-jitsu. He pointed out that Taekwon-do schools spend a huge amount of time doing patterns and sparring, whilst self-defence is often an 'add on' that is practised now and then.

Mr [REDACTED] (for GM C.K. Choi) said, 'Given that Taekwon-do was a synthesis of available techniques it is meant to be superior to all other martial arts. But only if trained properly with realism and a focus on power in each technique.' Finally, [REDACTED] said that all martial arts are basically the same, but with 'their own spin on things' and that we should take a bit from each and use it in our own way.

Whilst all the above advice is valid, as previously stated I personally feel that whilst each martial art undoubtedly has 'specialisms,' they must ultimately teach proficiency in self-defence in all situations. Whilst a Taekwon-do black belt will certainly be more comfortable on their feet, with their arms and legs free, they should also be able to deal with close quarters combat and cope if they are knocked off their feet.

I believe that there are many reasons why so many martial arts exist, but I think two factors warrant specific discussion. Firstly, I think the differences in each martial art have evolved over time due to cultural, geographical and philosophical differences. Most martial arts can trace their origins and philosophies back to Buddhism, but they have developed independently in different regions, where they have different landscapes and cultures and have had to deal with different threats over time. The masters of each art have developed their techniques accordingly.

In the 21st century and with the globalisation of culture, the historical and regional factors seem less valid than they were many years ago. However, I believe that the variety of martial arts continues to thrive due to differences in the people that practice them. People come in many different sizes and shapes and they also have wide ranging mentalities and lifestyles. Therefore I think that whilst any able bodied person should be able to train in any martial art, they will be naturally more skilled and will find more enjoyment in some than others. Although Taekwon-do is the only martial art I have trained in and I may not be of the optimum build for it, I believe I enjoy it because of its dynamism and power, as well as the comradeship and self-confidence that it provides. These are the reasons that I have continued with it for many years.



6. The Purpose of Taekwon-do

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, many books, documents and articles describe Taekwon-do as an art of self-defence, or similar. General Choi's Encyclopedia is titled 'The Korean Art of Self-Defence' and GM C.K. Choi's book calls it the 'Korean Martial Art of Self-Defence'^[13]. There are many other examples where Taekwon-do is defined as being for the purpose of self-defence, or where it is listed as one of its key purposes. For example, 'The Ultimate Book of Martial Arts' by Fay Goodman says of Taekwon-do, 'It is viewed not only as an extremely effective self-defence system, but is also a very popular international sport'^[14]. Wikipedia says that 'it combines combat techniques, self-defence, sport, exercise, meditation and philosophy'^[15].

Whilst there are countless references to Taekwon-do being primarily for self-defence, there are also many examples of people who think otherwise. Some people see it as a sport, an exercise or something else, but say that it is not much good for self-defence, especially in modern times. There is clearly a major disparity here, so I have tried to consider the various opinions before reaching a conclusion.

Taekwon-do was formed by General Choi and his colleagues in the South Korean army to be used in combat. It was proved to be very effective in both the Korean and Vietnam wars. At that time it was clearly a genuine and deadly form of self-defence. The final question I posed relates to whether that is still the case in the 21st century.

The answers I received to my questions again contained a broad range of opinions. Master [REDACTED] told me that he thinks Taekwon-do was originally very good for self-defence, but over the years it has become more like a sport and less effective for self-defence. So whilst self-defence was originally its primary purpose, it has become diluted over time.

Mr [REDACTED] (for GM C.K. Choi) said that self-defence is the primary purpose of Taekwon-do. He said, 'There are numerous secondary benefits but they all exist because of the system of training and its primary purpose; self-defence.'

Master [REDACTED] said that he believes the primary purpose of Taekwon-do is to develop what General Choi called 'Moral Culture.' General Choi devotes eleven pages in the condensed Encyclopedia to describing moral culture, but he sums it up as 'the endeavour and process of becoming an exemplary person'^[16]. He then goes on to explain the link between a good character, a strong mind and body and effective Taekwon-do.

Mr [REDACTED] said that he does not believe self-defence is the primary purpose of Taekwon-do, but nowadays is unfortunately a minor one of the many benefits. Mr [REDACTED] agreed that self-defence is one of a number of

benefits, but for him it is the key purpose, although mental and physical development are also important.

There is little doubt that Taekwon-do has changed since it was first taught in the Korean military. It is now taught to children and to people all over the world. I believe that is why Master [REDACTED] said the self-defence aspect has been 'diluted.' Equally though, techniques have been developed and improved on over the last fifty years or so, so surely it should be more effective now than it was?

As discussed, training in Taekwon-do has numerous benefits, for body, mind and spirit. Many Taekwon-do club adverts highlight some of these. I make a point of advertising the benefits of fitness, self-defence, discipline and enjoyment in my own club adverts. The books and e-mail advice I have referred to in this thesis continuously list the many mental and physical benefits of Taekwon-do.

Among so many benefits, it is a fair question to ask why self-defence should be considered to be the primary purpose or benefit of Taekwon-do. Other proposed 'primary' purposes in the 21st century include it being a sport, a business, or even a political tool. Free sparring is now an Olympic sport and tournaments are very popular amongst practitioners, so the sport aspect of Taekwon-do is clearly very important. Equally, many masters and instructors make a good living from Taekwon-do and their clubs or associations are indeed successful businesses.

The political influence of Taekwon-do is clear to see throughout its history. It is my belief that political differences are the biggest reason for the fractured state of Taekwon-do around the world. Reading 'A Killing Art' and other recollections of Taekwon-do history gives the inevitable conclusion that ultimately, the WTF split from the ITF because of South Korean politics. The ITF then split further because of North Korean politics. Taekwon-do is still being used as a political tool today, with the strong links between the South Korean government and WTF 'Olympic Taekwondo.' Meanwhile, Professor Chang Ung is president of one of the three main groups that call themselves the ITF, as well as a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for North Korea.

Despite all the above reasonable arguments, I cannot ignore the fact that Taekwon-do was designed to be used for self-defence first and foremost. I believe that where (not if) that has become diluted it is a regrettable mistake. All the benefits and goals/purposes of Taekwon-do, particularly the mental and physical training, 'moral culture' and sport are very important. They should all be recognised and promoted by instructors, but I agree with GM C.K. Choi's view that these other benefits all exist to contribute to the primary purpose; self-defence.

The perfection of technique, whether through patterns or otherwise, should be for the purpose of increasing effectiveness, which may or may not also make it more aesthetically pleasing. Free sparring should be done to improve speed, fitness, judging of distance and agility. All training should be done with purpose, power and correct application.

My final reference will be to the writings of General Choi, in his condensed Encyclopedia. He defines Taekwon-do as 'the scientific use of the body in the method of self-defence; a body that has gained the ultimate use of its facilities through intensive physical and mental training^[17].'



References

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Appendix A

My Training History

I started training in Taekwon-do at Loughborough University, under Mr [REDACTED] in September 1995. Over the years I have moved around the country several times and have consequently trained under several instructors. I passed my 1st degree black belt in September 1998 whilst training [REDACTED] in Stratford-upon-Avon,

I then went back to Loughborough, where I spent two years as Mr [REDACTED] assistant instructor. I passed my 2nd degree black belt in April 2000. At this time I was also training with Master [REDACTED] at Coventry [REDACTED] club. In May 2000, I competed at the GTF World Championships in Rimini, Italy.

I moved to Northampton in the summer of 2000 and opened my first club at University College Northampton (UCN). I ran that club for three years, before a new job brought me to Chester in 2003. I started training in Manchester and passed my 3rd degree black belt in March 2005. Two months after that I opened my current club in Chester, in collaboration with [REDACTED]. After she moved [REDACTED] I took over sole control of the Chester club.

Now as I prepare to test for my 4th degree black belt, I have a number of students approaching their black belt gradings. I hope that with their help I will get my club to grow and strengthen. I also look forward to taking something of a leadership role in my region and the association.

Appendix B

Copies of Questions, E-mails and Notes from Grandmasters, Masters and Senior Black Belts

Example e-mail sent to Grandmasters, Masters & Senior Instructors

Dear Sir,

My name is Mr Jonathan Emm and I am a 3rd degree black belt in [REDACTED] under Master [REDACTED] (VIII). I run a club in Chester, in the North West of England and I am due to take my 4th degree grading in October.

As part of my 4th degree grading, I am required to write a thesis on a subject of my choice, which must be related to Taekwon-do. My thesis will be entitled 'The use of Taekwon-do for Self-Defence.' I plan to discuss how important a part of Taekwon-do self-defence is, as well as how each part of Taekwon-do (such as patterns and sparring) contributes to a student's self-defence ability.

I have done some research in books and on the internet, but I would greatly value your opinions and experiences to contribute to the discussion in my thesis. As such, I have compiled a few short questions (below) and I would be very grateful if you would answer any of them for me.

Thank you very much in advance.

Best regards,

Jonathan Emm III

1. In your opinion, how does knowledge of Taekwon-do help someone to defend themselves?
2. How does self-defence in Taekwon-do compare to other martial arts?
3. How do activities such as free sparring, set sparring and patterns contribute to a Taekwon-do student's ability to defend themselves?
4. Do you consider self-defence to be the primary purpose of Taekwon-do, or is it only one of a number of aspects?

E-mail Response from Mr [REDACTED] (for GM C.K. Choi)

Hello Mr. Emm;

GM CK Choi has asked me to respond to your email. I was an assistant editor on the book your refer to.

After reviewing your questions with GM CK Choi here is some information to assist you with your assignment.

1. In your opinion, how does knowledge of Taekwon-do help someone to defend themselves?
2. How does self-defence in Taekwon-do compare to other martial arts?
3. How do activities such as free sparring, set sparring and patterns contribute to a Taekwon-do student's ability to defend themselves?
4. Do you consider self-defence to be the primary purpose of Taekwon-do, or is it only one of a number of aspects?

Tae Kwon Do had its initial foundation in the military as the main Korean Military Art of Self Defence. It was a mixed martial art that took the best techniques available from other systems and combined them with new techniques to allow Korean soldiers to defend themselves in a combat situation.

The practical and efficient techniques learnt in Tae Kwon Do are a fundamental core for defending one's self. But the focus for self defence should be on the quality of each technique not the number of techniques learnt. For self defence, techniques must be delivered with knock out power.

Given that Tae Kwon Do was a synthesis of available techniques it is meant to be superior to all other martial arts. But only if trained properly with realism and a focus on power in each technique. The training is a system so as long as it is used properly by the student and taught properly by the instructor then it works. Different types of sparring are valuable but only if the eventual focus is on realism. Patterns where General Choi's focus and although we all owe a lot to the General for being the glue that kept Tae Kwon Do together patterns and their movements are not practical for sparring. They are a form of exercise so they are beneficial for that.

GM CK Choi has a saying that he uses. "Train body and mind" The important thing is to first train the body. To learn the techniques and become physically fit so that you can use them effectively. While the student is learning and after they have developed some proficiency with the techniques it is important that they have control over themselves so that they know when to use them. This can be thought of as training the mind or mental discipline.

So yes self defence is the primary goal/purpose of Tae Kwon Do training. But self defense is not the only benefit of Tae Kwon Do training. There are numerous secondary benefits but they all exist because of the system of training and its primary purpose; self defence. Too much focus on the secondary aspects at the expense of the system and its primary goals does the student a disservice.

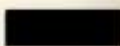
Please also refer to the following page for information on GM CK Choi's thoughts on patterns in general and his sparring patterns listed on page 73 of his book. This is a good interview that I was present for.

It provides some answers to your questions.

<http://www.akingart.com/blog>

Thanks for your questions. I hope you enjoyed the book as we spend many hours on it.

Train Body and Mind



1. TKD originally designed for self-defence, tho now a modern martial art. Not great for self-defence. Traditional TKD more self-defence oriented. Modern TKD more like a sport. It was used in Korean military so was v good for self-defence then, but over years has become more of a sport.
2. TKD not designed for self-defence in same way other martial arts like Ju-Jitsu are.
∴ don't think modern TKD is best martial art for self-defence.
3. All aspects of TKD contribute to self-defence ability. However, a lot of people practice it for the wrong reasons. The mental side & discipline much less than years ago. How you perform techniques/exercises is v important. Think 1 step is best type of training for self-defence. Free sparring helps too but less. [REDACTED] 1 step free is v good.
4. ~~Self~~ Self-defence was primary purpose years ago but not so much now. Self-defence and/or 'martial' aspect has been diluted so TKD is more like a sport now.

E-mail Response from Master [REDACTED]

Hi Mr. Emm,

Thanks for the mail. I can give you some answers but these are just my personal opinions. I would love to read the finished article.

Regards,
[REDACTED]

1. In your opinion, how does knowledge of Taekwon-do help someone to defend themselves?

Answer: It really depends on the instructor and their knowledge of realistic self-defence. Many Taekwon-Do instructors teach very unrealistic self defence which can lull the practitioner into a false sense of security. This can have disastrous consequences in real life.

2. How does self-defence in Taekwon-do compare to other martial arts? Taekwon-Do has a huge syllabus and is hamstrung in self defence terms compared to other martial arts. For example most Taekwon-Do schools spend huge amounts of time practicing Tul and sparring. As a result self defence is often an add on practiced now and again. Other martial arts like Ju Jitsu are orientated towards self defence. This does not mean that one martial art is better than another. Often times it is a question of what the student is looking for. Some members may be interested in competition more than self-defence. Always the quality and knowledge of the instructor will have a large influence on what is taught.

3. How do activities such as free sparring, set sparring and patterns contribute to a Taekwon-do student's ability to defend themselves? They can contribute to self defence but in my opinion only slightly. I prefer using self defence designed specifically to practical situations. Thus the knee, elbow, head butt etc will be the primary tools in any confrontation.

4. Do you consider self-defence to be the primary purpose of Taekwon-do, or is it only one of a number of aspects? I think that it is only one of many aspects. I believe that the primary purpose of Taekwon-Do is to develop what General Choi call "Moral Culture." Thus the philosophy and teachings of our art are really at the core.

E-mail Response from Mr [REDACTED]

Hi Jon,

I hope all is going well with your 4th deg preparation and here are my answers;

1. Having a knowledge of Taekwon-do is better than having no knowledge of Taekwon-do, so therefore helps some people slightly in being better able to defend oneself.

Due to having faster reactions, better awareness, and knowledge of where is best to strike, ie vital spots.

However, you must remember that only some people have the heart to defend themselves so no matter what you teach these people it will not work as they will freeze.

2. Self defence in Taekwon-do is sadly lacking and has diminished over the 26 years that i know of. I think modern Taekwon-do has less than most other styles due to its obsession for 'technical excellence'.

3. Free sparring will help in ones reaction time, set sparring can help if practised correct tools to vital spots. Patterns i feel contribute nothing to most people as they never visualise destroying with every move but instead concentrate on looking perfect.

4. It is most certainly not the primary objective of Taekwon-do it is one of many, but nowadays a minor one , unfortunately !

I hope this helps

Kind Regards, [REDACTED] VI

E-mail Response from Mr [REDACTED]

1. In your opinion, how does knowledge of Taekwon-do help someone to defend themselves? Through many hours of rigorous training and repeating moves time and time again, the body develops muscle memory, which means the TKD exponent can perform the necessary punches and kicks much faster and more accurately than the average guy in the street. Also you develop a better understanding of distance and focus, coupled with a knowledge of the right tools for the right vital spots
2. How does self-defence in Taekwon-do compare to other martial arts? From my perspective TKD differs from most other martial arts because it is a little more scientific. Basically TKD took Karate and other styles techniques and developed them with an understanding of physics etc. Consequently it is a very efficient and dynamic style, and has significantly increased power potential
3. How do activities such as free sparring, set sparring and patterns contribute to a Taekwon-do student's ability to defend themselves? Patterns are used to hone blocking and attacking techniques. Through the various fixed sparring disciplines, the student then starts to use them in real life (moving) situations and develops distance, balance and focus. Free sparring then moves closer to real life situations where counter and attacking moves are performed continuously. This all develops a real life understanding for the outside world.
4. Do you consider self-defence to be the primary purpose of Taekwon-do, or is it only one of a number of aspects? It is one of a number of aspects but the primary one. Mental and physical improvement and discipline are all very important as are the tenants but self defence is the key purpose for me

[REDACTED]
6th Degree

E-mail Response from Mr [REDACTED]

Hi jon , i'll give you my opinion on the questions but really its your call...

1. Knowledge of tae kwon do can help you with distance, correct application of attacking tools ,ect ect but being a black belt on your feet does'nt help if your on the floor.
2. They are all pretty much the same ,and they will all put there own spin on things, take a bit from each and use it your way.
- 3.Free sparring kills your self defence! scoring a point is'nt self defence, set sparring will give you an idea of blocking at different distances and which counter attack to use, patterns give you an idea of how to move from one attack to another. But be real have you ever seen any fight that uses proper technique!!!!
- 4.Its got lots of uses mental aswell as physical.

these questions have lots of answers jon

best of luck, take care.

[REDACTED]

E-mail Response from Mr [REDACTED]

tkd gives you knowledge of you ,sounds a bit mystical ,but if you go to a tournament and your opponent attacks and you curl up in a ball then thats what you will do in real life .in free sparring you get hit sometimes hard ,if you've never been hit before the first impact is fairly intense ,also if you get into a situation the first thing that happens is your heart rate goes up [a lot] there are many instances of people dying after even a superfiscial attack,so staying healthy and going to competitions is a good thing ,thats why i do my best to enter still.of course there's not much you can do if someone sneaks up behind you !!!dont know if that helps ,good luck in october