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# TAEKWONDO



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## SPIRIT AND PRACTICE

BEYOND SELF-DEFENSE

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GRAND MASTER  
RICHARD CHUN

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**YMAA Publication Center**

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# Preface

I am telling my story at the age of 67. I have been involved in the practice and teaching of Taekwondo for more than half a century. When I think of that, I am awestruck. It is unbelievable that a choice I made so innocently at the age of 11 has played such a major role in shaping who I am and the road I would take in this journey called life.

Truly, life is a mystery. How does one find his path? Was my meeting with the martial arts accidental or predestined? Were my choices ones that came from the heart or from the mind? The story I am about to tell will share my experiences in the martial arts and how they have shaped both my life and myself as a human being. It is clear to me now that any other life would not have been more right for me.

When I first began my practice of Taekwondo, it was mainly a means of physical development. I enjoyed the discipline and hard work that the training required. I was committed to it and, as a result, developed good work ethics. I became strong and healthy. These qualities remained with me and benefited me throughout my entire life. Even now, discipline and hard work are the tools I use to achieve my goals. Having this foundation, I am never disappointed in my endeavors.

Gradually, I began to sense a deeper meaning in my training. The mental attributes that a young martial artist develops came into the foreground. Slowly and naturally, a sense of inner strength and a peaceful state of mind blossomed within me. This manifested itself in a reassuring fearlessness towards life. I felt that I could overcome any obstacles that stood in my way. These mental attributes complimented continuing physical development. It was exciting to see that my study of the martial arts was expanding and deepening, and that I was expanding and deepening as well.

As I grew into manhood and became a Grandmaster of Taekwondo, I realized that ultimately the martial arts were a spiritual discipline and practice. The physical and mental development continued, but added to this was the profound understanding that being a martial artist meant becoming a whole person. I saw that everything in my life was touched by my martial arts experience; its influence was pervasive. As I grew aware of this, I began to feel

invincible, yet humble. I finally understood the truth behind the famous warrior maxim that states, “A man who has attained mastery of an art reveals it in his every action.” To be a true master in the martial arts is to be a master of one’s own life and destiny,

As a master, it became my mission to teach and communicate to young martial artists the completeness of the path they were choosing. I never wanted any single part of their training to overshadow the whole, because each part contributes equally to create a stronger and more complete entity.

To this end, all my life and work has been dedicated. As a constant reminder of this process, nothing gives me greater pleasure than conferring black belts to my students. When a new student comes to me, they are in essence asking for my guidance in their journey. When a student earns his black belt, I know that I have passed on a deep tradition. I have fulfilled my responsibility as a friend, teacher and mentor.

Earning a black belt in my school means much more than just passing a test on forms, sparring, and breaking. A black belt signifies not only physical excellence, but mental wisdom as well. My students must also take a written exam to see how much knowledge of the tradition and philosophy they have absorbed. I like to see that they have learned the true purpose of becoming a martial artist. Only after I read their answers do I know if they have truly achieved black belt status. Only then will I pass the black belt to them.

Throughout my forty-five years of teaching, I have rewarded over several thousand black belts to students. Nevertheless, each time I am moved by the tradition. I pass the black belt to the student in the presence of their family, friends and other students and assistant instructors with whom they have trained. The new black belts lined up on the gym floor in their doboks. I approach each individual and say his or her name for all to hear, holding a new black belt in my hand. We bow to each other and I tie the black belt around their waist. Then we bow again to each other and I congratulate them. This simple gesture symbolizes the transference of knowledge and the passing of the tradition from master to student.

Just as my master passed on his knowledge to me, it becomes the responsibility of my students to use what they have learned to enlighten their own lives. To this day, many of my students remain close to me. Some have even gone on to make martial arts their life by opening up schools of their own. Many eventually go their own way, of course, as they choose professions and settle down with their families. Somehow though, I always feel responsible

for them all. I often wonder how many will continue with their training. I wonder how many will fulfill the true purpose of a martial artist by reaching that state of invincibility and humility in their lives. All I know is that I have given them the tools to do it.

The connection between master and student is an unbroken, undying one. I am reminded of an experience I had with my master some years ago. I was in Korea on a trip and decided to visit him. We hadn't seen each other for some time, but had always kept in touch. He was retired from teaching, but was still very active promoting Taekwondo and working with other masters. He was in his late seventies, but looked twenty years younger, full of health and vitality.

When we met, we bowed to each other, as is the custom in Korea. When I stood up again, I noticed that my master was still bowed and holding this position for some time. I thought to myself that I have been living in America so long, and that my bowing had become too quick. When he finally stood up, I saw in his eyes that his long bow had been out of deep respect for me.

He smiled and said, "Rhin Moon, you are fulfilling your destiny as a martial artist." I was speechless and could only smile back. His words meant the world to me, and the love I felt was deeper than the ocean.

By relaying my life story, I hope to show you the essence of what it means to become a martial artist.

It is my way of bowing to you.

(Rhin Moon) Richard Chun  
New York City, 2002

**Note to Readers:**

Originally, Taekwondo was written as three words—Tae Kwon Do—to signify the meaning of each word, "Tae" meaning fist, "Kwon" meaning foot and "Do" meaning way. Many Korean Masters still write it this way. My previous books were written in this style. However, a present-day trend has been to write Tae Kwon Do as one word, particularly in references to organizations such as the Taekwondo Federation or Taekwondo Association. In this book, I have kept up with this trend of writing Taekwondo as one word.

## CHAPTER 1

# The Challenge

Class at the Moo Duk Kwan Institute always began with mopping the floor. This simple ritual served a dual purpose. The first was cleanliness. Soon, about 80 students—young twelve year old boys like myself to young men in their twenties—would be barefoot on that floor practicing the many hundred moves that comprised the art of Taekwondo. The second purpose was to instill in the novice a sense of pride and respect for our school and our art.

All of us at the school, excluding the black belts, were assigned to clean the floor in groups of five on a rotating basis. My turn came up about every ten days. When my time came around with four other students, I always arrived early. Grabbing a bucket and a mop, I quickly got out on the floor to clean off the sweat and marks from last night's matches and the dust that had settled during the night. When the others arrived, I usually had my section already done. I worked fast because I wanted to be first in the changing room and into my doboks.

Soon, all the students arrived and we were out on the floor warming up and practicing our forms. Our Master, Chong Soo Hong, emerged from his office about half an hour later to observe. He never said a word. He just stood off to the side in his crisp, white tobok with black trim, a black belt tied tightly around his waist and his face in deep concentration. He stood there with his arms crossed and expressionless for the longest time. Sometimes he clapped, indicating that he wanted our attention. We would immediately stop our practice, turn to face him, and bow. There was always a deafening silence.

Master Hong was a Grandmaster of the highest caliber. His teaching strictly followed traditional methods and his style was rigorous and disciplined. I was fortunate to be studying at his school as it was regarded as the best martial art school in Seoul in its day. I was fortunate in other ways though as well. I had the right start. It might not have been that way, however, if I had not learned the most fundamental lesson of the martial artist. That



With Grandmaster and Vice President of Kukkiwon, Chong Soo Hong, New York, 1970's.



With the past presidents of Moo Duk Kwan. Left to right; Richard Chun, Grandmaster Chang Yong Chung, Grandmaster Kang Ik Lee, Grandmaster Ching Soo Hong 1970's.

## CHAPTER 2

# The Peak of Hallasan

They were three days of eternity. Three never-ending days of waiting. The test for black belt was over and I could do nothing now except wait. Years of hard work lay behind me. My life as a martial artist lay before me, and yet it all seemed to come down to a sheet of paper posted on the small corkboard that hung on a wall at the Institute. I had seen it all before during the previous black belt tests—the nervousness and anxiety in my fellow student’s faces, the single sheet that announced if your years of training had come to fruition, the jostling before the posted results searching to find your name, the explosion of relief and happiness when you found it, the turning away in dejection and disappointment if you did not. Those three days of waiting to see if I had passed the test to earn my black belt seemed to pass even more slowly than the three years of training it took to get to that point.

I felt confident during the test, performing all the forms and breaks in a smooth, accomplished manner. No obvious mistakes were made. Still, there were three judges to convince. They sat silently, expressionless, behind a long table at the end of the gym and observed the forty candidates for black belt. In two groups of twenty, our instructor led us through a demonstration of advanced forms. My execution of the forms was impeccable, I thought. I had trained hard and often taught these same moves to students who progressed slower than I. Then, we moved on to breaking techniques. With classmates holding the boards, two students at a time performed before the judges. I executed a hop sidekick, flying sidekick, and double punch, breaking 3 boards with each move. The test concluded with a minute of non-contact free fighting.

I tried to ease my worry during those three days by telling myself that everything would turn out as it should. It was out of my hands at this point, yet I was so preoccupied with the anticipation of knowing the results that a constant nervousness churned in my stomach during the waiting period. I was edgy and did not sleep well. When I entered the Institute on the third day and saw a group of boys crowded before a notice on the corkboard,

## CHAPTER 3

# Tactics and Techniques

Seoul, Korea, 1954. I was 19 years old. Along with many thousands of refugees, I had returned to Seoul after the war to rebuild my life. During the final year of the war, I had enrolled at Yonsei University, a Christian college in Seoul that had relocated to Pusan, the second largest city in the south of Korea. When the war finally ended, the university moved back to its campus in Seoul and I followed, planning to major in economics and history so I could enter the business field upon graduation. It was a creative time for myself and for all Koreans. Everyone worked hard to re-establish themselves. The city itself was rebuilding: new office buildings, hotels, and residences were under construction, roadways were repaved, businesses and schools reopened. A sense of freedom and happiness—a natural feeling after an experiencing war—permeated life in Seoul.

I returned to the home in Bukahyun-Dong village that our family had left before the war. I lived with two of my brothers and one sister, who also returned to Seoul to resume their studies. The remainder of my siblings had stayed on Cheju Island to finish their schooling and live with my parents, who had also decided to remain. During the war, my father had established his medical practice and had become a prominent doctor and citizen of Cheju City much as he was in Seoul before the war. Their eldest children, however, were eager to get back to Seoul to fulfill their dreams. As always, my parents were supportive of our desires, and gave us the freedom to make our own decisions. They encouraged us to succeed and generously provided the means for our comfort. While in Seoul my father sent us a check every month to cover expenses, and if there was any remainder we divided between ourselves for entertainment.

I was particularly excited to be in Seoul again to resume martial arts training with established masters and black belts. However, I quickly discovered that the Moo Duk Kwan Institutes were not yet opened since the old masters needed time to re-establish their schools as they trickled back to Seoul. Old friends I trained with were now either gone or dispersed, some



Richard Chun in childhood.



Richard Chun in his Junior Year at Yon Sei University. Photo taken in front of his father's hospital in Cheju Island after the Korean War, 1954.

## CHAPTER 4

# In the Lion's Den

After the Korean War, I lived in Seoul in a one-story house in Bukahyum-Dong village with my brothers and sister. The house was built in traditional Korean style that meant that it included an ondol bang. This unique feature of a Korean house was a family room with a hole built right into the floor. It went straight down to the earth below so that a fire could be made to warm the house and provide a gathering point for the family.

With my father and mother now living on Cheju Island and my eldest brother studying medicine in Japan, there were four of us in the house. One brother worked as a psychologist in a government office, the other was a student, and my sister was a diplomat in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I had recently joined them after a year of military service upon graduation from the university and was looking for a job. During the days, I read the “want ads” in the paper and went on interviews; not much to my liking came along. In the evenings, I gathered together with my brothers and sister around the fire to exchange the news and stories of the day.

“Soo Hong and Mae Kim are getting married,” my sister told us one evening. “They met at a dance about six months ago. I’m happy for Soo Hong. Mae Kim is very pretty and well-educated,” she added.

“We have to find someone for Rhin Moon, now that he’s back and ready to begin his life,” said my elder brother.

“Wait, wait,” I said. “First I need to find a job.”

“You may have to wait a long time then, Rhin Moon. Jobs are hard to come by these days. Everyone wants a good job,” said my sister.

“Yes, maybe you could work at the docks, unloading and packaging fish,” said my younger sister. Everyone laughed because they knew I disliked both the smell of fish and handling them.

One evening my elder brother said that he had heard from a friend who was a journalist about an opening for a sales position at Air France. This sounded good so we immediately contacted my brother’s friend and found out that there were indeed two openings and that they were still accepting applications for a few more days.

## CHAPTER 5

# In America

Life suddenly became filled with unexpected journeys. I'm not talking about the free vacation to Tokyo in my second year with Air France, or the trip to Paris for a manager's conference. After five years at Air France, having risen to become sales manager, I now found myself on a plane headed for the United States. It was not a vacation or business trip. I was moving to America.

"I'm going to study business at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.," I told the elderly couple who sat next to me on the flight. They were traveling to the U.S. to visit their son who practiced law in Washington.

"Why study in America?" the elderly man asked. "Why leave Korea?"

"What was your job in Seoul?" the elderly woman asked.

These questions triggered off a conversation with this couple that lasted, intermittently, throughout the entire flight.

"In Seoul, I worked as a sales manager for Air France," I said.

Their eyes lit up in surprise. They knew that I was leaving a very good job at a time when good jobs were hard to find. They didn't have to ask the next question. I saw it in their faces.

"Yes, it was a good job and I earned good money," I said. "And I lived the high life, too—meeting interesting people, dining and dancing in the fanciest restaurants and nightclubs, free vacations every year."

"Then why leave all that, and Korea?" asked the elderly man.

"And your family," added the elderly woman.

They were a sweet couple. The woman had a round face with a small nose. He was short and stocky, handsome, with a dark hue to his skin. These were good questions they were asking me.

"One day after work, I was walking home alone and suddenly I began thinking about my future, you know, my destiny. I asked myself—Where would I be in 5 or 10 years?"

"Did an answer come?" said the elderly man.

"Yes," I said. "And I didn't like it. The answer was ... in the same spot."



With Mr. Sigward of Sigward Sports Academy, New York City, 1962.



At Sigward Sports Academy, Richard Chun (center); Grandmaster Hyun Ok Shin (right), 1963.

## CHAPTER 6

# My Own School

Advancing through the ranks of a new color belt is the outer sign of progress and mastery for the student in the art of Taekwondo. This advancement requires hard work and discipline. A specific number of hours in training and the precise knowledge of a required number of forms must be fulfilled. The physical challenge for the student is very demanding, and as a young master in my own school, I felt this challenge to be as much mine as theirs.

At the opening of my school in 1964, I had about twenty-five students, a few of whom had followed me from Sigward's Academy. They were mostly high school and college students who were serious about the martial arts. As their teacher, I worked them hard, holding them to the same standards that I held myself to. In order to train them properly, I had to train hard myself. I often stayed late after an evening's practice session, till midnight or one o'clock in the morning, to prepare for the next day's class.

I felt this preparation was absolutely necessary. I now had my own school, my own students, and I wanted nothing less than complete success in my new business. During this time as a young master, I began to feel a deep responsibility for the development of my students and the seriousness of my art. I realized that I was in the process of achieving my goal of becoming a leader and a teacher of others. This role pleased and fulfilled me, and the first thing I learned was that when one desires to better others, you spontaneously better yourself, and in bettering yourself, you better others. There is a well-known saying that the teacher learns more than the student. There is deep truth in this. The flow of knowledge and learning, the give and take back and forth, was immediately apparent.

The tradition of the martial arts throughout time has always been intimately tied to leadership and teaching. As human beings, we are all together on the same journey in life. This journey leads us in the direction of growth towards increased happiness, discovering our potential, and a life of fulfillment. My way has always been through the martial arts, and if anyone decided to join



Richard Chun in children's class.



Richard Chun sparring with instructors.

## CHAPTER 7

# A Decade of Change

One afternoon the phone rang in my office. It was Dr. Kim.

“Annyunghaseyo, Master Chun. Can you have lunch with me tomorrow?”

He sounded excited, almost out of breath. This was uncharacteristic for Dr. Kim. He was usually soft-spoken, always graceful and elegant, always the diplomat.

“Yes, of course Dr. Kim. But what is it? Why are you so excited?” I said.

“I want you to meet someone,” he said. “You will see tomorrow. Meet me at 12:30 at Sam Bok.

I hung up the phone. Sam Bok. It was one of the finest Korean restaurants in Manhattan. I wondered what Dr. Kim was up to. Maybe he had found a beautiful Korean woman for me to marry, someone that he thought would be a good match. More than once he had hinted to me that maybe it was time that I found someone and settle down.

“I am not ready yet, Dr. Kim. My life is still developing, too hectic. I don’t have the time,” I would say. I was serious with my words.

I believe that experiences and events come into a person’s life only when you are truly ready for them. It is a natural progression that one cannot force, but only flow along with; there is no other choice, in my opinion. Training in the martial arts taught me this lesson. You may want to develop as a martial artist faster, learn a particular form quicker, perfect a specific punch or kick in a mere few days. However, you realize that your mastery as a martial artist is, in reality, beyond your control. All you can do is train to the best of your ability every day and allow your progress to develop at its own natural pace. You must not be attached to the outcome, but only give yourself—one hundred percent—to the process.

Dr. Kim and I were like brothers. I listened to his advice, but with regards to marriage, I didn’t agree with him. Working during the day and running a school at night and on weekends kept me very busy. Marriage and starting a family did not seem right at this time. Yet, I appreciated his advice because I knew he was always thinking of me. Dr. Kim was the most unselfish man I

## CHAPTER 9

# The Missing Piece

Twenty-two students, ranging from 10 to 19 years in age, lined up before me to demonstrate their skills. They bowed quickly at the command of their master, Kae Jun. It was a disorganized bow, not at all in unison, but more like the out-of-step march of an undisciplined army troop. I glanced over to Kae Bae Jun and smiled. He returned my acknowledgement with a gentle nod of his head.

Master Jun was a young, but respected, Korean black belt with a bushy head of black hair, seemingly always unkempt. He was short and muscular and had a particularly small nose. I had sponsored Master Jun to live in the United States. In Korea, he was a student of Master Jae Chun from the city of Kwang Joo, but all his life he dreamed of coming to the United States. In Korea, Kae Jun was an accomplished martial artist; he taught military personnel at the Army base and he was also a martial arts instructor at the Police Academy in Seoul. In the late 1960's, he was hired to be on the team of personal security guards protecting the Prime Minister of Korea, who was then the most powerful commander in the military junta. During that time, he met Dr. Kim who worked closely with the Prime Minister as his right-hand man. One day, Kae Jun mentioned to Dr. Kim that he was interested in moving to the United States and asked if he had contacts there. Of course, Dr. Kim told him about me. In 1969, I accepted Kae Jun as my assistant instructor and arranged for his move to New York.

Kae Jun stayed with me a little over a year, sharing space in my apartment. A few years younger than I with some common experiences growing up in Korea, we quickly became friends. Once here, he immediately immersed himself in American culture and language. He was a quick learner and wanted to absorb American customs as quickly as possible so he could behave and relate to the American people on their own terms. As a martial art instructor in my school, we also worked together on designing new teaching methods for the American martial art student.

I had learned during my years here that teaching American students was

## CHAPTER II

# A Lion and a Father

My father, Dr. Byung Hoon Chun, often gave free medical treatment to the financially needy in Seoul and on Cheju Island where he practiced medicine. Because of this generous service to others, he became well known among his patients and colleagues, quickly rising in his profession to become President of the Doctor's Association. The government of Korea also offered him a three-year appointment, along with 14 other top doctors in Korea, to serve as full colonel in the Army assigned to the Army Hospital in Seoul to recruit and train reputable, young doctors to serve in the military. Throughout his career as a doctor, he occasionally returned to the Army Hospital to assist in the training of new doctors.

My father's generous service in the military and to the public certainly earned him wide respect. However, for the same reasons, he never became a very wealthy doctor. This never bothered him at all. All his life, he provided well for his family, a wife and eight children, and he was always an inspiring role model for his children in preparing us for a successful life. More than anyone I have ever known, my father had the biggest heart. All his life, he truly understood the meaning of giving, and this he passed on to his children.

Thus, when his best friend, also a colleague, approached my father with the idea of forming a Lions Club in Korea, he immediately jumped at the opportunity. Being the kind of man he was, the humanitarian ideals of the Lions Club greatly appealed to him. In the short few months that followed, he established the first Lions Club on Cheju Island and became its Charter President.

I was in Seoul at the time working at Air France, living with my brothers and sister when we heard about it. At that time, no one among us knew what the Lions Club was or did. In fact, we had never heard of it.

"It's an organization for service-minded people who want to work together," said my father. Then, he went on to explain how the club was the world's largest service organization, its motto and philosophy being 'we serve.'

"We will start by providing medical services for the needy by establishing free clinics," said my father.

## CHAPTER 12

# The Way of the Warrior

There is a famous 16<sup>th</sup> Century Chinese painting by T'ang Yin titled "Dreaming of Immortality in a Thatched Cottage." The painting depicts a monk sitting by an open window in a cottage atop a mountain. His hands are covering his face and he is lost in contemplation. Off to the left, we see the same monk flying in a standing position over a vast expanse of mountain ranges, his long hair and robe trailing behind him in the wind like outstretched wings. The painting has a great feeling of openness, freedom, and joy.

The painting also expresses something fundamental in the life of a martial artist. That is the desire to achieve something beyond our pre-conceived ideas and notions. It is impossible to fly. Yet, the monk sees himself soaring effortlessly over the mountaintops. Likewise, the martial artist sees himself achieving heights of physical excellence and prowess as to render himself completely invincible to his opponents, so invincible in body and mind that he is immortal.

The reality is that in both situations—that of the monk and the martial artist—they truly believe their goal is attainable. The monk strives towards his goal through meditation and contemplation; the martial artist through hard work and discipline, always pushing himself to his limits. A maxim from the martial art tradition says that 'tomorrow's battle is won in today's training.' How true this is, and even at a young age, I understood the value of hard work and the idea of pushing beyond one's limits.

Occasionally after practice at the Moo Duk Kwan Institute, a few of my fellow students and I would stay on for some "overtraining," as we called it.

"Now be careful, boys," said Master Hong as he left the gym. "Know when to push yourself and also when to stop."

Master Hong was aware of our occasional overtraining, and he approved of it. Although not actually part of our official training, he knew that overtraining was necessary and even encouraged us. So, on our own every few months or so, we stayed on after practice or met on a Saturday or Sunday



With actor and master Chuck Norris, Madison Square Garden, New York City, 2000.



With the world's famous martial arts promoter Aaron Banks at the USTA Championships, New York, 2002.

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**Dr. Richard Chun, Ph.D.**, (9th Dan) is the president of the United States Taekwondo Association, Special Assistant to the President of the World Taekwondo Federation and Past District Governor of the Lions Club International (NY State). Dr. Chun lives in Tenafly, NJ.



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