



## President's Message



January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007

### THE ITF: TEACHING YOU THE ART OF LIFE - MAKE TAEKWON-DO YOUR WAY OF LIFE

I would like to start this New Year by thanking you for your many positive comments about the messages I have posted on the ITF Web site. Your response encourages me to continue writing about important subjects.

The increasing globalization of the world in the last decades has made humanity more interdependent than ever. Using the Internet as a modern means of communication, we are now able to share our ideas and experiences with others around the world. To respond to your interest in gaining a deeper knowledge of the Taekwon-Do philosophy and learning how to apply it in your life, my first message in 2007 is about making Taekwon-Do your way of life.

As many of you know, I have lived through some very difficult times in my life. In the 1970's, while I was attending university in Canada, the war in Vietnam was devastating my country of birth. Like many other Vietnamese people, I lost many members of my family during that conflict. It was a time of great sorrow, and I felt absolutely helpless.

Early in 1994 when I was visiting Vietnam to promote business between Vietnam and Canadian companies – working to improve economic conditions for the Vietnamese people – I suffered the injustice of being thrown in jail because of a failed commercial transaction, while the true culprit was never prosecuted.

*Note: An investigation by Mr. François Pouliot, a journalist and lawyer, was a key factor in establishing my innocence.*

My physical and mental Taekwon-Do training proved particularly valuable during the almost three years that I spent in Vietnamese prisons. For much of that time I had no contact with anyone outside the prison and did not know if efforts were being made to secure my release. I had to face the possibility of spending the rest of my life in prison, and this led to despondency and depression.

By spending countless hours going over the principles of the ITF Taekwon-Do philosophy and ITF techniques, I was able to control my reaction to the stress of my situation and survive. Conditions in prison did not allow me to train properly, but I was able to review all twenty-four of the ITF Taekwon-Do patterns in my mind, precisely as General Choi described them. I also spent a lot of time alone in a small cell; there I was able to practice each movement repeatedly.

Later, when I was transferred to a prison camp in the countryside, I was able to resume my training in all aspects of Taekwon-Do. Eventually, with the cooperation of certain leaders in the prison population and the prison officials, I was even able to organize a variety of sports activities for the prisoners. The atmosphere in the prison camp was greatly improved as a result, and the level of violence was significantly reduced.

Eventually, because of the unfailing efforts of my family and friends, particularly my friends in Taekwon-Do, and as a result of strong pressure on the government of Vietnam from many sources, notably the Center for Human Rights of the United Nations, the Parliament

and the government of Canada, the government, the municipalities and the chambers of commerce in the Province of Quebec, I was released. I returned to Canada on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1997.

I started training in Taekwon-Do when I was twelve years old, so I had completed many years of training before all this happened. Also, I had the great privilege of working closely with our Founder General Choi for many years. I am grateful that my study of Taekwon-Do philosophy had prepared me to face difficult situations, so I was able to use my knowledge and training to remain mentally and physically strong.

However, it took many years of study and training before I came to appreciate the full meaning of Taekwon-Do as a way of life. In fact, I would say that it was only after I had survived this ordeal and regained my freedom that I realized the true value of the Taekwon-Do way of life.

Perhaps you have been studying Taekwon-Do for just a few years, and you are thinking that you do not have the knowledge and the experience to survive a similar experience. I sincerely hope that you will never be unjustly accused and thrown in prison. On the other hand, difficult times are part of life, and we have to do our best to deal with them. We may not be able to control many of the difficulties we face in life, but we can control how we react in tough times.

By training faithfully, seeking a deeper knowledge of the Taekwon-Do philosophy, and learning to live in harmony with it, you will be preparing yourself mentally and physically to deal with any difficult situations that arise in your life.

I know that living the Taekwon-Do way of life has made my life happier and more satisfying, and I am sure it will have a positive effect on your life too.

The Taekwon-Do way of life = living in harmony with the Taekwon-Do philosophy

### The Taekwon-Do Philosophy

The Taekwon-Do philosophy and the tenets are the foundation of the Taekwon-Do way of life.

General Choi developed the philosophy of Taekwon-Do after carefully studying the writings of the great oriental philosophers. Foremost among those philosophers is Confucius, a Chinese philosopher who lived between 554 and 479 B.C. Although Confucius lived many centuries ago, his writings have survived and remain popular because they teach universal human qualities and values (moral culture).

For example, Confucius described three stages in life:

1. Childhood, when the child is living at home with his family.  
This is a time when children should listen and learn.  
The parents and teachers are preparing the children for a successful life.
2. Active life, when the adult is working and is active in his community.  
This is when you may find a life partner and start your own family.  
At the same time, you will be establishing yourself in your profession or craft.  
This is a period of much hard work and many accomplishments.
3. Old age, withdrawal from active life



In old age you may retire from active life, so you have more time for contemplation and philosophizing. There is time to share the wisdom acquired during your long life and to take the time to appreciate fully the wonders of the natural world.

We can all recognize these three stages of life described by Confucius, and Taekwon-Do practitioners can see how these stages also apply to their progress in Taekwon-Do. Of course, Confucius wrote about his observations of life in China in the 5th century BC, when conditions were very different from now.

Another famous oriental philosopher, Lao Tze (570-490 BC) described the ideal society as one in which the ruler is of such high moral character that he can rule naturally, not by interference or fear but by appealing to the good nature of his people, who by merely doing their duty can live freely in peace without fear and anxiety. Unfortunately, no ruler has ever been able to establish such an ideal society.

Of course these ancient philosophers had no experience with a democratic system and could not predict what forms of government would prevail in the 21st century. They did not recognize the importance of showing respect for everyone no matter what position they hold and whatever their race, color, sex, nationality or religion. So we need to put their writings into context.

The basic moral precepts they teach are valuable and enable us to see how we fit into the history of mankind, following those who have existed in the past and preparing the way for those who will come after us.

The Taekwon-Do way of life = ancient philosophies adapted to our modern life

#### Why do we practice Taekwon-Do?

When I ask students why they are learning Taekwon-Do, the answer is often, “for self-defense”. This is a very good answer. In fact, many people have self-defense as a goal when they start learning Taekwon-Do, and you will remember that General Choi put a lot of emphasis on the effectiveness of ITF techniques, required for self-defense. When asked what it means to earn a Black Belt, he replied that it means that the student is capable of defending himself.

But ask yourself this question: How many times in my life will I need to use my ITF-TKD techniques to defend myself or someone else? I sincerely hope that you will never find yourselves in a situation so dangerous that you need to do so. The reality is that most Taekwon-Do students will never be in such a situation.

On the other hand, by training regularly and practicing ITF Taekwon-Do as self-defense techniques you will improve your physical condition and your self-confidence. That will improve your health and help you achieve balance in your life.

You will enjoy a better quality of life every day – certainly a valuable benefit of practicing Taekwon-Do!

## Winter in Quebec

In the part of Canada where I live, the winters are very cold. The ground is covered with snow and ice for four or five months of the year. We experience snowstorms, high winds, and freezing rain – sometimes all at the same time! So each year when the leaves begin to fall off the trees, we start to prepare for winter driving. We change summer tires for winter ones. We may erect a temporary garage to protect our car from the elements. We put a snow shovel and some extra warm clothing in the car, in case we get stuck in the snow. We change to Windshield washer fluid containing anti-freeze. We buy ice-melting salt and some sand to help with traction on ice. And we always check the weather forecast before going out. By preparing as well as we can for possible extreme driving conditions, we feel safe when we set out in the car. We are not overly anxious about what might happen, because we have prepared well. Likewise, learning ITF Taekwon-Do as the art of self-defense and training regularly builds self-confidence. Although physical conditioning and self-defense are very important, there is much more to ITF Taekwon-Do.



The Taekwon-Do way of life = a healthy mind in a healthy body

## If you make Taekwon-Do your way of life

Happiness is the ultimate goal of life but, as we all know, a happy life is not guaranteed for everyone. Living the Taekwon-Do way of life will give a focus to your life. The Taekwon-Do philosophy offers the basic principles and the structure that you need to make sense of your life and work to achieve your goals.

In order to have a happier life, each of us needs to strive to become a good person with a balanced life. This means being physically and mentally active. It also means having a positive attitude and thinking before we act. A Taekwon-Do practitioner should be cheerful, confident, respectful, honest, and loyal. He or she will be in good physical condition (taking into consideration age and any handicaps).

A good person shows integrity by refusing to make compromises that go against his moral principles. A happy family life and good friends as well as involvement in community life are also signs of a balanced life.

Participating in Taekwon-Do activities as a family – attending classes, training, studying, and living the Taekwon-Do way of life – will have a positive effect on your family. All members of the family will learn discipline and respect for others. They will see that working hard produces results and improve in knowledge, skills, and self-confidence. This is especially important for children. In fact, teachers in schools that offer Taekwon-Do courses note that students who participate in these programs show a marked improvement in behavior and academic results.

Living the Taekwon-Do way  
of life as a family:  
The Paquet Martineau  
family of Gatineau  
(Quebec, Canada):

Alain and Nicole with their  
sons Francois and Richard.



The third facet of Taekwon-Do is that it can become – in fact it should become – our way of life. When we have started to make progress in the first two facets of Taekwon-Do, it is natural to want to explore further the Taekwon-Do philosophy and learn to apply it in our lives.

To make progress in this third facet of Taekwon-Do, I suggest that you take the time to acquire knowledge by studying General Choi's Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do. A good place to start is the five tenets of Taekwon-Do identified by our Founder: courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control, and indomitable spirit. By learning more about each of these tenets, meditating on what they mean, and then working every day to integrate them into our lives, we will be living the Taekwon-Do way of life.

Finally, Taekwon-Do can be a tool for social development. It is important that we be involved in our community, working to build a better world. Identify a cause or an activity that will make a difference or make you useful in your community and get involved.

While traveling for Taekwon-Do and in my profession as an international consultant, I have visited many countries. I have also been able to work on a number of social development projects in different parts of the world. I firmly believe that ITF Taekwon-Do, with its noble philosophy, is an important tool that can be used to improve the quality of human life. I am convinced that with good planning and adequate resources, we can help to reduce poverty, which is a high priority for many international development agencies.

To receive the full benefits of living the Taekwon-Do way of life, we all need to continue to develop all four facets of Taekwon-Do:

1. a sport – for physical conditioning (healthy body)
2. a martial art – for self-defense and good spirit (safety and healthy mind)
3. a way of life – for a well-balanced life (happiness)
4. a tool for social development – to build a better world (compassion and devotion)

The Taekwon-Do way of life = a well-balanced life

### You can become a Leader

Our ultimate goal in applying the Taekwon-Do philosophy in our lives is expressed in the student oath that all ITF practitioners have memorized and repeated frequently: "I shall build a more peaceful world". The Taekwon-Do philosophy promotes the building of a better and more peaceful world where justice and freedom prevail. ITF Taekwon-Do practitioners are good citizens who contribute actively to achieve this noble goal.

In order to do this, we need to strive to become leaders. Although not everyone can become a leader on a national or international level, we can all become leaders in our own lives and those of our families.

A good leader can be compared to the captain who is responsible for bringing his ship safely to its destination and leads his crew using a combination of authority, teamwork, and fairness.

Confucius described the process of becoming a leader in four stages as illustrated below:



	TO LEAD	Work with wisdom and devotion to bring peace to the world	4
	TO DO	Use your know-how and hard work to bring order to the society you live in	3
	TO BEHAVE	Develop a harmonious family life through application of moral culture	2
<b>START HERE ►</b>	TO BE	Know yourself and improve yourself by self-evaluation and continuous education ( training)	1

As you can see from the illustration, you have to start with “to be”: working to improve yourself.

For example: If you realize that you have problems with interpersonal relations, start by analyzing the way you have reacted in the past. Do you tend to react on an emotional level, lack of objectivity and without thinking of the consequences? If so, work on developing self-control. Learn to stop and think before you act. Learn to anticipate the consequences of your actions. It will take time and practice, but you can improve.

I have used self-control as an example here because, like the other tenets, it is essential for a balanced life. In fact, because the five tenets are all inter-related, we cannot achieve a balanced life if we are unable to demonstrate all five in our daily lives.

But self-control is particularly important because a lack of self-control can have disastrous consequences in our lives in society, particularly with our families, at work, and in Taekwon-Do. This is why we chose self-control as the subject of the first Workshop on Teaching the Do, which was held in Benidorm (Spain) last October.

Teachers who have attended the workshop on self-control will be able to apply the techniques they have learned in their lives, and they will teach them to their students. In collaboration with the ITF Technical and Instruction Committee and with support from ITF leaders at the national level, we will continue to develop basic and advanced programs, methods and tools that will allow our masters and instructors to teach with success the Do to our members.

When you have started to make progress on the “to be” step, you can start working on the next step: developing a harmonious family life. When you have made some progress on the second step, you will be ready to extend your range of influence to your community and, possibly, beyond.

Take it one step at a time, and you will see positive effects on your life.

The Taekwon-Do way of life = always seeking self-improvement

## Justice and Human Rights

Since I was imprisoned in Vietnam and denied my freedom and basic human rights, I have done extensive reading and meditating on the subject of justice and human rights. We cannot precisely define justice, since our concept of justice depends on our local culture and traditions.

Basic human rights can be defined precisely, and this is what the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proposed by the United Nations in 1948 was designed to do. After experiencing the loss of hope for the future that results from the denial of basic human rights, I resolved to work for the recognition of the importance of human rights for everyone. Basic human rights must be guaranteed no matter what type of government you live under. Although a democratic structure may allow for more freedom for the individual, the majority opinion decides and this can lead to the loss of basic rights for those who believe differently.

This means working for a universal Charter of Human Rights, based on the Charter of Rights developed by the United Nations in 1948 but updated to reflect conditions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I have received many invitations to speak as a witness-advocate for basic human rights and I always use these opportunities to demonstrate how my ITF Taekwon-Do philosophy and training have helped me to overcome obstacles in my life.

One example of how our definition of basic human rights has changed in the last fifty years is the growing realization of the importance of protecting the environment. I am sure everyone will agree that basic human rights should include access to clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, and healthy food to eat. Yet so many of our fellow human beings are denied these essentials.

I am very encouraged to note that our young people are interested in protecting the environment and that they are willing to get personally involved. In fact, each of us should be more aware of the effect of our actions and do what we can to protect the environment. For example: If recycling programs for paper, glass, metal, and other materials are available in your area, do your share to protect the environment by participating. Think of other ways you can help, and then follow through.

Although the immediate consequences may seem small, you will be making a difference. And the more of us who make a small difference, the greater the cumulative effect will be.

The Taekwon-Do way of life = working for justice and human rights

## Conclusion

I decided to write about Taekwon-Do as a way of life because this is my first message to you in 2007 and the beginning of a new year is a good time for each of us to examine his or her life and resolve to make changes for the better.

Consider this quotation from Mark Victor Hansen, one of the most successful motivational speakers in America, who is well-known for his book of popular philosophy titled *Chicken Soup for the Soul*:

Don't wait until everything is just right. It will never be perfect. There will always be challenges, obstacles and less-than-perfect conditions. So what! Get started now! With each step you take, you will grow stronger and stronger, more and more skilled, more and more self-confident and more and more successful.

For example, if you have a tendency to think you can't do something, replace "I can't" with "I'll try".

Or you might decide to concentrate on the quality of respect by becoming more aware of how you can show respect in your relations with your family, your students, and others you deal with.

If your goal is to improve your physical condition, make a resolution to train regularly, then gradually increase the intensity of your training sessions.

Whatever your objectives for improvement in 2007, do not try to do everything at the same time. If you do, you are sure to become discouraged. Take it step by step. When you see the positive effect that even small changes can have, you will be encouraged to continue.

Here is what I hope you will remember from this message:

The more you are able to live the ITF Taekwon-Do way of life the more you will see positive effects on you, your family, your friends, your students, and your community.

Thank you for taking the time to read this important message. I send to each of you my best wishes for a happy and successful 2007 living the Taekwon-Do way of life!



Master Trần, Triều Quân  
ITF President

