



1969 (Then) Master Kim Soo (first on left) with some of his students outside the Downtown DoJang.

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## What Is A Dojang?

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There are many reasons why students begin martial arts training. Most come to the dojang to learn self defense, but others want to improve their fitness, learn self-discipline, or meet other people. With so many different opportunities available, what is a dojang?

Is the dojang a place where you learn to fight?

You certainly learn to defend yourself against an aggressor. You learn techniques that can be used in a fight. You develop a "combat-like" mindset if someone attacks you in the street. Many schools emphasize tournament competition where training is very much geared toward "fighting". But is this the best you can expect from a karate school? These schools "sell" tricks (physical skills) to anyone who is prepared to buy them.

Within a year, the conscientious student can perform the physical movements, at least on a superficial level. These physical skills are easily learned, and many students attain Black Belt level within a couple of years. However, the enlightened martial artist recognizes the "hollowness" of these physical displays by assessing the Basic Principles, rather than focusing on the entertainment of the performance.

While the body readily responds to physical training, the mind takes much longer to adapt to the knowledge and understanding of these new skills. Many "martial artists" who train in tournament oriented schools carry their aggression around with them during their daily activities. They use their physical skills to intimidate and threaten others, because they don't understand the true benefit of their training. They think they get respect because everyone is scared of them, and they are only too willing to "get physical" to prove themselves correct.

On the other hand, if their training had included mental and spiritual elements, the outcome would be vastly different. They would be peaceful, calm, confident and helpful to others. The physical skills are the same, however, the emphasis of training is on mental and physical balance, rather than

physical performance. That is why the outcome is so different.

Is a dojang a place to learn how to fight? No! You will learn to protect yourself, but if you are sincere, you will learn not to fight. However, self defense is only a very small part of the picture.

Is the dojang a gym?

A place where you can work out and sweat, lose weight and get fitter? Of course this may happen and is a great benefit to your life, but is that why you train? The dojang is not a fitness club with fancy equipment, air conditioning, and attendants ready to jump to your every whim. The dojang is a reflection of the collective dedication, sincerity, and humility of all the students. Your contribution to cleaning and maintenance is an essential part of this effort. The dojang is your school. You should be proud of it and want to show it to your friends and relatives. After all, this is where you come to improve your life. Improved health and fitness may have been an initial reason for coming to the dojang, but should become insignificant as training continues.

What is a dojang? A dojang is a place of education. Not necessarily the type of education you receive at grade school or college. The dojang teaches "common sense". It teaches understanding and truth. The dojang is a source of wisdom for your everyday life.

Through sincere training, your mind and spirit will open up to a greater reality of the world and its workings. This will develop from an understanding of the Basic Principles. Understanding these small principles will grow into understanding greater principles.

This is *Nam* - enlightenment. Only through your sincerity, respect, and humility will you gain an understanding of the principles. Cleaning and bowing in the dojang are essential to achieving *Nam*.

Many martial artists are ignorant to the mental and spiritual benefits of their training. Maybe only 20% really understand the principles. It is not entirely their fault, because it is likely their teachers did not understand them either. Some schools claim they will teach you a thousand techniques. There are no thousand techniques. There are Basic

Principles that apply in every case. Each case should be treated on its merit, in whatever circumstances exist.

Enlightenment should be the goal of all serious martial artists. It is a long and arduous journey and only achieved through understanding of the principles. Sincerity in your training is the key to understanding the principles. The common sense and wisdom gained through the dojang can be applied to any situation in your life.

Achieving these goals is why you come to the dojang.