



Master Walsh: Grandmaster Seo, you are widely regarded as the most senior martial arts practitioner in Korea. How did you begin training in the martial arts?

Grandmaster Seo: From an early age, I enjoyed different sports and physical training. I began martial arts training after the Korean War. It was a very difficult time for everyone. Maintaining a livelihood was not easy. Under such circumstances, I wanted to be stronger and being young at the time, I did not want to lose to anyone in a

fight. As time passed, I understood other benefits of training but this was the initial reason.

Master Walsh: In the 1950s, you developed the martial art of Kuk Sool Won with your brother, In Hyuk Suh. What are the essential principles of Kuk Sool Won?

Grandmaster Seo: Kuksool incorporates both soft and hard elements of martial arts to create a balanced approach to training. Both soft and hard elements have its merits and in Kuksool, a student must learn to harmonize this. The three core principles of Kuksool can be described as *ryu*, *won*, *wha*; that is principles of 'flow', 'circle', 'harmony'.

Master Walsh: Some writers in the United States have questioned whether there are any practical differences between the various Korean martial arts. How does Kuk Sool Won differ from Hapkido or Hwarang-Do?

Grandmaster Seo: There are many similarities between Kuksool and Hapkido, especially *yu-sool*¹. Differences can be found in the emphasis of other aspects of martial arts. In Kuksool equal emphasis is placed on joint locks, striking, sparring, and weapons training. In Hapkido, the main emphasis is on joint locks.



¹ 'Soft techniques'.

Master Walsh: You are the president of the World Kido Federation. Many Australian martial artists have never heard of the Federation even though it is regarded as one of the most prestigious martial arts organizations in the world. What is the role and function of the World Kido Federation and what is the Federation's vision for the future?

Grandmaster Seo: The World Kido Federation was founded in 1986 to give international Korean stylists the opportunity to reconnect with Korea and receive official recognition from the mother country of their arts. We started to actively promote the World Kido Federation in 1990. Given that it's been many years since non-Koreans have begun training in Korean Martial Arts, I believe that they have a legitimate place within the Korean martial arts history. The World Kido Federation provides the avenue for individuals to gain that legitimacy. Through the World Kido Federation, our members receive strong leadership and guidance from an organisation recognised by the Korean government, while maintaining enough autonomy to develop and pursue their individual styles and backgrounds. The World Kido Federation's vision is to continue to be the leader in the Korean martial arts community and encourage our members and others to work together to bring harmony and respect among all Korean martial arts.



Master Walsh: The Federation is currently making preparations for the 2004 World Hapkido championships and demonstration. What can we expect from the event and how can Australian martial artists get involved?

Grandmaster Seo: The Federation hosts a biennial trip to Korea and the World Hapkido Championships and Exhibition. It is an opportunity for students to test their skills in many areas of Hapkido such as *hosinsoo*², sparring, *hyung*³, and weapons. In addition, Masters from around the world exhibit the highest skills through diverse demonstrations of Hapkido. Also, seminars will be conducted to enhance Hapkido skills and to exchange methods and ideas. As for our members from abroad, there will be sightseeing of Korea so that one can appreciate the beauty of the country and to understand its culture. Australian martial artists

² 'Self-protection techniques'.

³ Martial arts 'patterns' or 'forms'. Also known as 'poomsae' in Modern Taekwondo.

that are interested can contact the World Kido Federation. I am positive that it will be a fulfilling experience.

Master Walsh: Earlier this year you formed a new martial arts organization in Korea called the *Han Min Jok* – the All Korea Hapkido Association? Why did you form the *Han Min Jok* and what is its role and function?

Grandmaster Seo: The Hanminjok Hapkido Association was formed to create an organization that can transcend the many different factions of Hapkido. Up until now, many of the organisations were not able to incorporate the diverse schools of Hapkido. Hanminjok is different in that it has been able to incorporate members from different organisations such as the Kidohae, the Kukjaeyunmaeng, the Daehanhapkido, among many others. Its goal is to unite all Hapkido practitioners under a unified goal of promotion



and growth. The Hanminjok Hapkido Association will be in the forefront of developing martial artists that are willing to put in the time to develop the highest technical skills, pursue development of one's character as well as the character of their students, and work for the improvement of society through the skills received through martial arts training.

Master Walsh: What changes have you witnessed in the practice of martial arts over the last 50 years? Do you think these changes are for the better or worse?

Grandmaster Seo: When I first started martial arts training, there were only a few *dojang* in Korea. In fact there was only one Hapkido school in the entire country. One the biggest change for the better has been the spread of martial arts and its popularity not only in Korea but all over the world. There are now thousands of martial arts schools and people now have easy access to training. However, on the downside, there definitely has been a deterioration of martial arts skills and understanding of martial arts philosophy, as well as etiquette and respect among martial artists. We all must continue to improve both quality and quantity of martial arts.

Master Walsh: Should Tae Kwon Do have been inducted as an Olympic sport?

Grandmaster Seo: If one considers Taekwondo to be a martial sport, its induction into the Olympics should be celebrated. Many countries all over the world are developing sports programs that are geared for Taekwondo competition. Also, through the Olympics, Taekwondo has now taken position as an international sporting event recognized by the highest authority. However, if Taekwondo is considered to be a martial art, there are few areas of concern. If Taekwondo concentrates itself on the competition aspect, many of the other areas of martial arts can be neglected. There might be too much emphasis winning medals and receiving recognition. Another area of concern can be the curriculum of Taekwondo. Modern sparring competition has changed to fit the rules of the sport. This might not fit with the martial art aspect of 'Tae Kwon Do'.

Master Walsh: In your opinion, what is the most important quality or characteristic of a martial artist?

Grandmaster Seo: The most important quality of a martial artist I believe is a good heart. That is the ability to fight for justice, show respect to others, and the will to continue on when things get really tough. Martial artists must definitely practice to achieve the highest technical skill but this does not mean much the martial artist cannot develop into a productive and caring human being.

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