

*You Wanna Throw Down?*

*An Exploration of Honor*

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*“You wanna throw down?”*

A friend of mine had teasingly made a comment and in retaliation, I jokingly challenged him to a fight. When my Hap-ki-do instructor found out about the exchange, I tried to defend my actions by saying I felt the need to defend my honor. My Sabumnim felt that maybe my definition of honor needed some help. He gave me the book Living the Martial Way<sup>1</sup> by Forrest E. Morgan and told me to focus on the section about honor.

And for the first time in my life, I had to actually think about what honor and being honorable truly means.

I learned that personal honor is often confused with reputation, or what the author calls “face”. A person’s reputation, or how a person is seen by community and those interacted with on a regular basis, can be important and is necessary to defend in some situations. People who are authority figures or work in leadership roles will often find it necessary to make sure that their reputation stays strong so that they can continue to be effective in their roles (pg 151).

Also, it may at times be necessary to defend your reputation just to protect yourself. For example, in some Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, reputation is vitally important. Most job positions require a good reputation both inside and outside the workplace. Also, some volunteer positions, such as in religious organizations might necessitate a good reputation. However, when it becomes necessary to fight for honor, it is important to remember that fighting does not always have to be a physical altercation. Other ways might be verbally defending, avoiding certain people or actions, or taking other actions to “save face”.

Morgan says that is important to understand that it is reputation, not honor, which is usually being fought for. I did not understand this distinction until now. I always thought that it was important to be seen as honorable by others. I did not understand that my reputation does

not give me honor, my honor comes from within. While others can say things that can hurt my reputation, they can not affect my honor. Honor is affected by my adherence to justice, courage and truth, but it is mine, and it can not be taken away by anyone but myself.

The author states that while many virtues are honorable, three basic tenets will determine honor: obligation, justice and courage.

Obligation is the root of all warrior honor, and meeting one's obligations is the principle part of what makes a warrior honorable (pg 143).

Morgan goes onto say that if one does anything for another, he or she needs to repay that person in a manner equal to the aid given. While I agree that fulfilling an obligation is an important part of honor I do not think that is the most important part. Nor do I feel that I should feel duty bound to repay someone every time they do something for me. If someone does something for me that I did not want him or her to do and it angers or upsets me, I do not feel that I should be obligated to repay them equally. I also do not think that it is very honorable to do something for someone because I should do it, or feel that I have to. Furthermore, I do not think that honor should be dependent on someone else doing something for me; it should be just as honorable to do things first.

In addition, I believe that I may need to fulfill my obligations, but not necessarily to the person who performed the service. It may be that a stranger stops and helps me change a tire. Now I have an obligation, but not necessarily to that stranger. Maybe next time I see someone else who needs help, it is my obligation to stop and help that person.

Another reason that I disagree with the author is that he does not discuss any obligation we have to ourselves. I feel that I have an obligation to be true and honest to myself, to take care of myself physically and emotionally. For example, if someone that I know needs help, but for

some reason I am unable to help at that time, I feel that I have the right to deny that person my help until I am available, and I should not have to feel guilty or upset when doing so.

Honesty is the virtue most often associated with honor. . . those who don't really understand the foundations of honor(,) sense a dishonest man is a dishonorable one, even though they might not be able to explain exactly why (pg. 159).

I think that being truthful is the basic foundation of honor. I think that to be truthful is also one of the hardest things to do. I also agree with Morgan when he says that when people lie, it is usually because they are afraid of the consequences of telling the truth (pg 61). Sometimes, this fear is justified. Morgan gives the example of lying to someone who is trying to rob the house of someone that you know, and you tell the robber when that person will be home (pg 171).

Often people will lie to others to protect themselves. They do not have the courage to face what they perceive as the consequence of their actions. To lie to someone who had put trust in you is to betray that trust. Some would argue that it is better to lie than to hurt another person. I disagree. Trust is precious and lying to a person that trusts you does a dishonor to that person. It also does a dishonor to the person lying by diminishing courage and encouraging cowardice.

In addition, I think that one of the most dishonorable acts I could commit is to be dishonest with myself. If I continue to deny what I know to be true as a way to protect myself, I am actually causing myself emotional and mental harm. Also, to be honest and truthful with myself will allow honesty with the people that I most care about. To show them nothing but a façade is dishonorable to them. It is a way of saying that I do not find them trustworthy. Lying to myself is a way to diminish my personal honor as I am not adhering to what I believe is right.

Justice lies at the heart of honor, for no obligation fulfilled is honorable if the act of fulfilling it creates an injustice ... Justice is simply the knowing of the difference between right and wrong and doing right (pg 144).

I do agree with his opinion that justice is the heart of honor, as it is doing what is right and being true to one's self that makes an individual honorable. Sometimes it is hard for me to know what is right and what is wrong. By exploring my beliefs and being truthful to myself, I will be able to figure out what is right. Unfortunately, what is just for me might be unjust to another person. If I knew how to deal with this problem, I would gladly do so. The only answer that I have right now is to accept justice as I see it, and act on it.

Courage is the virtue most often associated with warriorship . . . the fortitude it takes to do what is right, no matter what the personal cost (pg 148).

I believe that courage is one of the defining factors of honor. Being truthful to myself and knowing right from wrong means very little if I do not act in a congruent way. If I hope to never be afraid to do what is right, then I would be foolish. Others around me may not be as conscientious of adhering to truth and justice, but if I want to be honorable, I need to respect them but not join in their dishonorable actions.

The author also discusses how courtesy, restraint, loyalty and service are important parts of being honorable. To not treat others disrespectfully, to not overindulge, to not betray those who trust in you, and to give back to the community and others, are all signs that you have developed a sense of honor for yourself, and may build your reputation in your community.

One problem that I had with this book is that I do not consider myself to be a warrior, nor do I want to be one at this time. I did not take this art to learn how to fight; I took it to learn how to defend myself, and to learn more about myself. Trying to apply the information to myself was difficult for this reason.

I also think that Morgan's assertions that learning and developing a few virtues will cause one to be honorable is too simplistic. It demonstrates a how-to approach to honor when the true

development takes a combination of emotional understanding and life experience. Morgan talks about how justice is developed in three steps, when it is not that simple. Development of justice is not cut and dried. Different life experience can affect people in different ways, but is only by these experiences that people can decide for themselves what is right and wrong.

This assignment made me evaluate my thoughts about honor. Before, I believed that I knew what honor was but just could not define it. Writing this has started to clarify my thoughts and made me realize that while it is very hard to define honor, it is not necessarily that hard to act in honorable ways, being truthful, knowing what is right and what is wrong, and having the courage to act on what is right. Therefore, I do not need to challenge someone to a fight to defend my honor. I do not need to worry about letting other people define what my honor is, I will know for myself.

<sup>1</sup> Morgan, Forrest E., Maj USAF. Living the Martial Way, Barricade Books Inc., Fort Lee, NJ, 1992

## Honor comments from people on the \_dojang mailing list:

From: Farral, Kim <Kim.Farral@itt.com>

Here is my humble opinion and explanation of Honor...not Definition as I don't believe Honor is something which is simply defined...It is much more than that...

Honor includes proper ethics, a strong sense of right, high moral standards, respect for others, the ability to lead as well as follow, take orders as well as give them, understanding, compassion, a commitment to ones self, to ones lesser, ones superiors, and ones, duty...most importantly a commitment to the betterment of all...which I cannot stress enough...

Honor is a state of being that brings about admiration and respect from those that are within your realm of influence...It is a state of being where being your best is the ultimate goal without drawing obvious attention to yourself...in other words...without arrogance, showmanship, self-indulgence, etc...It is a state of being where one continually strives to improve with pride...not pride in ones self...but pride in the task of achievement for the right and proper cause as well as being part of something much larger than ones self...it is a state whereby you are looked upon with admiration and respect yet humble yourself to those in admiration of your skills and achievements...

"To Serve With Honor"...to train, practice, strive to be better each day...fulfill your commitments...fulfill your duties...not for the purpose of self-indulgence and self-gratification...but for of the betterment of all...

The best example I am able to provide which will demonstrate Serving with Honor and how one is seen as an Honorable person and what it takes to truly have Honor is to suggest you read the following book; "Silent Warrior" by Charles Henderson...this true, factual story is the best example of Honor I can offer...

Each individual will have heir own idea/opinion as to what Honor truly is and how it is best displayed...I have given you mine...

Serve With Honor...Not for yourself, but for all...Be Honorable...and Be Humble...

Pil Seung!!!

Kim Farral

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From: Stovall, Craig <CStovall@nucorar.com>

One of the recent postings about "honor" combined with some of the political wranglings in the martial arts community got me to thinking about honor and how it applies to what I and others are doing. I think one of the most useful ways of thinking about honor I got from Matt Thornton of the Straight Blast Gym. I believe he covers it on his website, but I first heard it mentioned on his original video series that he put out (which is quite excellent). He mentions the concept of "peasant honor" and "warrior/fighter honor". A person with peasant honor will bow down and submit to anyone that they deem superior to themselves. In turn, they will expect anyone that they deem to be inferior to bow down and submit to them. This type of thinking is very caste/class oriented. The flip side of that is the idea of having warrior honor. A person with warrior honor will bow down and submit to no man under any circumstances. At the same time, they expect no one to bow down and submit to them, regardless of circumstances. At first glance this sounds like an arrogant attitude, but I interpret it as being a person who respects the inherent value of all people, and who's own dignity/self-worth can neither be granted or taken away by another person.

What this does for me is provide a quick and easy litmus test that can be applied to people's behaviors/beliefs/actions when determining if I want to be associated with them. When I hear of or see people that are overly concerned with using "correct" terminology, that are promoting the wearing of "official" uniforms, or are driven toward the attainment of "official" positions within "sanctioned" organizations...I typically see the display of peasant honor. These are the first people to say, "You must

bow down and submit to my authority because you know less, are lower ranked, etc. Who says this is so...the guy who I have to bow down and submit to, that' s who". So what we have is a chain of authority that rolls downhill per the pecking order rules established by the "top dog". In turn, we have people that aren' t really engaging with each other on a genuine human level, but rather a collection of individuals interacting in a contrived manner that would look silly even when compared to the most draconian of Asian caste systems. Very little learning takes place, a WHOLE lot of political maneuvering goes on (how else do you get ahead in a system like that), and the mud starts flying when anybody inside or outside the system dares mention the fact that "things don' t have to be like this". After all, anything that can' t stand up against 5 minutes of critical thinking has to be guarded against the slightest hint of challenge. Is there honor in this type of environment? You bet...peasant honor.

Contrast this with other environments I have witnessed myself and/or received testimony of. People of all ranks, styles, and ages coming together to interact and learn. The 7th degree black belt helping out the white belt newbie. The champion TKD player helping the Hapkido player with his kicking...Hapkido guy helping TKD guy with rudimentary joint locking theory/technique. People from different spectrums of experience working hard and having fun. Is rank, age and experience still recognized and honored? You bet. But they serve as metrics of accomplishment and knowledge...not barriers to communication and interaction. Not a contrived social interaction, but a learning/growing experience that is built upon authentic human engagement. Is there honor in this type of environment? You bet...warrior honor.

I' ve been around this game for 17 years and I have seen a lot of things. Some good...some bad (and a whole lot of silly). The peasant/warrior dichotomy has taught me something useful. In order to love and respect others, I have to love and respect myself first. To me, that' s one of the hardest things in the world. Craig Stovall' s number one critic in the world is...Craig Stovall. Nobody is more intimately aware of my faults and shortcomings than that guy. Warrior honor forces me to observe the kind of environment/experience that I' m creating for both myself and others. If I' m a high ranking black belt, that doubles the challenge since I am likely the steward of a tradition or someone in which another person has placed some level of trust in me for their own development (call 911...I think I just channeled the spirit of Bruce Sims). Thinking like a warrior leads me to areas that result in growth for both parties...shooting for the true win-win. The peasant just sees it as an opportunity to put the coolie in his place, and to make "Uncle Daddy" a happy camper...and therefore propping up my own fragile ego and padding all the wallets from my end of the food chain and up. Here is my personal definition of "warrior"...I have shared it before, but I' ll do it again. A warrior is anyone that fights for a cause that they perceive as being greater than themselves. Being a warrior is not about fighting...it' s about having a reason to fight. Anyone who would put themselves on the line for a worthwhile cause, must surely have the sense of proportion to know that their own long-term well-being is closely associated with the long-term welfare of the next fella. Isn' t this the very foundation of human ethical thought? Can I be a warrior without ethics? Can I have ethics without at least being concerned for my fellow human being? Not in my book (on sale now...send \$1,000 for autographed copies).

So, if it' s any consolation...learn to have a warrior' s honor. If you do that, you' ll probably experience a whole lot of learning, make a whole lot of friends, and leave behind something for the next wave of fertilized eggs to build on. To the peasants out there...have fun with your belts, positions, certificates, organizations and hierarchies. Anything that makes it easier for you to look at yourself in the mirror each morning can' t be all that bad. Just don' t expect me to show up at your S&M pajama parties...I' ll be too busy having an authentic experience with another genuine human being. Simple philosophy, but nobody has ever accused me of being the next Jean Paul Sartre.

Hope that makes sense. This random rant on honor was brought to you by the letter H. Check your heads.

Craig "Warriors Don' t Need Tag Lines" Stovall  
P.S., And speaking of honor...do what the Bible says. Honor thy mother and father. After all, they had to put up with your crap for almost two decades. Oy!!!

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In the past few months, the Hapkido class has taken some time to think about the concept of "honor." In addition to a review paper by Angi Peglow on the book "Living the Martial Way" by Forrest Morgan, the NHA school got together one night over dinner and discussed aspects of the concept of honor, attempting to come up with a good workable definition for it.

We didn't quite get finished, though the discussion was intense, spirited, and extremely thought-provoking. In the next few months, hopefully we will finish our definition. In the meantime, here are some notes on what we have so far...

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Some generalized thoughts on what an "honorable person" demonstrates:

Presence	Good	Honest	Trustworthy
Moral	"just and right" from the heart.		

"Just," has courage, AND takes action. Has a moral compass (knows right and wrong)

Preliminary Definition: Honor involves thinking and feeling such that you act in a way that adheres to a moral compass that is internally motivated and internally defined.

Having the courage to act justly. "Act of character." Acting for what is best. The courage to face the fear of the situations, and act for change for the better.

After some discussion, (a considerable amount, actually. I was very impressed at the far-ranging quality of the discussion, bringing in aspects such as other cultures, time, and cultural mores) we ended up with the beginnings of a definition of honor, which we were planning on completing at a later date. (Probably sometime in October.)

**Honor:** An active character quality that is internally motivated, influenced by societal mores, and continually re-evaluated by the individual based on [Concept of Right and Wrong] resulting in [Concept of Action for Justice].

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The sections in brackets were what we were going to discuss and finish later.

To bring more thoughts to the table, even though we already have a huge amount to think about, here are some further ideas:

- If a person adheres to their own moral code, never lies, and is straightforward about their actions, is that person honorable?
- Does "being honorable" mean that their moral code must match that society's moral code?
- Does this concept of right and wrong have more to do with morals, or ethics? What is the difference?
- If a person takes responsibility for their actions, but doesn't wish to take responsibility for other people's reactions to those actions, is that person honorable?

Along with this, I thought I'd write our working definition of truth, so that as we formulate our definition of honor, we could test it to see if our definition of honor was true....

**Truth:** A clear, precise, and accurate description of a fact or situation that exists independently of the description.

## Additional Notes on Honor from the discussion on 10/25/03



From the last discussion, the current definition of honor was worked out enough to be:

**HONOR:** An active character quality that is internally motivated, influenced by societal mores, and continually re-evaluated by the individual based on [*Concept of Right and Wrong*] resulting in [*Concept of Action for Justice*].

### Further discussion:

Honor relates to a behavior *pattern*, not merely single behaviors.

Later thoughts included additions of the phrase "...resulting in choices creating a recognizable and consistent pattern of behavior" where that "consistency" was internally and externally consistent. (In other words, the pattern of behavior demonstrated *integrity*, where the person's external behaviors matched their actual internal feelings.)

For example, if a single dishonorable action is performed by an individual, does that mean that person (who heretofore may have led a blameless, honorable life) is suddenly dishonorable? That depends on how that person handles the effects of their dishonorable actions. There was an additional note about cognitive dissonance, related to an honorable person who has performed a dishonorable act, and how that person would then feel the need to make restitution of some sort.

Is there some sort of repayment/penance/atonement for their actions?

What is the motivation for their actions?

Singular thoughts on honor:

"Honest to yourself"                      trust/truth relating to other people  
"Based on a sense of personal responsibility"

At this point, the talks ran into a snag regarding the "concept of right and wrong" with regard to what had previously been worked out for a definition. "In accordance with your own internal code" meant different things to different people, but more importantly, what sorts of "actions for justice" were necessary for honorable actions differed greatly.

Several thoughts on this included:

To be honorable, actions had "to seek beyond one's own benefit or personal interest" or "to seek effect beyond one's own benefit."

At this point, the discussion seemed to break off into several camps, which gave rise to several different definitions of honor. For the most part, almost everyone seemed to agree with the following:

**HONOR:** An active character quality that is internally motivated, influenced by societal mores, and continually re-evaluated by the individual based on [*Concept of Right and Wrong*] resulting in choices creating a recognizable and consistent pattern of behavior that [*Concept of Action for Justice*].

However, the “Concept of Action for Justice” was a problem. Basically, three different view of honor were defined by the discussion group---or more appropriately, three different spots along a spectrum of honor.

At the ends of the spectrum, one group of people said that an honorable person’s actions *must* seek effects beyond one’s own personal benefit. Another said that the important part was that the person demonstrates integrity, that consistency between external behavior and internal belief, but that an honorable person did not need to act beyond personal interest. The third camp was in the middle between these two points.

It basically seemed to come down to a singular discussion: can a bad person be honorable?

By one group’s definition, a bad person could be honorable. If that person demonstrated integrity, did not lie about themselves, and always kept their word, that person could be honorable. Their concept of right and wrong may not match anyone else’s, and perhaps in society’s eye they were bad---but they could still be honorable.

By the other group’s definition, that would not be possible---an honorable person must perform actions resulting in benefits beyond one’s personal interest. (Note: this group didn’t say this had to occur all of the time. However, there must be a consistent pattern of behavior that demonstrates an attempt to effect beyond one’s personal scope.) This means that in some way, others must be benefited, which means there must be some similarity between their respective concepts of right, wrong, and benefit. As such, a “bad person” could not be honorable.

These two groups found themselves unable to reach a consensus or compromise that enabled their beliefs to all be honored simultaneously.

It was interesting to note that the “Concept of Right and Wrong” wasn’t necessarily the sticking point for the definition, it was what the person *did* as a result of that concept that caused the problem. While the right/wrong concept did occasion some debate (and to be truthful, we did seem to shy away from serious discussion of what is right and what is wrong, tabling it for later extreme discussion) it seemed to make less difference than what people actually *did*.

So---we didn’t come up with a working definition. Looking at our discussion, I really doubt that we will be able to further refine our definition of honor, as the discussion would now be based on truly different beliefs in the concept of honor. Up until this last point, people could work together on how honor was derived, but the concept of type of action really indicates a true difference in how people view honor.

However, I will note this isn’t a bad thing. It would be nice if everyone agreed and thought the same thing---but I actually didn’t expect it to happen. What I *did* hope for (and got) was a serious mental exercise about an important concept, and I really appreciate how people got interested and really dove into the discussion.

As such, I believe that at this point, we will consider the honor discussion closed, at least for the moment. Those people interested in writing comments, additions, or explanations of thought are welcome to do so, and email them to me. I will take them, add them to the honor file, and make the entire honor discussion available via the web site when I get it all put together.

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