

*You Wanna Throw Down?*

*An Exploration of Honor*

*Angela Peglow*

*Sabumnim Howard*

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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.

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