

Lessons Under the Ash Tree

Teachings of the Master

Master and Student
Walk the path side by side.
They share the same destinies
Until their paths diverge.

Deng Ming Dao

Chapter One

“When a student is ready, a master appears.”

I first knew Master Rankin as a parishioner in my church. He, his wife Bunny, and his Mother Lola, always sat half way back in the Sanctuary, on the left side, on the isle. Mr. Rankin was there with his family every Sunday without fail. Mr. Rankin always had a welcoming smile and a positive and uplifting word to say. As his pastor I was moved by his patient care with his elderly mother. Then my life crashed.

I had a debilitating life event that literally overnight destroyed my self confidence and self assurance. Here I was a highly educated, very experienced pastor helping others with their problems, and inside, I was struggling to keep myself together. Due to the life event I was fearful of being attacked by people late at night as I left my office. I was nervous at home that these same people would break into my home and do my family harm. I was suffering panic attacks. I was losing sleep and my work performance was beginning to suffer.

I knew that Mr. Rankin had taught a self defense class in our church. I had participated in that class and found it quite interesting. The class taught me that Mr. Rankin was someone that I could trust and reach out to.

One Sunday after church, I asked if I could see Mr. Rankin in my office. I described the life event and how it was affecting my personal life. Mr. Rankin listened

and nodded silently. He invited me to come the next day to his home and he would begin teaching me how to respond. I readily agreed.

Upon entering Mr. Rankin's home I was warmly greeted by his wife Bunny, their dog Molly, and his mother Lola. I was immediately struck by the black outfit that John was wearing. I knew it was a martial art outfit. I was a little hesitant as I began to wonder what I was getting myself into. Mr. Rankin invited me into his den. He moved an ottoman out of the way and bowed before me. I was taken aback. No one had ever bowed to me before. Then Mr. Rankin invited me to bow before him. I was doubly shocked as I had never bowed before anyone else either.

"The first lesson to learn," said Mr. Rankin, "is that I am referred to as Master Rankin. Within the teaching of this Dojang you will refer to me as Master Rankin." I began to feel very uneasy. "Dojang? What's a Dojang? Call him Master? The only Master that I knew of was that of Jesus Christ. The scriptures of the Bible teach that he alone is Master of our life and no other." I began to wonder if this was such a good idea to come to Master Rankin's house. I also knew though, that I was desperate and something inside of me said, "Yes, go ahead, this is what you are supposed to be doing. He will show you the way." So I agreed. I hesitantly bowed, and the journey began.

Master Rankin began showing me technique after technique of what to do if suddenly attacked by someone. I felt embarrassed and awkward. In all of my 45 years I had never been in a fight, I had never thrown a punch; I had spent my adult years teaching people to be peaceful and gentle. I had taught my children to avoid fights at all cost, and here I was learning how to fight. I couldn't believe what I was doing. Slowly,

gently, Master Rankin assured me that things would be O.K., that I would learn, and I would be able to protect myself, my loved ones, and those that are vulnerable in life.

After one hour exactly, the lesson came to an end. Master Rankin bowed to me. I bowed to him. He walked me to the door and he looked at me and said, "Same time, next week." He said it in such a way that I knew exactly where I was going to be next week at this time; at his home, in his den, learning self defense.

After several weeks of self defense skills my curiosity was piqued. Was this Taekwando? I knew Master Rankin was an instructor. I asked if he would be willing to teach me. He questioned if I was willing to take the journey. To be honest I was intimidated. For the past several sessions I felt anything but coordinated and competent, fit for such a task. Internally I wrestled, "Could a Minister actually study martial arts? Isn't that a conflict of terms? Could you follow Jesus, the Prince of Peace, and at the same time study how to kick, block, fight, maim, even kill another person?" Again, a silent voice inside me said, "Yes, do this. He will show you the way." So, I agreed. Monday's at 5:00, Master Rankin's house. There began my relationship with Master Rankin that would span the next three and half years and lead me to the place where I now stand on the verge of testing for my black belt.

The journey towards black belt has been one of the most challenging and humbling things that I have ever done. Every step of the way has felt like a struggle. I struggle to remember Forms. Wrist technicals hurt my wrist. Never having thrown a punch in life, sparring intimidates me, if not down right frightens me. Every step of my journey though, Master Rankin has been right beside me; patently, insistently

encouraging me as I tripped and faltered, with what I learned was going to become one of his favorite teachings, “Again. Do it again.”

As the seasons turned from winter to spring, our Dojang moved outside. We would workout underneath an Ash tree that Master Rankin has in his back yard. Often as we stretched our conversations strayed from the teachings of Taekwando. In the midst of a Form the Master would stop me and pose a philosophical question, a question about morality or religion. We would have a dialogue about some pretty heady issues. The Master would nod, he would say, “Again” and I would be off stumbling my way through another form.

One beautiful fall afternoon as the ash leaves reddened and began to fall, I began to realize that I was learning far more than Taekwando. I was learning about life in such a way that no academic degree had ever taught me. I began to cherish my times with the Master. I often felt like the disciples sitting at the feet of Master Jesus. Master Rankin was more than just a parishioner, more than just a teacher, more than just a mentor, Master Rankin had become what I feel is one of the most profound relationships that a person can have with another human being. He was indeed my Master in life.

Over my journey with Master Rankin I began to wonder why there aren't more Masters in our society? Why don't we recognize those person's who seem to be on a different path than the rest of us? Why don't we seek these people out to guide us, instruct us, and show us the way in life? I believe that our personal lives, and our world, would be healthier, more satisfied, and definitely wiser, if we all had a Master to follow. This is why I dedicate my Black Belt thesis to the issue of the Master. As a tribute to

Master Rankin, I want to explore exactly what a Master is and their role not only in Taekwando, but in life in general.

Chapter Two

More Than a Rank

Within the martial art of Taekwando the student receives the mantle of “Master” upon achieving the rank of fifth degree black belt. While the mantle is duly earned at the level of fifth degree, living as a Master in the world, or serving as a Master for another student, or a group of students, involves so much more than a particular rank. Deng Ming-Dao in his book, Scholar Warrior; an Introduction to the Tao in Everyday Life (Harper Collins, 1990.) describes the many characteristics that a master must have in their life.

While Ming-Dao is describing the Master within Taoism, I find that the similarities are striking and very applicable to Taekwando. Taoism, an Asian religion, is very committed to the integration of religion, philosophy and martial arts. Ming Dao lays out nine clear characteristics of someone who is a Master.

The first tenant Ming-Dao describes is that a Master is like a parent. Above and beyond all else a Master is someone who nurtures, guides, instructs, disciplines and loves his students like a perfect parent. One of the life issues that almost every human engages is to find a person, a friend, a mentor, a guide that will fulfill the role of parent that their

biological parents where unable to fulfill. Many people had parents who were abusive; others had parents who were distant, too strict, uncaring, or uninvolved. One of the most profound roles that a Master plays is that of a nurturing parent. Within this role the Master must be very careful to learn how to deal with the many transference issues that a student may project upon the Master as parent. But there is no more a profound role that a Master has with his or her students than that of a guiding father or a nurturing mother. A Master must be cognizant, comfortable, and even enjoy this role and all of the many responsibilities that come with it.

The role of a parent is something that Master Rankin truly enjoys. In an interview with Master Rankin he shared with me,

“One of the things I enjoy the most about being a Master, is that I’m the head of a very large family. I support my students like a parent. I love them and care for them. It is a connection that lasts forever. It does my heart good when students become Adults and come back and talk with me about what they’ve learned. Part of being a Master is teaching about life beyond the Dojang. That friendship between a master and Student becomes so much closer. I love the interpersonal part of it.”

Master Rankin very willingly fulfills the role of a guiding and nurturing father. His teaching is disciplined and structured like a good father seeking to provide necessary direction for a child. His teaching is also filled with smiles, laughter, and a wonderful sense of humor. More than just the founder of the Mountain Academy of Martial Arts, Master Rankin is the good parent who seeks to nurture and guide us in life.

The second tenant of a Master that Ming-Dao presents is that a Master must have a lineage. While a Master often teaches out of their own intuition and insight, their intuition and insight is grounded in a history that transcends their individual lives. They are to have a lineage of training that stretches beyond themselves. This lineage is to shape

and form not only the Master's own skill and practice, but their thoughts and thinking as well.

Mr. Matt Emmons in his thesis paper for his second degree black belt described the lineage of Master Rankin. Master Rankin studied Taekwando under Master Foster, who studied under Grand Master Kyung Won Han, who studied under Grand Master Hwang Kee. In addition Master Rankin studied Go Shin Ryu Karate under Steve Gafbitz. Master Rankin studied and earned a black belt in Hapkido under Master Ye Young Kim. Master Rankin also studied Iaido for two and half years. Master Rankin studied Tang So Do Taekwando under Master Chul Woo Jung. Master Rankin's lineage is as deep as the founding of the Moo Duk Kwan in Korea and as wide as expertise in four different styles of martial arts. As I have studied under Master Rankin the depth and breadth of his lineage has repeatedly shaped and formed his teaching. Master Rankin makes constant reference to his teachers, to Hapkido, and to Karate. Instead of being confined to the teachings of Taekwando in particular, Master Rankin uses the breadth of his knowledge of Martial arts in the daily instructions of the simple acts of kicking, punches and forms.

The third tenant of a Master that Ming-Dao presents is that a Master, by his very presence, awakens the dormant spiritual energy within the student. Every human being has a spiritual side of their psyche. A person's spiritual energy often lies dormant within them, waiting for some life event to spark the notion that there is a greater realm than that of the mundane day to day. The life and teaching of a Master, by his very example, awakens the student to this spiritual energy. One of the great gifts of Martial Arts is that it

allows the physical action of the martial disciplines to awaken the student to this spiritual energy. I find the teachings of Taoism helpful to understand how the Master awakens a person's spiritual energy.

The Taoist religion teaches that a person's spiritual energy is Chi. Chi is the life force that moves within each and every living object. Martial arts is a critical part of the study of Taoism, as Taoists believe that the physical actions of the martial disciplines unleashes the chi energy within them. For Taoists, a person becomes aware of Chi as they begin to learn the many movements, kicks, punches and Forms of a particular martial art. As mentors and guides, The Master of a particular martial art not only teaches technique but models the flow of this spiritual energy in their own lives. As they live and teach among their students, they literally awaken and unleash the chi energy of the person.

As I worked with Master Rankin under the Ash tree there were several times that he would stop me and describe that my Chi was blocked. We would talk about this energy as it flowed through me as a student. Master Rankin taught that the key to breaking boards is actually the flow of Chi. While technique and personal belief is critical in breaking boards and bricks, it is the Chi itself, the energy that moves from the core of the individual out through the limb towards the object that actually does the breaking. Master Rankin would cite photo studies that showed boards breaking in slow motion. The photographs capture that in the split second before the board breaks, there is an energy space between the limb and the board that actually does the breaking. This energy space is the Chi that flows.

In the daily practice of the Taekwondo Forms Master Rankin also taught the movement of the Chi in each step. The step of each Form allows the Chi to flow out from the core of the individual out through to the extremities of the limb.

Often as we sat under the Ash Tree, Master Rankin would do nothing more than teach me to breath, relax, and to feel the movement of the life force within me.

Deng Ming-Dao states that another critical aspect of the Master is that they can answer any question that a student has, that they themselves are Scholar Warriors. A key aspect of a Master is that they themselves are constantly learning. Their curiosity for new ideas and insights is a life long pursuit. Their knowledge stretches into multipul disciplines. Not only are they a Master of martial art, but they are Masters of philosophy, religion, art, engineering and sciences. This knowledge is critical in that it not only provides balance for the Master, but they are able, as Ming-Dao states, to be able to, “direct their students search.”

One of Master Rankin’s great strengths is his depth of knowledge in so many fields of study. He is a highly skilled engineer. He knows multiple aspects of all different forms of martial arts. Master Rankin has a fluid understanding of Asian culture and religion. He is a student of American history, politics and philosophy. Master Rankin is also a devoted Christian and student of Jesus and the teachings of Christianity. The true gift of Master Rankin is his ability to integrate these fields and apply them to his teachings. In an interview with Master Rankin when we were discussing the mental aspects of martial arts, he was able to reflect on his depth of knowledge when he said,

I am able, in any given situation, to pretty much know what's going to happen before it happens. I am able to anticipate questions from my students. I know the problems that different ranks face. It helps me be a better teacher.

This was said in all humility and I have experienced this myself in my own training with Master Rankin.

A weekly part of my training with Master Rankin were conversations that strayed far beyond martial arts. Master Rankin would quiz me on issues of religion, philosophy and inter-personal relationships. Master Rankin would ask me to apply my knowledge of different fields to different aspects of Taekwando. We would often philosophize on how the invisible opponents of the Forms were a reflection of the invisible issues of life that constantly plague us. There were many times that our sessions would involve stretching, then sitting and talking about engineering and politics. We would then stand, and bow to each other to finish the session. These mental workouts were as integral to my development as a student of Taekwando as the rigorous physical ones were. They developed within me the ability to integrate the martial disciplines into literally every aspect of life.

Deng Ming-Dao believes that a true master is one that one that lives the life that he is advocating. Ming-Dao states, "There can be no intellectualizing, hypothesizing, fantasizing, or mesmerizing. A Master must be experienced. The greatest sin of a Master is that of hypocrisy. The Master and his life practice must be one. (p.215)" That, which qualifies a Master as being, "A Master", is the total integration of the martial disciplines into their daily life.

It doesn't take long for someone to know that Master Rankin's total life is defined by the disciplines of Taekwando. Not only is his week framed around his classes and the needs of his students, but his life is characterized by the life principles of Taekwando; courage, respect, integrity, and discipline. I know Master Rankin in many facets of his life. I have visited his workplace and seen how he interacts with his employees. He is well loved as a supervisor because of the respect that he shows his employees. But the greatest insight to Master Rankin's integrity is the way he treats his aging mother. While Master Rankin is physically powerful, he is as tender and patient with his mother. He has provided for her home, her well being, and her daily needs. Many are the times when I have seen Master Rankin patiently walk beside his mother steadying her steps. In the same way that Master Rankin patiently walks beside the disciplined student, so does he walk beside all those of need in life. His practice and his life are a unified whole.

A master must look healthy and vital. Deng Ming-Dao describes that there is a direct unity between body and soul. As the Master takes care of his body it is a reflection of how the Master cares for his soul. The Master must look healthy and be healthy. Ming-Dao describes that the Masters, "Eyes and skin must be clear, his body muscular and lean. He should be fastidious in habits and glowing in health."

Master Rankin models what it means to lead a healthy life. His house and yard are spotless. He is constantly working to improve his home. Master Rankin takes care of his body in the same way. He's fastidious about his weight, and cares for his body by the food that he eats. In addition to the Taekwando workout, Master Rankin daily works at a Gym building his physical and aerobic conditioning.

A Master must be the right age. Ming-Dao describes that, "A young teacher is too inexperienced an older one will be too impatient, too irritable and too interested in completing his own spiritual quest" (P. 215). Dao describes that the ideal age for a Master is between the age of 55 and 65.

When I began studying with Master Rankin he was age 57. At the writing of this paper Master Rankin has just turned 60. According to Ming-Dao, as his students we are most fortunate as we are learning from Master Rankin in his prime. This is completely evident in Master Rankin's style and approach; he is able to integrate all aspects of not only Taekwondo, but also all of martial arts. He is focused on his students and their personal development. Master Rankin is not overly distracted by the completion of his own spiritual quest. Although, I have seen contemplative thoughts from Master Rankin about wondering if he should begin the process of preparing for his 8th degree Black Belt. As students, I believe that we should encourage the Master in his training and not allow our own needs to stand in the way of his own spiritual quest. While we enjoy his teaching and training, we all know that he has many well trained instructors. At some point as students, we should be the ones to encourage the Master to continue his own spiritual and physical development.

Another aspect of a Master's character is that a Master must inspire trust. Ming-Dao describes that for a student to learn, the student must come to trust their Master. The student must trust that the Master would never harm them physically, spiritually, mentally, or emotionally. As the Master engenders trust in the student, the student is able to let go of their fears and begin to learn. A Master is training his students in lethal forms

that can harm, maim, and even kill others. A student must learn to trust that the Master will guide them through this process.

If there was one thing that the Master repeatedly tells his students it is, “Trust me.” “Trust me, I will not hurt you.” “Trust me; I will not let you fail.” “Trust me as I teach you.” In an interview with Master Rankin he described how he valued the growing trust between himself and his students. “I love to see students open up, and just come in as a closed shell, and after a while they open up. That comes from trust and the value of Martial Arts where all people are treated as an equal.”

Sparring has always been my own Achilles heel in Taekwando. I hated sparring for fear of getting hurt. It took many long sessions with the Master saying repeatedly, “Trust me, I will not hurt you.” Eventually I learned that the Master was right. While engaging me in sparring, he would teach that his method is to, “always spar just a bit above the student’s level.” If Master Rankin did land a solid punch or kick, it was always for instructional purposes and never done in a dangerous or humiliating fashion. I have seen this with all the students that Master Rankin teaches. All of them know through his quick smile, and gentle demeanor that while disciplined and intense in teaching, his approach is gentle and inviting. As students we trust the Master.

The final aspect of a Master that Ming-Dao describes is that a Master must be three quarters along his own spiritual journey. If the master is too young, the master makes too many mistakes and has not fully integrated the breadth of martial arts and life to his students. If the Master is too close to their own, “ultimate spiritual attainment,” they are not able to communicate on a level that the beginner can understand. Ming-Dao describes that the Master who is too advanced has a tendency to withdraw from daily

activities and conversation and is completely focused on things ultimate and eternal. This is beautifully illustrated in Miyamoto Musashi's, "The Book of Five Rings" (Wilson, William, Kodanasha International. 2002.). After a life time of training, fighting, and teaching, Musashi withdrew from life, "Climbed mount Iwato in the province of Higo on and island of Kysuhu, bowed in veneration to heaven, worshiped Kannon, stood before the Buddah and began to compose 'The Book of Five Rings' (p.18)."

The time of withdrawal will someday come for Master Rankin. There will be his own Mount Iwato that he will want to climb. When that time arrives, all of his students must celebrate his spiritual journey and allow him to draw close to his God. It will ultimately be for his and our benefit when God calls him further. However, at this stage of Master Rankin's journey, we enjoy his undivided attention. We selfishly benefit from the stage of life that he currently lives. It is our privilege to study under his tutelage.

For the past three and a half years, I have had the weekly privilege of studying under the Ash tree learning from Master Rankin. It is only after reading Deng Ming-
Dao's description of a Master that I have realized how fortunate I, and all of his students, have been. We are learning from a Scholar Warrior.

Chapter Three

Master and Mastery

The title, “Master” is often viewed as a destination. One has worked, trained, practiced, and tested to achieve this honor. But when achieving the rank of Master, the individual soon realizes that this title is much more than destination, but a commitment to a process called, “mastery.” Mastery is the daily commitment to a process of learning that only culminates in death, and even then continues onto the next world. Mastery is a physical journey and a spiritual journey. It’s a complete melding of body, mind and soul.

George Leonard in his book, Mastery: the Keys to Success and Long Term Fulfillment (Penguin Books. New York. 1992.) describes that there are five keys to the process of Mastery; instruction, practice, surrender, intentionality, and working on the edge. In my work with Master Rankin I have found that his teachings and life reflect these five keys of mastery.

Leonard’s first Key of Mastery is that of instruction. The process of mastery is attained when one has committed their life to teaching what they have come to learn throughout their lives. This desire to teach and instruct is a reflection of an inner longing, a spiritual compulsion, to shape and form students who have come under their care and tutelage.

In a conversation with Master Rankin he shared with me the following. “I have this desire to get all that I know out of me, so that somebody collectively knows what I

know. It draws me to a point of contemplation. I spend a lot of time thinking about how I'm going to convey my teachings to my students.”

But more than a compulsion, the Master must be able to actually teach and instruct students the different aspects of martial arts and life. For Master Rankin, the marks of a good instructor is one who has checked their ego at the door of the Dojang. Master Rankin states,

I believe a good instructor is ego less. When an instructor comes through the door they leave their ego at the door and they teach. There is a certain love and dedication about martial arts that a teacher has to have to teach.

The knowledge that a Master has attained over a life time of study ultimately does not belong to the Master himself, but to the lineage that has taught him and to the community that has nurtured him. Deng Ming-Dao in his book, The Chronicles of Tao describes through his main character that has attained mastery, the challenge to not be a recluse but to periodically enter into the flow of society to teach what has been learned through seclusion.

It is the responsibility of the Master to teach. It is a part of the journey of mastery to teach. As Master Rankin said,

The teacher knows the responsibility to teach, he knows that responsibility deep in his soul. . . As a master you have a huge responsibility to your students, and to your instructors to teach what you know. . . Your love of martial arts, is taught, is felt, it is one of your main responsibilities as a Master.

But it is not only to the advanced students that a Master must direct his efforts. The true challenge, gift, and blessing of the Master is to teach the beginner. Leonard describes that in the process of mastery by instructing the beginner the Master, “is not only involved in the teaching of a new skill, but penetrates the process of mastery itself.”

Leonard describes that while, “Knowledge, expertise, technical skill, and credentials are important, without the patience and empathy that go with teaching beginners, these merits are as nothing.” It is patience and empathy that not only allows the Master to instruct the beginner, but it is these same traits that propel the master on the process of mastery. Mastery denotes that one has been able to set aside their own emotions; they have “mastered them,” and have through patience and empathy to identify with those in a different, a beginning, stage of learning.

The joy of working with Beginners is truly evident in Master Rankin’s teaching. He often comments that he enjoys teaching White Belts the different Forms and moves. He describes to beginners that they, “Must learn to walk all over again.” Master Rankin describes that he finds great satisfaction in watching beginner students suddenly learn how to lock their back leg, straighten their arms, and step through their Forms.

Master Rankin takes great pride in his beginners. He is able to work with children who are uncoordinated, adults who are timid, and people who have been displaced by the more popular segments of society. By his gentle yet firm approach, he is able to restore confidence and courage in people’s lives. One of my favorite memories is one time watching Master Rankin wade into a group of very young White Belts. They were hanging from his arms and legs like he was a huge tree. While the children laughed, the Master beamed. He was teaching not only the beginnings of Taekwando, but to these young children, he was teaching the joy of life, and how to trust their Master.

Leonard’s second key of Mastery is that of practice. Leonard describes that the Master and the Master’s path are one (p.74). It is a path that is marked by the love and devotion of practice. Leonard again states, “The people we know as Masters don’t devote

themselves to their particular skill not to just get better at it. The truth is they love to practice (p.75).” Leonard states that, “Ultimately practice is the path of mastery.”

Master Rankin has said on numerous times, “How many times have you kicked - thousands? How many times have you punched - thousands? And thousands more will you kick and punch.” Practice is the key for Master Rankin in learning martial arts.

Another one of Master Rankin’s favorite teachings is, “Again.” The student will present a form, stand sweating at attention only to hear Master Rankin, snap his fingers, clap his hand twice, and say, “Again.” The highest words of praise that a student can hear from Master Rankin after hearing, “Again,” and, “Again,” and “Again,” are the words, “The Master is not so much dissatisfied.” These words are a reflection of Masters love of practice.

One of the great challenges that a Master encounters on the journey of mastery is that of the plateau. Eventually every one who practices any physical activity matures into a long place where development seems slow and gradual, if anything at all. During this time a student can become undisciplined and even disillusioned. In the process of mastery though, the individual enjoys, even relishes the plateau as a time for personal growth and introspection. Leonard describes that the plateau is not about obtaining goals or charting progress, but it’s a time where the student practices for the sheer joy of practice (p.43). The plateau can become a spiritual place where deep personal introspection happens. Leonard states, “To love the plateau is to love the eternal now.”

Master Rankin views the different plateaus that he has faced as being great gifts to his life.

“There were different plateaus along the way; you deal with the plateau differently at different stages of development. After the first degree Black Belt the plateau will last for years and the student must learn how to deal with it. Eventually, you learn that the plateau becomes more of an opportunity, to learn about yourself and your students. You savor the plateau and the lessons that it teaches, and then you move on to your next level. There is sometimes even an inner reluctance to move on to the next rank because the plateau has taught you so much.

The next Key to Mastery that Leonard teaches is that of surrender. Leonard defines surrender as, “The courage of the master is measured by his or her willingness to surrender. This means surrendering to your teacher and to the demands of your discipline.”

Mastery demands sacrifice. Mastery requires that an individual set priorities, and schedules around the discipline that is being practiced. The Master must constantly sacrifice himself and his needs for that of his students and the disciplines of Martial Arts. Master Rankin describes it this way,

I became personally responsible for martial arts, the weight of that tradition, it is my responsibility to teach the tradition of Martial Arts. There are some nights when I say, ‘Man, I don’t want to go teach.’ But in that little pause, of wondering, the Master Always knows the answer, ‘Yes’ even at the cost of family, work, friends.

Master Rankin has done more than sacrifice himself; he has offered his home, his automobile and his personal finances to better his students. On his own path of mastery, Master Rankin models what it means to surrender to his calling.

Another key ingredient of mastery that Leonard describes is that of intentionality. For Leonard, intentionality begins with the process of mentally developing an image, a vision, of what one is striving for and then intentionally striving to embody that vision in life. Leonard describes how athletes find great success when they are able to mentally

envision themselves catching a football, making a basketball shot, or running a race.

What the mind can conceive, the body can achieve. Leonard describes that, "Every Master is a master of vision" (p.96).

Intentionally driving to embody a vision is a key component of Master Rankin's teaching. Master Rankin teaches students to conceive in their minds what they are trying to attain. He especially embodies it in his own practice and discipline. As Master Rankin contemplates his thoughts around testing for an 8th degree ranking he says,

There's something inside me that is beginning to see myself as an 8th degree, you have to envision it before it's a reality. You have to say to yourself, "You know I'm an 8th degree black belt and then believe it."

Master Rankin teaches students to envision the move of a Form before it is actually done. The student is to hold the perfect form in their head as they then strive to intentionally align their body with what they envision.

Vision and intentionality are a central aspect of board and brick breaking. Master Rankin teaches that perfect technique is only one part of breaking. The student must also believe that they can break the object. The student must be able to envision in their mind the object breaking. As if they were standing outside of themselves, Master Rankin teaches students to create a picture in their mind of themselves breaking the board or brick. The vision then combines with the technique for a successful break.

The last ingredient of the process of mastery is the desire and willingness to live on the edge for the purpose of perfecting their skill. Leonard describes that, "These Masters are precisely the ones who are likely to challenge previous limits, to take risks for the sake of higher performance, and even to become obsessive at times in that pursuit."

Master Rankin appears as a very calm, even tempered, gentleman . . . that is until he puts on his sparring gloves. When the gloves go on, he settles into himself, he breathes, his mouth draws into a slight smile and his eyes twinkle. He draws close to his edge. Master Rankin can then unleash a flurry of punches and kicks that are almost invisible to the eye.

One night at a demonstration, Master Rankin stood over a stack of five bricks. He stood still. He breathed. His mouth drew into a slight smile. His eyes twinkled. The Master drew close to his edge, and he cracked the bricks with a single punch.

Master Rankin then laid down on a platform. Cement blocks were stacked on his chest. Master Rankin breathed. He settled into himself. His mouth drew into a slight smile. He closed his eyes and nodded. The Master drew close to his edge. A man (myself) drew a sledge hammer over his head and shattered the blocks from his chest.

The Master took a potato and placed it upon the open hand of an unwitting volunteer (myself). He took his Samurai sword and placed it over the edge of the potato. He breathed. He focused. His mouth drew into a slight smile. His eyes twinkled. He drew close to his edge. He brought the sword up and sliced the potato from the volunteer's hand barely touching the person's palm.

Over my years of working with the calm, centered, gentle, Master Rankin I have come to know him as a Master who loves the edge. He loves to push himself and others. He loves to strive for perfection. He loves to push his students to attain new levels. In my own development I know that I have grown and developed because Master Rankin consistently pushed me to my edge.

Through the life long disciplines of Instruction, practice, surrender, intentionality, and the edge, Master Rankin has modeled a life that is committed to mastery. As a Master, Master Rankin doesn't so much as wear a mantle as he is committed to a way of life.

Conclusion

As a pastor who constantly works with people, I have this sense that we have lost our way as a culture. We seem to be living in a morass of flux and change. Our lives are governed by fad and fear more than principle and practice. I cannot help but think that our lives would greatly improve if we all had a Master that would lead and guide us. If every individual studied under a martial arts Master, not only would they learn a great physical skill, but they would find a way of life. They would be awakened to a spiritual energy that dwells within them. They would be connected to a great tradition that literally spans centuries. The Master would be for them as a good parent and as a faithful teacher. The Master would be able to guide them through the plateau's of life. The Master could teach them about the breadth of knowledge that awaits to be learned. The Master could teach them about health. Instead of drifting aimlessly in life, if people had a Master, they would have a mentor that would guide them towards a vision of life that was vast and fulfilling. This is what I have found in my relationship with Master Rankin.

I have seen several seasons standing underneath the Ash tree. I have seen the Ash tree stand cold in the winter months. I have seen the Ash tree blossom in spring and flourish in the summer. I have seen the Ash tree turn a beautiful red and drop its leaves.

Through each of these seasons I have had the privilege to study under someone who has taught me not so much the Martial Art of Taekwando, but the joy and discipline of the mastery of life.

I close this brief paper with a vision I will carry with me the rest of my life. I'm sweating under the Ash tree, practising Form after Form before Master Rankin. I come to stand in the rest position. The Master stands before me with his arms crossed. After a brief moment, he snaps his fingers, claps his hands twice and I receive the Master's highest praise, "I am not so much dissatisfied." I then hear the all too familiar next command, "Again, do it again." These words propel me on my own path towards what will hopefully be mastery in my own life.

