

Chapter 1

Character

The Nature of the Superior Man

Character: a distinctive mark; a distinctive trait, quality, or attribute; essential quality; nature; the pattern of behavior or personality found in an individual or group; moral constitution; moral or ethical strength; self-discipline.

Your character is essentially who you are as a person. It is the person that you have become through your actions and decisions over your lifetime, your essence if you will. The character of the warrior is the intrinsic qualities and principles which make him what he is – a man of integrity and honor. It is the character of the true warrior which makes him a superior man.

The true warrior, by nature and training, is indeed a superior man. He holds himself to a higher standard than most men, especially in today's society. The superior man holds his character, his reputation and the qualities which make him a man of excellence, in high esteem. To the warrior, it is his character which sets him apart from the average man. Any man can be trained to fight, but it takes much more than a set of physical skills to be a true man of honor; it takes character.

Gichin Funakoshi, the father of Shotokan karate, stated that, "The ultimate aim of Karate lies not in victory or defeat, but in the perfection of the character of the participant." The same could be said of the ultimate goal of the warrior. While it is true that the warrior trains his spirit, mind and body to be victorious when circumstances demand extraordinary action, the vast majority of the warrior's training is involved with the perfection of his character. Perfecting his character and becoming a superior man is the warrior's definitive purpose.

Furthermore, over the years, the warrior will find that he will have many more opportunities to use his character training than he will to

use his physical training. Of course the warrior's physical training and the development of his character are both important parts of the warrior lifestyle, but the latter will be used on a daily basis. Every man's character is tested daily through interactions with those who he comes in contact with during his daily activities.

Therefore, it is imperative that you develop a strong moral character, and the strength to cultivate and maintain that character, once you have planted the seeds of excellence in your life. You have to decide what you stand for and what you will not stand for. Don't leave your character and your reputation to chance – take responsibility for your life. It is your duty to build your character. Nobody else will do it for you, but there are many who are willing to help you weaken it or totally destroy it.

You have to be strong enough to stand up for what you believe, even if you are standing alone. Public opinion and outside pressures should not play a part in swaying the core beliefs which make up your true character, but they will if you don't know exactly what you believe and why you believe it. You have to know why certain character traits are important to you. If your foundation is not solid, sooner or later you will find problems which are a direct result of your shaky foundation.

Your character is the foundation of all the other parts of the warrior lifestyle. Without a solid foundation, it is easy for you to veer off track in one way or another. For this reason, it is vital that your character adheres to the highest standards. Don't compromise where your character is concerned. This is just one of the traits that sets the warrior apart as a superior man. Work to build a solid character and maintain a reputation which is true to your nature as a superior man.

This brings us to the question of how do you compose your character. How does a person develop a set of qualities or traits in his life that sets him apart from the common man? Where do you start? This can be an especially tricky question if one does not have background knowledge concerning what comprises good character traits, or if one has failed to live a life filled with these positive qualities over the years.

The best way to start to compose your character or to change your character if need be, is to study the traits which you want to incorporate into your life. Study the traits of the superior men of the past. What made these men "men of character?" Why do you admire them? What traits set them apart in your mind? By studying the lives

of warriors, sages, and men of character, you can get a good picture of what it takes to be a man of character – a superior man.

These men sought to live lives of honor and integrity. They took life seriously and lived life to the fullest, at the same time, they did so without compromising their character. These men were not perfect. Nobody is perfect. They simply worked at being men of character. They made a firm decision about the way that they were going to live their lives and followed through with that decision.

When they found that they had fallen short or had faults that needed to be corrected or removed, they made the effort to make the necessary changes. Everyone falls short on this quest. The key is to not give up when you miss the mark. When you are sighting in your rifle and you miss the bull's eye, you don't give up; you simply adjust your sights and refine your technique until you are able to place your shots where you want them to be.

The same principle applies to the development of your character. When you miss the mark or find that you have a habit that is not in sync with the person that you want to be, you should simply make the necessary changes to bring your actions into harmony with the character that you want to cultivate. This is an ongoing process. Although you may develop your character to that of a superior man, you will never reach a point where you will not have to make adjustments from time to time.

Building and maintaining your character takes time. It doesn't happen overnight. Just as it takes weeks for the cherry blossom to actually become a cherry, it takes months, even years to perfect your character. Be patient with yourself, especially when you fail to live up to the standards which you are striving to achieve. Don't allow frustration over your failures to cause you to throw in the towel on your goal to become a man of excellence.

Sophocles, one of the most influential writers of Ancient Greece, wrote that, "All men make mistakes, but a good man yields when he knows his course is wrong, and repairs the evil." As I stated above, no one is perfect. Your imperfections do not indicate that you are not a man of character, but merely that you are a human being. George Washington pointed out that even the greatest men are not without their faults when he said, "It is to be lamented that great characters are seldom without a blot."

It is your duty to work to achieve the perfection of your character, not to be perfect. Every gardener works hard to maintain his garden and keep it as weed free as possible. This doesn't mean that his garden

will never have any weeds. It means that when he becomes aware of those weeds, he takes steps to remove them. It takes continual work for him to keep his garden weed free. Maintaining a weed free garden is a constant struggle, but one in which he is dedicated to in order to cultivate the type of garden that he wants and can be proud of growing.

Just as the gardener has to continually tend to his garden, you have to work at maintaining both your character and your reputation, even after they have been formed. Living up to your high standards is a never-ending process and there will always be temptations to lower your standards or temporarily set them aside. You have to have the intestinal fortitude to maintain your standards no matter what others around you say or do. Your character has to be able to withstand the tide of public opinion, the actions of others, and your own weaknesses.

Don't let others influence your decisions, at least not in a negative way. Don't compromise your principles to please someone else or to avoid displeasing those around you. Stand firm. Live according to your nature – the nature of the superior man. It can be very tempting to allow the actions of others to influence your own actions in a negative way. When someone treats you with disrespect or in a rude manner, it is tempting to respond in kind, but this is not the character of the superior man.

Emerson pointed out that, “Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist.” The man of character cannot afford to allow others to dictate his actions. The 17th century Spanish writer and one of my favorite authors of old, Baltasar Gracian, stated this perfectly when he wrote, “The man of principle never forgets what he is, because of what others are.”

Don't choose your actions according to the actions of others, but rather to your own standards and principles. Let your own conscience be your guide. You know which actions are in accord with your standards, and which are not. After you have developed quality character traits in your life, you can depend on your conscience to be a reliable guide concerning what you should and should not do.

Lao Tzu, the author of the classic book, *Tao Te Ching*, another one of my favorite books, made this point stating, “Highly evolved people have their own conscience as pure law.” He went on to teach that, “A person experiences the events of life, and the experiences of life in turn reveal something about that person.” How you respond to the events in your life, both the good ones and the challenges, reveal your true character.

Sages throughout the ages have taught this same platitude. Plutarch, the famous Greek historian simply stated that, “The measure of a man is the way he bears up under misfortune.” Thoreau wrote, “Our true character silently underlies all our words and actions, as the granite underlies the other strata.” If you want to truly know how well you have developed your character, pay attention to how you respond to both the challenges and the triumphs of your life.

This not only applies to those times when you are with other people, but also for the quiet times when you are alone. The truest test of character is what you do when you are alone. Do you still live up to your standards when nobody is watching? Do you live up to your reputation when you are at home with your family or only when you are in public? Your character should be sincere and genuine, not for show.

You should not act one way in public and another way in private. Your character is revealed through your words and your actions. You must be consistent and sincere in order to be a superior man. Strive to make sure that your words and your actions are in line with the character that you are building. This is the nature of the superior man – the nature of the warrior.

Aristotle put it this way, “A good man...whatever may befall him, will behave gracefully; approving his conduct exact, square, and blameless. Slight misfortunes are unable to shake his well-balanced happiness...Of the circumstances in which he is placed, he will always make the best and most honorable use.”

This is a good description of the man of upstanding character and can only be lived up to by making a conscious decision to be a man of character. You have to remain conscious of your every thought and your every word. Many people basically live their lives on autopilot, going through life without any true direction, responding in whatever manner their emotions dictate to them in any given moment. The warrior can't afford to live his life in this way; he has to be ever vigilant of his thoughts, words and actions.

He must maintain his character in all of the situations of life. No matter what circumstances he finds himself in, the man of character will act appropriately, maintaining the principles which he has firmly decided to incorporate into his life. This takes practice and determination. Hemingway called this “Grace under pressure.”

This is a tall order. It is not easy, if it were easy, then men of character would not be as rare as they appear to be in today's society. You have to constantly work at building and maintaining your

character. You have to develop confidence in the principles that you have made a commitment to live by during your lifetime. Having this kind of confidence in your principles takes time and effort to develop; it takes persistent, unrelenting work.

William Ellery Channing described the man of character as, “The greatest man is he who chooses the right with invincible resolution; who resists the sorest temptations from within and without; who bears the heaviest burdens cheerfully; who is calmest in storms and most fearless under menace and frowns; and whose reliance of truth, on virtue, and on God, is most unflinching.”

Choose what is right with invincible resolution. It should not matter to the man of character what others think, say, or do. His focus is always on what is right according to the principles he has decided to make his own. It is these inner principles which determine the true character of a man, and the dedication to these principles will be exhibited through his thoughts, words and actions.

Professing to live by a set of principles, no matter how lofty those principles may be, is worthless if they do not manifest themselves through your thoughts, words and actions. It is not enough to be a man of character in your own mind; you have to be a man of character in every aspect of your life, starting with your underlying principles. Even if your actions appear upstanding to those around you, if the underlying motivations and principles are skewed, your actions are questionable at best.

Building your character on strong personal principles is the most important part of the warrior lifestyle. It is the foundation of all the other traits which make up this lifestyle of excellence. Each of the other traits that I will be discussing, actually form a part of your overall character, and together they construct the actual principles and code of life by which the true warrior strives to live. It is not good enough to *appear* to be a man of character; you must truly *be* a man of character. Thomas Paine stated, “Reputation is what men and women think of us; character is what God and angels know of us.”

While your reputation is important, at least to a degree, it is your authentic character that truly matters. Each of the underlying principles or traits which form your true character must be built on a solid foundation. This foundation is your sincere desire to be a man of character and to live according to those time-tested principles which make someone a superior man. Understanding the importance of developing an unquestionable character is the first step towards living a life of excellence.

Meditations on Character

Hold yourself responsible for a higher standard than anyone else expects of you. Never excuse yourself.

Henry Ward Beecher

If an urn lacks the characteristics of an urn,
how can we call it an urn?

Confucius

To compose our character is our duty.

Montaigne

It is no easy thing for a principle to become a man's own unless each day he maintains it and works it out in his life.

Epictetus

Do not seek to follow in the footsteps
of the men of old, seek what they sought.

Matsuo Basho

Every man who is truly a man must learn to be alone
in the mist of all others, and if need be against all others.

Romain Rolland

Perfection is attained by slow degrees;
she requires the hand of time.

Voltaire

For when moral value is considered,
the concern is not the actions, which are seen,
but rather with their inner principles, which are not seen.

Kant

Lay down for yourself, at the outset,
a certain stamp and type of character for yourself,
which you are to maintain whether you are
by yourself or are meeting with people.

Epictetus

Let them know a real man,
who lives as he was meant to live.

Marcus Aurelius

The man of principle never forgets what he is,
because of what others are.

Baltasar Gracian

What I must do is all that concerns me,
not what the people think.

Emerson

The superior man is watchful over
himself even when alone.

Chung Yung

Our true character silently underlies
all our words and actions,
as the granite underlies the other strata.

Thoreau

A good character is more valuable than gold.

Philippine Proverb

The superior man does not give up good conduct
because the inferior man rails against him.

Hsun-Tzu