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What a Black Belt Means to Me

A black belt, like one's age, is not truly given to someone at one specific time, although it is sometimes portrayed that way. The day of your birthday signifies your being a year older, but are you really a year older than the day before? As is a black belt, you do not become a black belt overnight, but rather develop into one throughout your training. To me, being a black belt consists of three components. A black belt not only wears a black belt, but has developed mental, physical and emotional characteristics.

Having a black belt should insure to others that you have certain characteristics. You do not demand respect, but earn it, by being respectful to others. You have integrity in everything that you do. You are trustworthy, so people can rely on you. A black belt is also self disciplined: a black belt means autonomy, to show you are capable of carrying on with your training by yourself. One is a leader by guiding others to a common goal. A black belt is also humble; assuming you are the best is greatly amiss. A black belt is capable of self growth, and have a desire and aptitude to continue learning. When a black belt does not know something, they must know how to learn and correct without another to guide them, whether it be learning a new form, or a new martial art, the rules to learning are the same, which are rules you have learned from your training.

However, if a black belt is only about mental aspects it would not be a *martial* art. A black belt also displays a mastering of what he/she has learned. They display competence in their forms, kicks, fighting skills, endurance, and strength. They ever have these components down well enough to teach them. The key to being a black belt is the capability of enlightening others, to bring them up to your level; only then can you prove full mastery of your learnings. A black belt radiates energy.

The emotions that a black belt feels must also be appropriate. It is not just how you interact with others that is important. You treat yourself with respect because that is how you will treat others too. You face things with a certain attitude; you act mature in situations and not childish. If you descend down to the level of immaturity, you might not be ready to teach them. Also, black belts do not look at challenges with despair, but rather as an opportunity to prove themselves to others around them; instead of dwelling on how large the obstacle is, they think of a way around it.

Although we will be breaking boards and displaying our forms at our black belt test, being a black belt is much more than this event. If someone were to come in and do the black belt test we are doing on April 22, they would not be a true black belt. To me, a black belt is much more than a day's work, or our entire training for that matter. A black belt is a promise the candidate is making, that they will continue to train as hard as they have been training to get to this point, a promise that they have the knowledge, responsibility, and skill to teach others and also themselves. To be a black belt, one must not simply wear a black belt, but be a black belt everyday; it is not an accessory, it is a lifestyle for which we have been training many years to achieve. We must not stop, but continue, expanding and spreading our mindset, and our emotions, and our knowledge in martial arts.