

The Karate Gi

I read an article in a national martial arts magazine which has prompted me to write my views on this subject. The article was titled "Isn't It Time For An Alternate choice in attire?"

The article has made the comments that the traditional karate gi prevents perspective new students from entering the doors and that it is unattractive, restraining and looks funny to most people. The article also made the statement "without using the word tradition, can anyone explain why we require that our students wear a karate gi."

In the beginning of the article it mentions a story about some adults looking through the window of a karate school and making a comment that they would not train because of the gi. To begin with, if someone looks at the martial arts in that way then they had no serious intentions of training. The majority of students that are drawn to martial arts schools are drawn to them because they have the spirit of the warrior inside them. Training in the martial arts is a calling the Warriors of this day an age. Sure some people train for other reasons, but the majority train because they feel the calling of the warrior inside them.

The word "tradition" should be all that is needed to explain to someone why we require that our students wear a karate gi. I trained in the traditional style of Okinawan karate and wear the traditional white gi. Throughout my years I have never encountered a student that was embarrassed or unwilling to wear a gi. On the other hand I have seen students attitudes and energy levels change to the positive side with their first class wearing their new gi. The traditional gi allows all students to be equal, but it's the belts of the style that distinguish the knowledge of each student. I can remember the first day I got to wear my first gi. I felt that I had become part of the family and the tradition of karate. My knowledge for karate grew with each belt that I had received. The gi becomes more than just a uniform, just like the belt, it becomes a part of you and your spirit.

There are many traditions that we carry on in our lives. Some we still practice and others have been lost. Tradition means a lot more than the passing down of elements of a culture from generation to generation. It means learning and becoming a part of that tradition. If you decide to remove the traditional gi then what would be next? Would you then decide to remove the courtesy bow that is shown to instructors and fellow students simply because students might feel uncomfortable bowing to someone, or to remove it simply because some people might feel it is a nonessential part of traditional karate.

The gi is an important part of traditional martial arts. Most people that are not willing to wear a gi are the people that only want to learn the basic essentials of how to kick butt and are not interested in learning tradition. In a traditional martial arts school you learn more than just how to kick and punch, you learn respect,

pride, courtesy and loyalty among the few. So maybe more schools should become more traditional in their teaching, and not the other way around. I feel that there is no reason to consider replacing the traditional gi, or even any other tradition that comes with a traditional martial arts. I am a traditional martial artist and I accept all that comes with a traditional martial arts.

Sensei Thomas Harty
www.suncoastkarate.com
dojo@suncoastkarate.com