Ron Do

(My Way)

By Master

Ron Claassens



**Development of Do (the Way)**

**By Master Ron Claassens 6th Dan**

**Introduction**

In all styles of martial arts there is a quest of self improvement or to find oneself. My quest in taekwondo has been the development of my mind as a sponge of sorts, for all aspects of martial arts. But most of all to be able to control the mind to increase clarity of memory, which has been achieved by nearly 40 years of martial arts training. Also by utilizing the active meditation from yoga to understand my body and helping my students in their quest to advance the same. All this is not possible without having a supportive partner who feels the same way, with the same passion and commitment.

**My Tools**

Yoga – via Asarnas/postures – deep prana/breathing – rehabilitation – meditation – stilling the mind – breathing – clarity by de-cluttering the mind.

Gardening – being one with the earth – active meditation.

Surfing – being one with the ocean active meditation.

Teaching - sharing my knowledge of understanding of the martial arts and life. Helping students grow.

Training – looking for ways to improve and increase way knowledge and understanding to students.

Balance – family life – work – martial arts – recreation/relaxation.

**Yoga** – has been an endearing friend to the martial arts – when Bodhirama introduced the basic movements to the monks of the Shaolin many centuries ago – to make the then lazy monks of the monastery take a direction in development of martial arts, spawning the many style of kung fu that have been born from the Shaolin Monastery.

Postures – by standing in yoga arsanas (postures) you create an awareness of your body. To create muscle control, strength and flexibility I have been incorporating the style of B.K.S.Inyengar yoga for more than 30 years to develop my flexibility, strength and body awareness.

Breathing – yoga nidra – it is not merely enough to stand in posture, you must relax your muscles with your breath – the breathing must be strong and focused – incorporating relaxation and tension whilst working different parts of our body.

Incorporating the yoga postures and breathing into our style of TKD (IMT) our students have enhanced their flexibility in a fraction of the time. Making them better martial artists, as well as decreasing the chance of personal injuries.

**Meditation** - By this I don’t mean you have to sit far hours on end like a monk or religious zealot. But you do need to sit when you can for 5-10-15-20 minutes, whatever you can fit into your lifestyle/ schedule.

Method – Your goal is to quiet/still your mind and focus on your breathing, this creates awesome mental clarity and enhances your ability to learn new things. My method has been to sit and focus on the inhalation and exhalation and making them the same duration.

e.g. Start empty your lungs with an exhalation. Then Inhale – count to 10 while breathing in. Then exhale – count to 10 while breathing out. Repeat for 10, 20, 30 or 40 cycles, focusing totally on the breath and not focusing on any thoughts that come into your mind, let them go – continually focusing on the breathing inhalation and exhalation. I have been able to do this even while being active such as gardening at home or surfing in the ocean. Being one with the earth or ocean is very soothing to our mind as well. Working and helping things grow as well as manual labour with the earth is very fulfilling. As is catching a wave and harnessing its power for your enjoyment and appreciating the aspects of nature whilst in the ocean.

**Gardening**- I’ve always had a green thumb so to speak, as a kid I always helped my mum in the garden. Creating a love for plants and watching things grow. I even had a part time job at a nursery on the weekends. When I finally got my own back yard there was no stopping me. A simple suburban lawn was turned into a tropical oasis; this didn’t happen over night but over the course of 30 years. For years we had fresh vegetables and fruit coming out of our own back yard, most holidays when the kids were young were spent on my father in-laws farm. We changed his farm dramatically in 10 years, with a huge fruit orchard and vegetable garden.

**Surfing/Skateboarding** – have been recreational hobbies of mine since I was old enough to swim in the ocean and skate on the road. I can be thank-full that my parents chose the northern beaches to set up home for our family. As a young kid, we spent all our spare time in the surf or skating on the roads and paths. My affinity with the ocean must be with my ocean star sign Cancer. There’s just something about floating in the ocean waiting for the next wave to propel you to the shore. As I got older the attraction to the ocean diminished for a few years as the kids were growing up and became just a vacation activity. But now in my fifties, you can find me every Sunday morning down Freshwater beach in the surf catching a few waves with some friends. The serenity in the water is amazing, with the sunrise giving you time to reflect and chill in between waves.

**Teaching-** In teaching TKD I’ve increased my level of understanding as well as my ability to perform better, hence making our students progress faster with a higher level of understanding. The way we were taught is not necessarily the way we teach, as our knowledge increases we are able to impart this knowledge onto our students. Who inturn share it with their peers as well as junior’s ranks bellow them. Teaching is the forefront of developing the Do in TKD. Practicing the basics over and over we develop and refine our technique. But most of all it is to share your passion for what we have so much and impart this onto our students and their families. To be a teacher means to lead from the front and to set the standard for others to follow. Doing this the teacher should always be working towards the next level of mastery, so the students see that it doesn’t stop @ black belt. But see it, just as the beginning of a lifelong journey in pursuit of perfection.

**Training** – has to be the glue of your development in the martial arts, turning everything you do into the development of your body. It doesn’t mean become a gym junkie, but making the most out of the opportunities that come your way. I was lucky to have a very physical job for more than 18 years; we were catching kangaroos on a daily basis, great for timing as we would catch them by hand. By grabbing their tail as they ran past us in full flight up to 25 km an hour. They would take some stopping, once you got your timing right you could pluck them out of the air. The smaller ones we would catch with landing nets we got very good at this. Digging trenches for drainage or fencing became a workout. Carrying 20 kg bags of feed around the park became a workout. Unloading the feed truck became a workout. Then at lunch time we went to train TKD already pumped. One of my focuses was to absorb what ever I could and always looked at other people to cross train with, Macquarie University had visiting students and academics from all over the world and they would congregate at the gym. There was always someone to spar or train with before class or after, or even on the of days when we would go over to the gym and just train by ourselves. It was like an addiction I just couldn’t get enough. On the weekends a bunch of us would get together and train in our back yard throw some mats down and sweat it out for a few hours. Great friendships were made over these years that still hold to this day. It takes at least 10,000 hours to achieve mastery, so don’t count years count actual training time spent on the mat or in the dojang.

**Balance**- creating balance in your life creates harmony, everything you do has a knock on effect, by that I mean something has to give if you spend to much time on one thing. So it is important to time manage so other things in your life don’t suffer. Wether it be relationships, family, work, study, home maintenance, house chores, recreation, relaxation. Creating a balance with all these things not only creates a happy life but a good life. Its even better if you can encourage other members of your family or partners to join you on this journey.

**My Journey the early days**

We all have numerous challenges and adversities to face throughout our lives. This is my journey at age 13, I was being bullied at school as well as down the beach where we would spend most of our time on the weekends. We lived close to the water and spent a lot of time in it swimming, body surfing and surfing as we got older and got more confident with the ocean. Through a friend, Danny who shared the same birthday as me, we decided to start up karate. As his uncle trained in Go Ju Kai with Sensei Merv Oakley and his assistant instructor Denis, forgot his surname as that was more than 40 years ago. Training was tough, we were the only two teenagers in the class the rest was adults. A lot of times it felt like we were the punching bags for the older guys as we were continuously getting knocked around. This was the school of hard knocks, literally. But we didn’t know any different as there was no choice because this was all there was back in 1973 on the northern beaches.

Week after week I made the effort to train every Monday and Tuesday and occasionally Thursday if I got a night off my part time job at Coles to pay for my classes. Back then it was $5 per class which was pretty expensive as I only used to get $17 per week for working Thurs night and Saturday morning. I relished, in the physicality of training back then. Classes were not very imaginative on the level of boring in todays standards. They were repetitive – in the way that every class was structured the same. I was living for the day that I got a green belt and could train weapons with the older guys before class. Back then they used nunchaku, sai and bo. But to train in these you needed to be a green belt. Feeling that most of the green belts had been training 5 years or more. That was some time away being a white belt. I just knew I had to be diligent, practice and learn what I needed to know for my first test. Back then grading was held once a year. If you trained regularly you were given the green light to go for the test after a year I thought, I had a good understanding and knowledge of the basics. The instructor also thought I was ready to do my first test. This would be held only on a Thursday evening when the master Sensei Merv Oakley would be present. As I worked I would have to take a night off work to attend. My boss would not understand that I had to go to a KARATE grading so I had to say that I was not well, so I could attend. I was very nervous being only 14 and doing a test with adults the sparring component was pretty much full contact with the body and head contract with hands and feet no mouthguards only very thin hand guards, mine were covered in blood, all my own from getting hit in the face in class by the seniors. There I was ready for my first test. I waited on the side kneeling for my turn to perform with my friend. The green belts were getting assessed first and getting punished by the master for not holding composure strong enough through their kata (form). The master punched and kicked them whilst they were doing their moves and not holding strong stance. This increased my nerves somewhat till it was our turn to perform. Our basics were as strong as a 14 year could perform then after about 11 months of training, our kata was far from perfect but we tried hard and our sparring was average against guys that were nearly 10 years our senior. But we tried hard and didn’t give up. We both failed our first test, we were devastated but not deterred as were told by our instructor that it was quite common to fail your first test to see if you had what it takes to keep on going and not let failure be anything but a hurdle to get over. So we were back at class on Monday still white belts. New students came and went as the next at training went on. My friend and I kept turning up to class even when my friend lost interest I kept going as I just felt I needed martial arts in my life, at 14 going on to 15. I loved the discipline and physicality of the classes and it helped my growing frame fill out and get strong. I kept surfing and had also taken up skateboarding which I was getting very good at due to my balance through training in karate. I was chosen for the “Sauras” skateboard team to compete and on the way to become one of the top competitors in the Shire. With all the kicking from Karate, made my legs very strong for powering my skateboard along. The second year of Karate was coming to and end, again the grading was set for a Thursday night. Yes, I told my boss I was sick again and my boss wasn’t happy for the late notice. You never know when you are going to be sick do you? Again I fronted up and again we went through the same scenario of watching the seniors grade and get hammered by the master till it was our turn. We were far better than we were the year before. Everything we did was sharper, stronger and more technically executed or so we thought. As you would expect after practising the same moves for 2 years. The unexpected happened we failed again, I was very upset and my mate quit. But I was determined not to give up, my indomitable spirit was very strong and I was not a quitter. When I came back to class on Monday I asked my instructor why, the answer was simple I never trained on Thursday evenings, which was when the Master taught. He thought I was being disrespectful for not training with him. I reiterated if I could be there I would, but my job was my means of paying training fees. As I come from a large family and my parents would not support my quest to become a martial artist. Yet another hurdle in my way. I was never driven to class, I walked 4 km. to and from the dojo each night. Doesn’t sound like much, but I was only 13 when I started, occasionally one of the seniors would give me a lift home. Only because they felt guilty for giving me so much punishment on the dojo floor that night. Sensei Denis explained my predicament to the Master, of how I was funding myself to attend class, he came back to me the following week and informed me that the Master thought this was admirable encouraging me to keep on training, which I did diligently. I was a very good white belt and knew my syllabus back to front. I even had the privilege of helping the new white belts with their basics. Also they started teaching me the more advanced forms. But I was still a white belt till at the age of 16 ½ I was awarded my first green stripe. The first of 3 to qualify for green belt. I thought no wonder these guys have been training for 5-10 years and are only green belt. I accepted this and didn’t know any different. I was so proud of my one stripe “9th Kyu” I was on my way to becoming a black belt, slow as it might be I was determined to keep going. I was getting stronger, more confident and settling into my growing physique. I kept training and another year passed and grading came up again, guess what I failed. I was so used to this it didn’t bother me at all. It wasn’t for the belts, I loved training that much. It was just accepted as the Masters method for creating strong students. Then at 17 came a devastating set back to my training, my parents stopped me from training Karate to focus on my studies as I was in year 11 at high school. I needed to dedicate time to homework, back then the school expected minimum 3 hours of homework/study every night to cover all your subjects. I was traumatized to say the least, as the one thing above all else that meant so much to me had been taken away. The next 2 ½ years flew by, but during this time there was a huge hole in my life that couldn’t be filled by anything of substance.

It wasn’t until I started working at Macquarie University that the second leg of my journey started. I was 19 years old now and I knew above all else I wanted to achieve my Black Belt. In 1981 I found Tae Kwon Do with the Australian Tae Kwon Do Institute (ATI). At this time the Master was Grahame Johnstone 5th Dan, but my Instructor was James Sheedy 2nd Dan at the time, I achieve brown belt under the ATI, then in early 1983 a bunch Instructors led by Master John Callagari 4th Dan broke away and formed the Australian Freestyle TKD academy (AFTA). Before this split we very much practiced the old Rhee form of ITF TKD, with the formation of the AFTA we went more freestyle. Incorporating elements of western boxing and kick boxing using leg kicks, knees and elbows. The curriculum changed considerably and got progressively more demanding and harder. The contact of sparing was lifted to include gloves and mouthguards which we never used before, the AFTA grew very quickly. In Sydney Region alone we had over 30 centres, including club’s north up to Newcastle, south to Wollongong and Nowra and to the west in Bathurst. I took on teaching at 1st Kup Black tip and opened up my own centre with 10 friends in Manlyvale. I was very committed, I trained at Macquarie Uni. 3 times per week and at the headquarters in Glebe 2 times a week as well. The night I went for my 1st Dan in September ‘83, I had my first 10 students do their yellow belt test. I was a Black Belt and an instructor, from then on I knew I was born to be a leader and teach what I had a passion for. Life seemed to fly by as my passion and journey continued, I got married in 1984, my first son Carl was born in 1988, second son Bryce born in 1991. My family all did TKD with me, as soon as my two boys were old enough to attend class they were part of it. Although they did not both have the same passion they trained with me for many years. My oldest son Carl is now a 3rd Dan. For me I kept training and teaching 2nd& 3rd Dan’s were both achieved. I had even trained more than 30 students to Black Belt with the AFTA. I was the first student in Sydney to achieve 4th Dan after 16 years of training and teaching 5- 6 days a week. At my grading we had an attendance of over 100 black belts from the AFTA, there was standing room only, the dojang was packed. I had come to a crossroad of sorts, where my learning and advancement was being held back. Even though I had learnt and shared a lot, I knew I still had so much more to learn myself and give to our students. It was a hard decision for me to leave the AFTA, as it was for them 15 years’ prior when the left the ATI to form the AFTA. This decision wasn’t taken lightly and on speaking to fellow instructors they too felt the same. Instructors that I was close to felt an allegiance to me because of my ideals and training etiquette. So we banded together to form the Institute of Modern Tae Kwon Do in NSW in 1998, a martial arts co-operative with myself as the head instructor. We were 12 clubs strong and heading in a new direction blending old with new. In the lead up to the 2000 Olympics in Sydney I received my 4th Dan Kukiwon certification from Grand Master Na Ham Lee during an amnesty period, it was an honour to be finally recognized for my achievements. I decided to volunteer for the Olympic Games TKD competition and got involved with TKD Australia and the World TKD championships (test event for the Olympics) in Sydney. Here I met many great people, all on similar journeys of self discovery. Older guys and younger guys all on the same path, with an unyielding passion to teach TKD and to promote the culture and lifestyle of martial arts.

The Olympics was the pinnacle or zenith of my TKD career, to volunteer for such an event. This event showcased our sport and passion to the world. Sydney orchestrated a flawless event as a new medal sport, it was uncanny that the first gold medal would go to an Australian athlete Lauren Burns. Thinking about that time always puts a smile on my face, every day that I travelled into the Olympic site as a volunteer I was filled with pride. After the Olympics I met Grand Master Kwak 9thDan and he took my TKD training in another direction as I was getting input from him as well. The IMT decided to blend elements of WTF methodology with ITF methodology. GM Kwak graded me to 5th Dan in 2001 and later to 6th Dan in 2006 and ten years later in 2016 is going to asses me for 7th Dan.

**The Present**

In 2004 was a beginning of a new direction in life, they say things happen in 3’s. I went to Korea for the first time on an Instructors tour, not much training but lots of networking. That same year I separated from my wife of more than 20 years. Then met my soul mate Anne who was as interested in martial arts as much as I was, it was a match made in heaven, destiny. I couldn’t believe it we were like two pees in a pod, same music, same movies, same love for animals, but most of all same passion for TKD. A year later we eloped and got married in Micronesia on a little island called Palau. A very romantic island, we had a wedding under a magnificent orange and yellow sky. We took our first group to Korea in 2005, 14 of us went and we started building relationships with the Korean Masters at various locations. Especially at Chueng Chung University with Grand Master Oh & not to forget Yon Yin University with Master Park 7th Dan Hapkido and TKD. Then we came back in 2006 with 12 more students and trained for a week, 3 times a day. On this trip we included 5 days in China where we fulfilled a life long dream of mine to visit the Shaolin monastery and train with the monks. Then in 2007 we went back again with only 4 students for the Sister School ceremony, with Daewoo TKD led by Master Kim 7thDan, this was by far the best training trip as we got specialized private training with the Poomse Coach of Kukiwon who was the master Kim from our new sister club in Daewoo. We got to train with his Master, Grand Master Lee 9th Dan, also going to Chuen Chung University and Yon Yin University to have more TKD fun with the students there. We reacquainted our love for Kumdo with Master Han as well as countless hours of TKD. The Korean bathhouse became a nightly event to soak our aching muscles.

In 2006 I lost my dad, he had been unwell for years. But like the trooper he was he kept up a good battle till the end. Funny thing was coming from a large family we didn’t have a close relationship with our dad, he was always working when I was younger. It wasn’t till I had kids of my own that a relationship blossomed with my father. We were good mates talked about lots of things, I still remember he always wanted to know how everything was going.

My influences are many, from numerous trips to Korea, Thailand, Indonesia and China we have always brought back something extra for our students. As well training with visiting masters that have come to Australia over this time, there is always something useful to absorb and utilize.

Maintaining your focus over all these years has a lot to do with channelling your inner strength. Life throws many curve balls at you, in the form of adversity. The one that TKD throws more often is injuries. Training TKD has led to various injuries over the years, but like falling of a bike you have to dust yourself off and get back on. I have been lucky to have a stable of excellent body mechanics, that have always got me back on the mat in record time. The secret wasn’t rest as you might think, but to keep moving till I was rehabilitated. I firmly believe in looking after your body as you would a car, with regular servicing in the form of Massage, Acupuncture, Physiotherapy, Osteo therapy, Chiropractic and Yoga specialists. Through this process or processes gives you a better understanding of your body so you can truly heel yourself.

To be strong in mind you also must be strong in body, you must be very aware of this when you are a teacher/instructor. Physical exercise keeps your body toned and supple, nearly at 55 with not too much effort I can still drop into the splits do 100 push ups and 300 sit ups. This is only because I do them with each class 6 days a week. Most Sundays I still surf in the mornings and consolidates my upper body conditioning with all the paddling for waves. Just walking around doing my daily job I’m very aware of my posture and breathing, constantly engaging my core muscles.

**The tenets of TKD my version**

**Courtesy** – respect your parents, your teachers, your peers and your students. As you can’t force respect, only by giving it is it returned willingly. Always being mind full of others, going out of your way to do good and being polite. But most of all be thankful and appreciative of everything and everyone.

**Integrity** - One must live by a code and not a $ price. Don’t sell yourself out for $, we see this throughout the martial arts with Mac Dojos opening up al over the world. Teaching martial arts was never meant to make you rich, its about enriching peoples lives. By giving them a true direction and make them feel proud of what they have achieved. Rank shouldn’t be a gift but something that was earned honourably. This instils quality, high standards and loyalty in your students.

**Perseverance** – The pursuit of a goal, regardless of obstacles. To have the determination to go on no matter what the adversity. Once a goal has been achieved strive towards the next goal, to always work on self improvement. Setting yourself a new bench mark, wether its doing a better form or doing more repetitions of a particular kick. You have to be continually working on your focus and don’t stop trying, ever.

**Self Control** – This is applicable to so many facets of life, not just on the dojang floor. But on the floor you must be humble not vindictive and develop your skills to a high degree of accuracy. In life you have to moderate the things that can destroy your self control, by doing things like drinking, partying or even eating in excess. I’m not saying you can’t have a good time, just that it has to be in moderation. Show restraint as excess has a price the next day, as your over indulgence leaves you sick the next day. We’ve all been there and always feel bad the next day.

**Indomitable Spirit** – To anyone this can mean so many things. But to me its deep rooted in emotion and state of mind. I learnt this in my teenage years. We are capable of so much we just have to apply ourselves. Mastery is not achieved by practising 10,000 kicks but practicing a kick 10,000 times. After nearly 40 years I’ve put in more than 10,000 hours, its this constant necessity for self improvement. I actually love nothing more than to be a student and learn as I have Black Belt eyes, and look at everything subjectively. Analysing and dissecting with my brain to understand and make by body and muscles act accordingly. In preparation for my next Dan grade I have been spending more time on the mat as a student, my loving wife Anne has been cracking the whip so to speak for me. As I did for her 1st, 2nd,3rd and 4th Dan grading, the shoe is now on the other foot so to speak and she shares her experience and knowledge as a master and personal trainer to make me be the best I can be.

**A new dawn**

Its been more than 10 years since I have been examined, in that time my wife Anne and I have created a dojang “Empower Fitness and Martial Arts”. In 2010 we opened our doors for the first time. It was an awesome feeling after more than 30 years of training in community halls, church halls, school halls and surf clubs we finally had a place that we could call our own. We had long been using Macquarie University as our headquarters but we always had the interference of patrons from adjoining courts or areas, and even though they were adequate facilities grading days lacked the atmosphere. All our Sydney clubs come to Empower Dojang to grade four times a year and twice a year we hold Dan grading for successful applicants. This will be the venue for my advancement in front of our black belts and senior students.

**Conclusion**

As I am approaching 55 I realize that TKD is keeping me young, as I’m constantly in the presence of youth. Teaching children since my two boys were old enough to train, has been my driving force. To see these kids starting at 5 or 6 and training with you for 5-6 years to get their Black Belts and turn into awesome and inspiring teenagers is priceless. Teaching teenagers for 5-6 years and seeing them achieve their black belts sets them up for life. Seeing adults train for 5-6 years and achieve their black belts does wonders for their self esteem and attitude. Our involvement with the community and our support for a variety of charities, is our way of giving back. Kindness can be shown so many ways, we encourage our students to follow suit and give back to their communities and help people in need.

All our students are encouraged to give back to the club and support each other, by helping each other to achieve similar goals, it’s a big family. Our motto “A family that kicks together, sticks together” is a testament to the number of whole families that train with us, creating great bonding and lasting friendships. Our training camps although tough, are wholesome retreats for the whole family to train together and experience physical challenges together. Also being the pinnacle event for the year as all our centres have students at the camp. We have been using the Myuna Bay sport and Recreation centre for more than 10 years an outstanding venue.

Tae Kwon Do or even more so the martial arts, has been the backbone of my life for nearly four decades. The benefits have been numerous but on the downside you get injured. I have never been disheartened as its all part of the process of learning. Lets face it, we are not learning origami but a martial way, like the school of hard knocks, what doesn’t break you makes you. I’ll just keep on kicking.

By

Master Ron Claassens 7th Dan