



## **Sam Dan Essay – A New Beginning**

**By**

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This essay or composition is drawn from the events and occasions during my transition from second to third dan, which is described by many to be a “journey along my chosen path”. Looking back on those last four years since testing for E Dan, there have been many lessons to learn some good some not so good, some pleasant and some that were at times hard to swallow, but without that cocktail of emotions the “journey” would not have been so worthwhile.

I have in the past few weeks considered what will make me a Sam Dan, will it be the third stripe on the belt, somehow I don't think so, I could quite easily have done that myself. So is it actually taking part in the test for Sam Dan, not completely, it is still a very necessary and defining moment, but not everything in becoming a Sam Dan. After all from one week to the next I am essentially still me, the same person who was once a white belt. It must therefore be a combination of all those things, personal traits, learning, teachings, abilities, and desire. The defining two elements to me are desire and personality, each of us should receive similar teaching and have the opportunity to learn the same things, whether we choose to accept those things is down to our personal composition. We do not all have the same abilities, but those with a want to improve will overcome the obstacles in their path to achieve a standard which they are happy with. The desire is not to be a particular grade, but the desire to learn and improve oneself, a thirst for knowledge and understanding. When I first started training, it was because my son wanted to learn karate, rather than sit and watch I wanted to join in, but my instructor told me I would have to do it because I wanted to and not for someone else, the truth indeed.

Whilst I still have the latter part of that journey to complete, I feel that the latter part of this period is also an important part of my testing and promotion to Sam Dan. Yes I still have to complete the pre-test, and if successful be recommended for the dan test, which will be that final hurdle in my promotion. I now know in my heart that I will achieve it, if not this testing then the next, and even though I acknowledge that there may be a possibility of not succeeding this time, my commitment and determination are no less than at any previous testing or task which I have undertaken. On this occasion however, I feel that I have changed, or moved on, I now look at the events of my life through a different view than before, almost as though I have found another window in my house, which hasn't existed until now. Perhaps I was too blinkered, in too much of a rush to get something done, too involved, or simply just not looking, to notice what changes were going on around me.

So the first question I must consider is "What will this promotion mean, to me, to my students and my club, and more importantly to the World Tang Soo Do Association?"

To me it will mean a great deal, the achievement of a goal that twelve years ago, when I started training, was "pie in the sky", something I did not consider for more than a second without dismissing the idea. I am sure that I am not alone when I say that I cannot remember thinking about the next belt. I enjoyed training and learning and grading to my next grade, was something that my instructor told me I would be required to do. Also it will I hope, open new doors and give me the opportunity to attend seminars and clinics which previously I have not been eligible to attend, which in turn will increase my understanding and appreciation of our martial art. To my students and my club it should bring an improved instructor, through continued training, access to further knowledge and teaching; someone they can look to as an example in the association and the martial arts.

To the association I intend to be a stalwart and an asset, through my continued commitment, dedication and support; and to promote the traditions and standards of our martial art.

From the early period as a second dan I had ambitions to start a new club, but this I found was not a simple task. Choosing the right day, finding the right venue, in the right town and then encouraging the students to attend was more difficult than we thought. Using some good advice provided by Master Khan we opened a class in a sports centre adjoining Impington Village College on the outskirts of Cambridge. When I say we I refer to myself and my wife, who at the time was also an instructor and soon to test for her second Dan, and with whom I share the instructing role. Our idea was to be able to pass on what we had learnt to new students, who would in turn help the association grow and prosper. This we have been able to do, from a small beginning I have seen the club and its students grow in stature, to become a contributing part of the World Tang Soo Do Association in Great Britain. From that small beginning we now have a flourishing club which will soon produce more Dan grades to further our martial art and benefit the association, something in which we both take great pride.

During this period I was also fortunate enough to be asked to help organise the National Competitions by assisting Mrs Dawn Khan. I thought of this as a privilege, and something which on reflection has provided me with a bond to many of the Great Britain students. Over the past four years I have seen many of them develop into good martial artists, the determination of some to continue to strive for a goal which often eludes them, and to share their joy when they finally achieve it. Surprisingly I am still asked where I find the time, or more importantly why I give up my time. It is as though I am doing something that they would not consider undertaking, but perhaps I am? My philosophy on this has always been that as a member of the association, we should be involved in its activities. Whether it is attending a seminar, or helping to organise something, or judging at a competition, or perhaps just setting a good example; as Dan grades, and especially as instructors, we need to be involved in the association and its activities. Otherwise why do we belong, what are we here for, and what do we bring to this, our chosen martial art. I see no benefit in joining any organisation and then standing on the edge complaining about it. If as an instructor, I do not train with my Master Instructor then surely my students will be the ones that loose out. Being involved gives you the opportunity to involve others, by involving others the association grows.

Two thousand and four was the final year of my journey to Sam Dan, and it is definitely a year to remember. This year would be my first opportunity to attend the World Championships in America. I had long wanted to attend, but other demands on finances had always kept me from considering it a possibility. This year we were determined to make it possible, having been successful in the last European Championships and the National Championships I was eligible to compete, and so we planned to make this the year. We were also proud to have three of our students also compete in the championship making it even more of a special occasion. But in truth I was not prepared for the occasion, those who have attended this event before may have become accustomed to it, but in all honesty I do not know if I will ever feel like that. The atmosphere, comradeship, the enormity of the occasion, is almost like a drug, it leaves you wanting to experience it over and over again. It could definitely be described as something that leaves you wanting more. Competing in this event and winning a silver medal was without doubt very special, especially having my family there at the time, but for all that one thing is still strong in my memory of that occasion.

I found the most emotional and proudest moment was standing in a hall with two thousand other martial artists from all over the world, taking part in a warm-up routine, instructed by Master Khan. To see someone for whom I have the greatest respect, receive such warmth and respect from everyone in the hall was very special, and most memorable. It makes you very proud to be part of Great Britain Tang Soo Do, and very privileged to be able to train under such a respected martial artist. In October 2004 I was eligible and put forward for promotion to Sam Dan, but due to an injury, and much to my disappointment, I was unable to make the Dan testing of October 2004.

To relate the story as briefly as possible, I had been preparing for the pre-test in September 2004, and three weeks before, whilst training with Master Khan, at a lesson I had decided to take on the spur of the moment, I ruptured my Achilles tendon, this was not recognised immediately by my doctor and resulted in my needing surgery to repair the injury, and was followed by the inevitable lengthy recovery period. Is that bad luck or what?

Well I don't look at it that way more. I could have been philosophical and said "*everything happens for a reason*", "*it wasn't my time to test*", or some other reason that escapes me for the moment, but I won't, I have accepted that what happened has happened, not for any particular reason or anyone's fault, and have moved forward from there.

At the time it occurred I was devastated, my world had in some way ended, all the hopes were dashed, all the dreams were shattered and a lot of tears flowed before I came to terms with the situation. This reminds me of a fable I remember someone relating at a class I attended;

*"It involved a poor farmer who made his living from the land and one day his only horse ran off, leaving him and his son to pull the plough themselves. Every one said "How bad luck it was" the farmer just said "Maybe". A week later the horse returned bringing three mares back with it. Then whilst trying to tame the wild horses his son fell and broke his leg, and was unable to help his father. Every one said "How bad luck it was" the farmer just said "Maybe".*

*Not long after that the army turned up in the village and took all the able bodied young men away to the wars, some of them never to return again. The son was not taken due to the broken leg and remained in the village. So although everything may seem bad, and luck seems to have passed you by, it is merely a point of view."*

With that in mind I was determined to turn my misfortune into a positive and not a negative experience. Initially the concept was possibly beyond me; all I could see was can't walk, can't teach, can't train, and can't test. A little lacking in positives would be somewhat an understatement. I can remember spending time considering whether to call it a day, accept the hand I had been dealt and move on. But somehow I could not, it wouldn't go away, it was always there a constant companion, making me realise how much Tang Soo do meant to me. Then I remembered the number of times I have said to a student, "do not say can't, just not able to at this time". I think it was time to take some of my own medicine. I have always said to our students "Always be prepared, expect the unexpected"; well I certainly needed to do that. So where were the positive things in my situation that I could draw on?

Well I said I could not walk, but to be accurate it meant to get around I limped a little, and I could still drive a car. When I attended the hospital, the surgeon could not explain why I could do either without pain. He eventually came to the conclusion that a number of years training in martial arts had built up the muscles in my feet and that they were compensating for the Achilles tendon.

To simply state that I could not teach, was not correct. It would be more accurate to say that I felt a little useless, almost an extra, a bystander, especially when I was with the class of students I had taught each week, fortunately my wife, also an instructor at our club, was able to continue taking the classes. This I feel has been a great benefit to her, and something if I am honest would not have happened if left to me to decide. So it was more of an ego problem than anything else, not helped by being a person who just did what was needed, rather than wait for someone else to do it. As part of instructing and teaching our martial art, we demonstrate and then students copy, that is the main basis of how we learn. But it is not the only way, there are many ways of teaching and each of them has a place. For example; *“How many times have you needed to remove a screw from something with the wrong screwdriver, yes you get the job done, mangle the screw a bit, make it harder for next time; ruin the screwdriver for its proper purpose, but you achieved the end result. It would have been easier if you had the right tool in the first place and the job would have been something to be proud about.”*

Same goes for the ways of teaching, all of us learn in different ways and we may need to have things explained in a different manner. So I started to try explaining what I wanted to achieve, describing the purpose of what I wanted the student to do either by an example which they could relate to or in step by step stages. This I felt I could do, never having been stuck for words in the past, I should be able to make a reasonable job of teaching and turn a negative into something very positive.

Can't train, couldn't do a lot about that one, there weren't many students training on crutches the last few classes I had been to, but some thing I could work towards later. Actually there was something positive that I could do and that was to maintain what I had already learnt. I couldn't physically train but I could run through every hyung and il soo sik dae ryun in my head. I could put together techniques for the class by visualising them, and that in turn made me more involved in the classes. After all I would need all of that, if the teaching was going to be a success.

Can't test, that was the way I saw it in the early stages, a little bit of a childish way to think, sort of “Can't test, won't test” kind of thing. Thinking back to my very first statement, I knew it was better to stay positive and look at it as “Not able to at this time”.

So now I am all sorted and on the road to recovery, that's good. While it was good, it was also a constant process, almost like having to fill your car with fuel every day, even though you filled it up yesterday. Things that you didn't give a second thought to suddenly required a number of thought processes to achieve. Just standing in the right stance, or maintaining your balance, etc, etc. Initially I was unable to physically take part in things so I found myself watching for most of the time. It is true, “You can learn a lot by watching”, both about yourself and others. In fact the biggest benefit from watching has been what I have learnt about myself. Looking at your class can show you the things you need to work on, whether it is from your demonstration of a technique or by how successfully you convey it to the student.

Why is it that students easily pick up your bad habits, but seem to overlook the good ones? One thing is for certain, this incapacity has given me the opportunity to try to re-train myself, to try to overcome some of those bad habits, to work on some of the techniques which I always struggled with. My advice to others would be to take an opportunity to look at yourself, and not wait for something to make you do it.

Before completing this essay I have attended the pre-test, and as part of that some of us were called before the panel to answer questions. One question has remained in my mind more than others, asked by Master Carter it was "*What do you feel that, if removed from Tang So Do, would leave a big hole in our martial art*". At the time I didn't quite see what he was expecting as the answer, I immediately thought that to remove any part of our martial art would be detrimental in some way, as I feel it is very rounded in the way it encompasses so many aspects of the martial arts. The answer that he was looking for was "*etiquette*". He said that we could take away the punching, the blocking, the kicking, the sparring, and the weapons and still we would have a martial art, but that without the required etiquette we would have nothing. I would like to thank him for that insight, for the more I peruse the subject the bigger the hole becomes, without etiquette, the fundamental part of our martial art, we would without doubt have nothing that we have today.

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**Tang Soo!**

**E Dan**