

## Facing The Grim Reaper:

No true combative system, style, or art can be complete unless it teaches one to internalize and personalize the issues surrounding death. Not only the death of oneself, but also the justifiable taking of another's life as well. Some say that to talk about such a topic is morbid and unnecessary. Others, through willful blindness, choose to ignore the topic all together. The fact remains, that death is a clear and present danger any time one finds themselves faced with a situation where one has to physically defend themselves. As a fellow instructor once said, "Death is a fact of life, with only the cause and time a matter of speculation."

Watching the war coverage on CNN has crystallized the issue of death for me. As a LEO, I go to work everyday knowing subconsciously that I could lose my life or be required to take the life of another person at a moment's notice. Those soldiers, sailors, and airmen and women who are presently fighting in Iraq, also understand that death is a reality every second that they remain on the battle field. For these brave men and women, the Grim Reaper is lurking behind every sand burm, hut, or Iraqi who may be holding a white flag. It is my opinion, that those who are involved in this conflict and choose to "repress" the thought of death, will panic when they are looking death in the eye.

To overcome the negative psychological consequences of death, warriors throughout history have recognized the fact that one needs to come to grips with death. The samurai, kamikaze, the plains Indians and more recently those who were responsible for flying the two planes into the World Trade Centers faced death as a bridge, and internalized it as a passage, which promised a spiritual reward. Because of their belief systems, to voluntarily take one's life and or the life of others, was psychologically easy to do. Those who understand this bridge, are intuitively aware that there is a direct correlation between the fear of death, the taking of another life, and combative performance.

As teachers, coaches, instructors, and students, we need to make peace with the issues surrounding death because if we don't, we will be distracted due to the internal moral conflict that the fear of death will create. Instead of concentrating on the threat at hand, one will consciously and subconsciously question their own belief systems that will certainly increase combat anxiety. Increased combative anxiety leads to hesitation, hesitation lead injury, and injury may lead to your own death. It has been said that those who hesitate in combat, levitate six feet under.

Last night on CNN, an imbedded news correspondent interviewed a sergeant from the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Screaming Eagles who was involved in a fierce battle. The correspondent asked this soldier what got him through the night. The soldier calmly stated; "training, and my belief in God." At which time he pulled out a crucifix and kissed it. I have heard this statement time and time again during the coverage of the war. To me, there appears to be a peace of mind resulting from a strong faith system, whatever that faith system may be. Certain elements of special warfare units around the world are now given time to

Speak with their Deity before going to battle, In fact, we are seeing members of AlKida, Jihad, and Saddam Hussein's secret army also echoing this fact. Now I'm not trying to convert anyone here, but the fact remains that a strong faith system appears to minimize the fear of dying, or having to take the life of another. In 1990, Alexander, Groller and Morris stated, "When training fails and reason is insufficient to save the day, the warrior reaches deep within, where his fundamental vision of self, God, or the universe, provides the winning edge. But those beliefs must already be there. Combat is not the place to be making major adjustments to your belief systems."

We have all heard of "Killer Instinct" and many teachers, coaches, and instructors preach this combative attribute. How many, however, truly understand the moral and internal conflict resolutions that need to be bridged for killer instinct to be harnessed and used when called upon to do so ??? Just break their neck, hit them in the throat, shoot them, or stab them with your knife are common death calls that many promote. The question that needs to be asked however is; **"has the student really internalized all issues surrounding DEATH, and the taking of another's life?"** If the answer is no, then it's my belief that the student will fail to act.

For me, all the issues surrounding DEATH are a reality that I have come to terms with in my life. This journey however was not easy !!!!! Many times I questioned my belief systems, and often I found myself in conflict. I recognized however, that these conflicts needed to be resolved primarily because of the job that I do. Easy NO, but a conscious choice that I have now come to accept which will keep me focused and goal oriented in battle. I can honestly say that the Grim Reaper is an omnipresent reality in a deadly force situation whom I have made peace with. I will not let him distract me from what needs to be done. CAN YOU THE READER, HONESTLY SAY THE SAME THING ????? IF THE ANSWER IS NO, BEGIN YOUR JOURNEY NOW, IT MAY MEAN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE, AND EXCUSE THE PUN, "DEATH"

In my locker at work, I have pasted the following quote that I read every day I put my uniform on:

"Those of us who maintain a dangerous life-style will experience fear and anxiety. But, to do so, allows us to join a fraternity of those who have, since the beginning of man's time, endured. They endured. We Endured. It is the cost of the privilege of such company."

Strength and Honor

Darren Laur

