

The Black Belt Book of Life - Topic #19 –

Rank Does Not Make the Man.

The Man Makes the Rank

In a world of slippery, empty titles,
this truth to God we thank:
Rank Does Not Make The Man,
The Man Makes The Rank.

*Ranks of this world will not
be recognized in the next.*

Guru Nanak

[15th/16th Century Saint]

*High rank and soft manners may not
always belong to a true heart.*

Anthony Trollope

[19th Century English novelist]

*It is an interesting question how far men
would retain their relative rank if they
were divested of their clothes.*

Henry David Thoreau

The achievement of a black belt from a reputable martial arts establishment is a rank of notable merit, as any Black Belt will confirm. It takes an enormous amount of sacrifice, dedication, determination, persistence, effort, time, sweat, pain and focus to achieve. Yet, as any dedicated Black Belt will also tell you, such a prestigious rank does not make him who he is. It is he who makes the rank what it is, and thus, *rank does not make the man; the man makes the rank.*

This philosophy applies to any worthy position in any field of endeavor. Does donning a black belt or acquiring a designation of any sort make a person wiser, more loving, kind, aware, gifted or better than another person? If God created us all, how could any one person consider himself better than another? Spiritually speaking, he can't. Titles do not make men. Men make titles. Ranks do not make men. Men make ranks.

Yet, in this world a person's station in life somehow places him in a certain class category with the rich and famous at the top and the poor and infamous at the bottom. Titles often expand people's egos, giving them a false sense of superiority. As the famous 18th Century French writer, Suzanne Necker, observed: *Fortune does not change men, it unmasks them.* Equating title, rank or position to superiority is an illusion. Think of the greatest souls in history. The quality that made them great above all others was not their station in life but their humility. Lao Tzu, Buddha, Christ, Guru Nanak, Kabir, Ravidas, Gandhi, Schweitzer, Mother Teresa and others became great not because of their titles but because of who they were, not what they were.

As we achieve, whether in the martial arts world, the sports world, corporate world, educational world, medical world, media world, etc., if we're to become truly worthy of any rank, we need to give worthiness to that rank, not allow it to give worthiness to us, to control us, or increase the ego that is us. If we assume a sense of entitlement and superiority because of our rank or title, we fail in the test of power. In fact, the higher we go, the greater our responsibility to not violate the spiritual principles of power or humility. What God gives He can certainly take away, and those in power would do well to heed this advice. As Guru Nanak states, *Ranks of this world will not be recognized in the next.* Therefore, those who have been bequeathed great power and position now, in this lifetime, should pause and look beyond the gates of death lest any misuse of their ephemeral status in the "here and now" places them, not on pedestals, but on pin cushions in the "there and then."

Great minds throughout history have warned about the abuse of power. Following are some worthy quotes for consideration.

Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.

~ Shakespeare: Henry IV, Part 2, Act 3, Scene 1

Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.

~ Lord Acton

*No man is wise enough, nor good enough to be trusted
with unlimited power.* ~ Charles Caleb Colton

*Power, like a desolating pestilence, pollutes whatever it
touches.* ~ Percy Shelley

*The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power, and all that
beauty, all that wealth e're gave, awaits alike the
inevitable hour. The paths of glory lead but to the grave.*

~ Thomas Gray

Elegy Written in a Country Church-yard

*Unnumbered suppliants crowd Preferment's Gate, athirst
for wealth and burning to be great; delusive fortune
hears the incessant call; they rise, they shine, evaporate
and fall!*

~ Dr. Samuel Johnson

Vanity of Human Wishes

All is ephemeral,—fame and the famous as well.

~ Marcus Aurelius 2nd Century AD

The moral of this section: when given rank or status, treat it as if you were walking on eggs, the razor's edge or on a precipice. Know it is temporary and not to be lauded over others. If anything, having status is a call to service, not rulership. As the great Dr. Albert Einstein stated: *The highest destiny of the individual is to serve rather than to rule.*

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