

Pathways

A SOMETIMES MONTHLY NEWSLETTER PRODUCED BY CHRIS DEWEY MARTIAL ARTS, INC.

VOLUME 13, ISSUE 1

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2009



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*Just for today, I will not rise to anger
Just for today, I will not succumb to worry
Today, I will express my gratitude to all my blessings
Today, I will manifest compassion to all living beings
Today, I will apply myself diligently
-- Mikeao Ushii*

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Relaxation

Think about your body...you know that chunk of the physical universe that you call home. How often are you fully present in your body? Answer: All the time....ah, yes, but are you really?

How much time do you spend thinking about the past or the future. How much time are you truly, really, fully present in the moment?

The interesting thing is that your body is the only part of you that is always 'in the moment.' No matter where your mind wanders off to, your body is always in the here and now. It is also unique in every moment. Your body is constantly updating itself, repairing itself and adjusting to changes in its environment...even when you're asleep.

Something that I find amazing when I stop and truly ponder it, is that you are, in every moment, unique. I am not the same person that I was last year, last month or even last week. Like a completely regenerating machine, my body is taking the nutrients I feed it and re-building itself as a near-perfect copy of itself.

Over the years, I've picked up a few non-repairable marks of my life and my body is beginning to show signs of both age and mileage, but it keeps on performing for me, without question. It is the silent, unquestioning home to my psyche and my soul and most of the time I take it for granted...until it breaks down or fails me in some way.

The problem is that most of the time it breaks down because I am abusing

the systems it uses to operate and repair itself.

It is invariably here, that stresses of not living in the moment enter the picture. Many of us live too much in the past, worrying and regretting some of our choices and actions. Some of us live too much in the future, uncertain about how things will play out, or worrying that we can't undo some of the choices we made earlier in life. It's a mental hamster wheel.

Over time our mental convolutions can lead us to fear, anger, regret, bitterness, depression and any one of a number of stress-causing feelings that slowly, inevitably undermine the ability of the body to do its job.

All the time, the body is living in the present, doing what it can to repair and rebuild...in the moment.

Your body is in a constant state of change and yet it is always completely present in this moment, dealing with the issues of this moment; digesting its latest meal, repairing the cut on your finger, fighting unwanted microbial guests, repairing muscle fibers from your last workout and growing a new skin as a barrier of protection.

The body is the ultimate Zen-master: Silent observer of what it is, constantly renewing itself without regret or worry.

My guess is that we could all learn a thing or two about how to relax and truly live in the moment if we listened to what our physical selves are trying to tell us.

Another New Year

Being the start of another new year, I suppose it is expected that I would touch on making resolutions and putting old habits aside, creating new pathways for our lives and attempting to improve our lot in life as we see it.

We talk about goal setting all the time in this newsletter, but, quite honestly I have never seen the merit of creating "New Year's Resolutions." After all, why should I wait until the beginning of a new year to quit a bad habit or lose weight or get fit? ...it makes no sense. January the first is no different to any other day. Beginnings are where and when you choose to make them, nowhere else.

I was reading an article recently in which the author claimed that people do not change their lives until the pain of their current circumstances reaches such a level of intensity that they finally feel the need to act. The author of the article suggested that on a personal level of psychic or emotional pain that runs from zero to ten; a nine won't lead to change. Only a ten gets us to change.

What an interesting notion.

What the author suggested in her article is that as individuals we can accept enormous levels of emotional pain before we finally act to make a change. What she says, in essence, is that we can live our lives at a level nine in terms of emotional discomfort and *do nothing about it*...no matter how bad it feels at the time. Theoretically, we could live at 'nine'

for years and *do nothing!* Only a ten causes us to shift from where we are. Isn't that curious?

What is even more interesting to me is that we all perceive 'tens' in different ways. What represents a ten for me is not the same for you.

I suppose we can look at levels one through nine as a set of resting and agitation conditions. Only at level ten do we acquire enough energy of movement to do something.

Think about a marble in a box. At level zero the box and the marble are a rest. Slowly, as the levels increase, the box is being shaken and battered, the marble is rolling, bouncing and bumping into the walls with more and more force, but it doesn't bounce out. Only when we put enough energy into the system that we either break the box or bounce the marble clear out of the box, do the box and the marble part company.

Can you see yourself here?

If you see in yourself things that you feel like you ought to change or should change and yet apparently do nothing about; then it is a fair bet that you simply have not reached a level ten yet with respect to the thing that needs changing. It doesn't matter what the world sees, to you it is simply not enough to cause you to change.

So from this we learn that change comes in its own time and we only change when we're ready. It becomes pretty clear to us then, that

resolutions mean nothing unless we are resolving to change something that feels like a ten to us.

So, let's say you decide that this year, you are going to get fit, or lose some weight. If you have not yet reached a level of ten in your perceived level of discomfort with respect to your level of fitness or weight, then the resolution will inevitably fail. Only when you decide it is time...is it time!

Now, the positive news is that once the decision to change is reached, old habits can simply fall away and never return. We can reach a level of personal preparedness and awareness that makes it easy to let something go to which we might have been clinging for years. When we keep going back to an old habit or behavior, it is a fair bet that we didn't reach a level ten on that issue.

So my question becomes this: Is it possible to recalibrate the scale such that a ten happens at a lower level of discomfort. I'm not sure.

It seems to me as I get older, that some of the habits I have struggled with most have fallen away very easily and some of them haven't been affected at all yet. Like most of us, I have a lot of growing and learning to do.

I also think that some of our habits and behaviors were created to shield us from psychological pain and as we let them go, we find our authentic self coming closer to the surface.

☺

*Our sorrows and wounds are healed
only when we touch them with compassion.*

-- Jack Kornfield

Pebbles in the lake

This may seem a bit silly to you, but please bear with me.

If you can, I would like you to think of your life like a big lake for a moment.

The surface of the lake is what is impacted by the world, it reflects the events in our lives. Sometimes the surface is smooth and clear, and acts like an almost perfect mirror of what is. At other times there are ripples and waves on the surface and the reflections get broken up into patches of color, rather than clear images. When we are calm and still the pond is quiet and undisturbed...but these are not frequent moments in the daily scheme of things...for most of us.

Now think of the water in the lake like the energy of your life. Sometimes the lake is full to overflowing and sometimes it is drying up, because there has not been enough runoff or rain to keep the thing topped up. Sometimes the lake feeds water to the area around it, at others it takes water from streams and rain.

Think of the edges of the lake as the boundaries of your life. If you like, you can think of the lake edge as a physical boundary to your body or a if you wish, a mental boundary to your life. In reality, the lake edge is an artificial thing, but for the purposes of defining 'lake' from 'not-lake', scientists create boundaries in the physical world. Just as these boundaries are, to a degree arbitrary, the boundaries of your life are also, not as sharp as we sometimes think.

Think of all the different types of life in the lake as thoughts and emotions. Some of them are big, some small, some quiet, some noisy. Some lie hidden in the mud at the

bottom of the lake, some float gracefully on the surface. Some you can see swimming just below the surface. All of the life is held together in a web of interaction. All the lifeforms in the lake are interdependent. So it is with our thoughts and emotions.

Now think of the rocks and pebbles on the bottom of the lake. Some are large, some small. They represent our memories, both good and not so good, uplifting and traumatic. Few people can see the bottom of the lake, but each of us knows the pebbles and rocks that are there.

When someone throws a pebble into the lake, ripples are formed that flow outward. Soon the ripples fade and the surface of the pond returns to its pre-pebble state. Maybe the surface was smooth, maybe it was being chopped up by the wind. It really doesn't matter, the pebble has fallen to the bottom of the pond and the ripples it formed have faded away.

Both the lake and the person who threw the pebble, and everyone who saw the event, now share a memory of the event. But, only the lake carries the pebble.

The pebble remains long after the ripples fade.

The pebbles and boulders in our personal lakes are our memories of the events that have shaped who we are. Some of the boulders represent great moments full of joy. As an example, one of the big boulders in the bottom of my lake was produced when my son opened his eyes for the first time and looked at me on the day he was born. The ripples of that event echo quietly through my life and changed me forever.

On the other hand, some of the boulders represent more difficult and traumatic events in our lives.

We all have them. Each pebble and boulder is unique to our own lives.

Sometimes, we bump into one of those rocks in the bottom of the lake and we remember the event that laid it there. Sometimes the memory makes us smile or laugh, sometimes it brings us sadness and tears.

One of the strange things about emotional pain, is that it never quite dies. If you hurt yourself physically or have surgery (for instance), it hurts, but later you will have difficulty remembering the exact feeling of pain. Conversely if you remember a traumatic event, the memory comes back with the full force of the emotion, even though it may have occurred years ago. You may think you have forgotten the event, but the rock remains, hidden beneath the surface.

To protect ourselves, we put shields over our wounds and we use time to distance us from the pain. For sure, time helps, but the events become part of our psychological character, and will affect our decisions thereafter.

Few people get to see the rocks in our personal lakes, or understand how they got there. But those rocks will affect how you react to the events of your life in the future. They will affect how you filter and analyze what happens in your relationships and your daily life.

It's probably a good thing to know that the rocks are there, and a good thing to know what they mean. It's probably a good idea to recognize that your rocks aren't the same as someone else's rocks, and that what has piled up in the bottom of our individual lakes is unique to each of us.

I like lakes, they teach me so much about life. ☺

Catharsis

For some reason since the beginning of the year, I have found myself speaking about catharsis and healing to several people, both inside and outside of the dojo. Normally, this means that it's time for a newsletter article.

Catharsis is the process of emotional healing or cleansing. Although not entirely accurate, I tend to associate catharsis with long-term healing of deeper wounds. In terms of its original meaning in Greek, catharsis relates to a process of purging and purification.

We all get stressed and traumatized in life for one reason or another. Some stresses are sudden and recent, other stresses are older and more subtle. Some of our stresses can take decades to heal, others can heal more quickly.

After any kind of stress or trauma in our lives, we each seek to heal ourselves in different ways. Some of us seek solitude, while others of us seek company. Some of us seek to re-establish the routine of life, finding comfort in the routine. Others of us find difficulty in maintaining what feels like a front. Some of us oscillate between the two ends...some days it is easy to function in the routine of life, other days it is difficult to face the routine. It is not that there is a right or wrong, there is only the way that each of us find to heal.

The important thing here, is that we each find a pathway to healing. And, the most important part of all of that is that we do actually seek to heal, rather than cling to our pain like a mark of personal identification.

Catharsis involves giving space to

the process of renewal and rebirth and letting go of the need to feel hurt. This is sometimes quite difficult.

Catharsis can be found in lots of ways. Over the years I have found myself using different methods for achieving catharsis. Mostly, these days I use the camera and the pen (keyboard). I go to nature and I write. I have always found solace in nature, especially near water, preferably the ocean. The more powerful the ocean, the greater the sense of renewal. I have also found catharsis in the martial arts. The mere act of performing technique can be cathartic, especially so if we pour ourselves into the martial art for its own sake. Working with a partner or a martial arts form (kata) or drilling a technique over and over to the point of physical exhaustion can be a form of therapeutic catharsis...especially so if we focus on the purity of the move, distilling a move to its essence and finding the irreducible biomechanical principles behind a technique. By using the martial arts to help us get out of our own way, we can allow ourselves to heal.

Obviously also there is also an element of meditation about all of this. When I practice martial arts to the exclusion of all around me, I am doing so as a form of moving meditation.

These are just some of the paths that I have used. They are by no means all.

I have dear friends who throw themselves into life and the lives of those around them as a form of catharsis. I admire their courage as I watch them heal and find renewal in the process.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- ◆ FRAYSER JUDO TOURNAMENT, MEMPHIS, TN, MARCH 28TH 2009
- ◆ SMAC KARATE TOURNAMENT, GREENWOOD, MS, MARCH 21ST, 2009
- ◆ SMAA PIF SPARATHON, STARKVILLE, MS, MARCH 7TH, 2009
- ◆ SMAA KIDS SPARRING TOURNAMENT, STARKVILLE, APRIL 4TH, 2009
- ◆ AKAYAMA RYU, GULF SHORES, JULY 17-18TH, 2009

I learn from my friends.

Whatever path we take, catharsis is a gift of sorts. Catharsis allows us to process the difficult things of life and to learn from them. Catharsis allows us to learn compassion both for ourselves and for others. At the end of the process we are richer, wiser, more compassionate and caring. Perhaps these traits form the corpus of a litmus test for the process of healing. If I become aware of a richer, deeper meaning to the ebb and flow of life, then perhaps I am beginning to heal. If I can accept the foibles and neuroses of those around me without judging and condemning, then perhaps I am healing.

And... as with most paths, it is always about the journey, not the destination. There is always so much more to learn...and perhaps that's why it takes a lifetime. ☺

Time to Kick some old habits?



Call us now!

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