

Pathways

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

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**“Silence is the answer
for the wise man”**

Eurypides

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Rela-a-a-x

I just got back from our Ju Jitsu winter camp in Orange Beach, Alabama. During the weekend, several instructors got into a discussion about why students are stiff and unable to relax, so I thought I'd touch on this subject as an opening salvo for the year.

One of the things that came to the forefront of the conversation pretty quickly, was that resistance in the body was often a reflection of resistance in the mind.

Ju Jitsu works because we allow our 'attacker' to do exactly what s/he wants to do and give them more energy with which to do it. Ju Jitsu literally means 'Techniques of Softness', which doesn't mean that I am a limp noodle and a victim. Rather, it means that I am dynamically relaxed and capable of both feeling and responding to my attacker's intent and actions.

The point at which relaxation of both mind and body enter the picture is when I am able to get my own desires and preconceived notions out of the way. Relaxation allows me to adapt what I do to my attacker's actions.

One of the great traps of martial arts training is that we learn 'technique'. Technique is a prescribed way of doing something against a specific attack, but it is only that...just a technique. In order for the 'technique' to work, each student must transcend the actual technique through practice with lots of different people in lots of different settings, until the 'technique' evolves into a body memory skill. At this level of training the mind can get out of the way, allow us to flow with the attack and neutralize the threat,

rather than simply resist it with force.

So here comes the second bit...All too frequently, we get trapped by the way we were taught and lack the insights necessary to see that there are multiple answers to a specific question, any one of which might have validity.

It is an unfortunate fact that too often the mind of the defender is more of a threat to personal safety than the intent of the attacker. If my mind is closed to potential answers to a particular problem, how can my body move in a fluid and relaxed way? If I rely on my strength, how can I adapt what I do to an unknown assailant who may be bigger and/or stronger than me? If I rely on my superior technical skill, how can I adapt to an assailant who did not get my training and 'didn't read the script'?

This is the whole point of mushin (literally mind of no mind). In a state of mushin, I am able to use force at the right time, in the right way and in the right amount to get exactly the correct result. Yes, achieving this level of awareness is difficult, but this is why we train and one of the reasons we compete. If it were easy, we wouldn't need to train, you could take a one size-fits-all self defense class and be done. Reality is somewhat different...and a good deal more complex (and paradoxically, simple). One of the hardest things to do in the martial arts is to let go of our fears and to relax when doing so. When my students begin to relax during falling and throwing drills, I know their minds are opening and their bodies are showing the result. So, how are you doing? ☯

Humility

Let's start with the notion that everything you know is a mere fraction of what there is to know. Let us also add the notion that you can only walk your own path and are unable to see other people's paths or truly share their journey.

Your thoughts, feelings, decisions, actions, knowledge and life journey are all unique. No-one else in the history of time will ever walk your journey in exactly your way.

Oh, for sure, there will plenty of intersection points along the way, when you meet with other people who can empathize with your life, share your knowledge base or resonate with your spirit...and these are wonderful moments and relationships in our lives. Even so, your life is still as unique as any other person's...an interesting paradox...we're all different and we're all the same...but that's a different article.

All of which brings me to three words that I try to live by, but fail at miserably more often than not: Compassion, Understanding and Tolerance.

Before I get to these words, however, let us consider that the sum of my essence is wrapped up in my ego, my sense of self...but when ego gets in the way, it makes the assumption that I am, in some way, better than others around me. Maybe I'm richer, faster, stronger, am better looking, know more things, have more experience, have special gifts, abilities and talents...and all these things set me apart...but do they really?

It is easy to allow ego to set you up as being better than those around you. In my world as a university professor or a martial arts instructor, it is easy to think of myself as being superior, but the truth of the matter is that the only thing I have going for me here, is that I've been on the road for longer.

Many of my students are no less in-

telligent, or capable than am I. Many of my students and most of my colleagues are, in fact, much brighter and more capable than I. As a professor or a martial arts instructor, I am merely a facilitator of growth and a conduit for the acquisition of knowledge. Equally, as a professor and as a martial artist, what I know pales into insignificance when compared to the sum of what there is to know. Then there is the notion that knowledge is not a static thing...it changes with time. What I learned as a student is not what is available to learn in today's world.

O.K. so much for knowledge.

Now, let's look at the process of living: As a spectator and observer of other people's lives, I have no way of knowing what things they have to deal with on a daily basis. Maybe the guy who cut me off on the road while I was driving, was on the way to the hospital where his wife had just had a heart attack. Maybe the woman who shouted at me had just lost a parent and was grieving and had no emotional reserve. I don't know what things are occurring in people's lives and perhaps I should cut them a little slack for the 'unknown'. I cannot see the internal struggles, nor the external stresses that the people around me face on a daily basis, but it seems to me that they are each deserving of compassion, understanding and tolerance.

Easy to say, difficult to do.

All of which is where humility comes in. It is not for me to judge others or place myself above them. Humility is recognizing our place in the great cosmos and the recognition that no 'thing' is greater or lesser than I. I am a temporary feature of the cosmos as it is at the moment and my existence is a tiny blip on the radar of time.

Humility then, is by definition, knowing one's place in the great

scheme of things, both in terms of time and space. Humility is the absence of pride and arrogance, but a negative definition is not a lot of help. So maybe we could chew it finer...humility is the active choice to make your own needs, wants and desires subordinate to the needs, wants and desires of others.

Humility grows from an awareness that other people's struggles are no less important than yours. Humility grows from an awareness that other people's talents, abilities, looks, wealth, knowledge or stature are no less important than yours regardless of what you have done in life to achieve success and/or renown.

We are taught to be proud of our accomplishments, as a necessary part of self-confidence. But this is only a partial truth, because taken too far, pride and arrogance are surefire killers of humility. Pride and arrogance are, however, unfortunately much more attractive to us than humility.

The sublimation of ego to the growth of humility is a difficult and demanding path. In Buddhist literature the path to awareness is described as being as sharp as a razor's edge. Walking the path of humility is no less easy, but it is just possible that walking the path of humility can bring to your life a greater sense of harmony. Harmony is a much more likely result if harmony brings with it a true awareness of your place in the whole community of mankind, both past and present.

If you want a lesson in humility, look up into the night sky on a clear evening and allow your mind to open. You might just get one of those "Aha...I see it now" moments, that have inspired scientists, philosophers and poets since the dawn of intellectual thought.



Rank Structure and Respect

The article I am about to write is a bit of a departure from what we normally discuss, but I think that it needs attention.

Martial art training is a rank-driven, hierarchical process, which brings with it some responsibilities and also a little cultural baggage.

In the past, martial arts schools were run like little military academies, but we are not in the military and although some of us are training for combat in either the real world or the competition arena, some of us will never face a violent encounter in our entire lives. Accordingly, I run a program that is a little more relaxed and informal, purely because we are such a diverse group of people with different needs and goals.

Simply because I do not run the most formal, disciplined classes, does not leave the door open for disrespect. I like to think that the people who outrank you, earn your respect because of their ability and because of the way in which they treat you.

Let's look at this a little bit more. In a very real way, I hope that people will find within our program a mentorship and development relationship. The key here though, is that a mentor has to be someone who has 'been there, done that'. I can coach competitors in Judo because I have more than thirty years of experience in the arena. True, I was not an elite athlete, nor an international player, but I have fought, coached and refereed at the national level. I have never worked in law enforcement or served in the military. I do know that a lot of our techniques have direct transference to these environments, but having never lived there, I cannot speak from a position of life experience. I would therefore be a poor mentor for a new policeman. I could teach basic evasion and control tactics, but would not mentor a street cop. I could clean up a technique or offer advice, but that's different.

Do you begin to see?

Each black belt wears his/her rank because there is a technical base of knowledge. Each black belt instructor also has some experience in some area of performance and those who garner the most respect have either real life experience where combat is not a playground or have

competition experience.

I remember as I came up the ranks and sought out my own mentors I always sought out instructors who 'knew' what they were about.

It is our responsibility as black belts not to be 'paper tigers'. Anyone can put on a black belt, not everyone can wear one. Our responsibility as black belts is to uphold the integrity of the rank and serve as mentors for those who want to stand where we now stand. We also need to seek mentors who are standing where we one day wish to stand. The journey is always onward.

In the West, it is common for people to question authority, and to a degree that is a healthy thing. There comes a point, however, when authority-questioning becomes disrespect, especially if it not based on equivalency of experience or knowledge.

There are things that occur in the martial world, (or any educational environment for that matter), the reasons for which are not readily apparent to the student at the time of the lesson. In fact, in some cases, the reasons things were done the way they were done when I was younger were not apparent to me until many, many years later. (So maybe I'm just a slow learner).

Mentors do not always explain themselves and have reasons for not doing so. (Ask me about Heisenberg). Mentors may teach one thing to one student, but something slightly different to another student. There are reasons why these events occur.

Additionally, without an authority-driven structure in the martial arts class, there would be utter confusion. No-one would know who to turn to for instruction or reliable training information. There can be only one leader to any group and then a command structure flows out from that position. It is for these reasons that we have a Program Manager who runs the dojo, and several class instructors as well as assistant instructors who administer the teaching components. The leader is the final arbiter of how the school is run, is the strategist for programmatic goals and is the source of content knowledge. The leader is not infallible, which is precisely why there is a subordinate rank structure, to allow information to flow up and down

the ranks, to interpret and to provide a conduit of communication. A good leader listens, probably a lot more than s/he talks.

So much for the black belts. What about those who are on their journey to black belt? Again, there is a hierarchy. We each start as a white belt and move up the ranks, acquiring knowledge and experience along the way. It would not be sensible for a white belt with only two weeks of experience to start challenging a green belt with almost a year's experience. Likewise a brown belt would not be wise to start questioning a black belt with four years' worth of experience. Doing so would only undermine the whole process and erode both trust and respect in both directions. There's a difference between 'challenging and questioning' and asking honest questions to facilitate learning.

Understand this though; authority does not equate to authoritarian, nor does teaching equate to condescension. One of the reasons our dojo works the way it does, is because, for the most part we hold two things to the fore: Trust and Respect.

Trust is paramount. If I cannot trust my instructors, then they cannot be permitted to teach, period. If I cannot trust my training partners then I will not train with them, period. If my students and my instructors cannot trust me to care for them, to nurture their growth and to provide an environment of learning, then they will go elsewhere to train.

Respect is a natural outgrowth of trust. We respect those whom we trust, and the reverse also tends to be true.

You will notice in most of our classes a lot of eye contact, a lot of shoulder touching and encouragement. You will not see a lot of demanding, military-style commands. For sure you will hear exhortations to perform at your very best and to push your limits, but that's different. It works because we are building an internally supportive, mutually competitive team structure. Each of us wants to improve because in that way we all improve. Remember that...it's important. The next time you think about how you behave in class, no matter what your rank, remember that it is always about trust and respect. I want to keep it that way. ☺

Thought I was done

Just when you thought it was safe...

I'm not done with relaxation yet. I want to tie relaxation and humility together for as moment...in what might seem like an oblique way.

As though I would do such a thing. So here we go...

When I think that my force of will can overcome an aggressor, there is an aspect of truth in my thought, but there is also an inherent trap. The prideful will resists, the humble will yields. Have you ever considered that humility can be a very powerful weapon in the face of an aggressive attack? Rather than meeting force with force, humility will allow you to resist by yielding to the force of your attacker and give the power nowhere to impact. How strong is the punch that misses?

Let us not mistake force of will for prideful resistance, let us see it for what it needs to be: Tenacity, a determination to survive. When attacked, giving way is not necessarily retreating. There's not a military campaigner in the history of warfare who did not know this. Ask Napoleon or Hitler about the wisdom of invading Russia.

There's an interesting point here. Early in the second world war, the Russians gave ground to the advancing German blitzkrieg, but later, in 1943, during the Battle of Kursk, the Russians deliberately created an impregnable ring of layered defenses against which they wanted the German offensive to bleed itself white. The intent of the battle was to break the German army and cost (for the Russians) was not a factor. Few of us have that luxury in an aggressive encounter with a powerful adversary. In a highly charged, stressful moment, strength will not necessarily be your ally, unless you can yield when you need to and apply strength at the right moment.

The ability to be flexible in both mind and body, yet resolute in will are paramount. As a single person, my strength will always be overcome by a bigger, stronger assailant or multiple assailants. In order for me to be successful I must learn to flow with the attacks and dissipate their power, rather than absorb the attacks with my body.

After thirty-some years of competition in Judo and Karate, some of it at the national level, I can tell you

that on days when my mind and body were relaxed I did really well. On days, when I was stiff, afraid, too confident, or uncertain, I invariably lost.

Remember the definition of humility? To know your place in mankind.

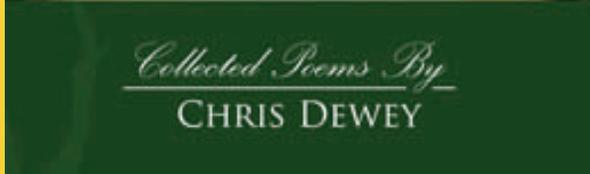
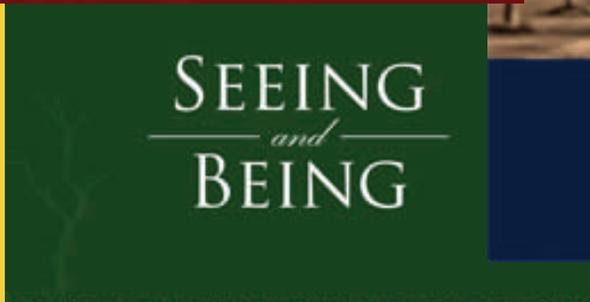
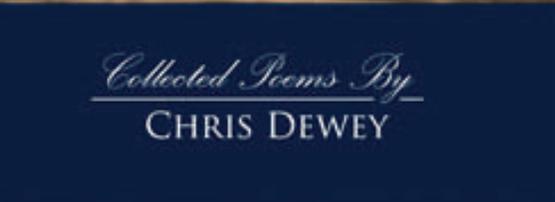
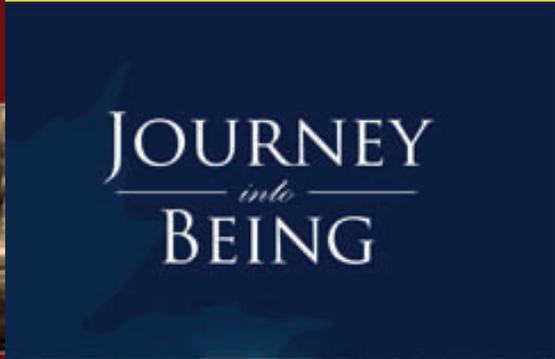
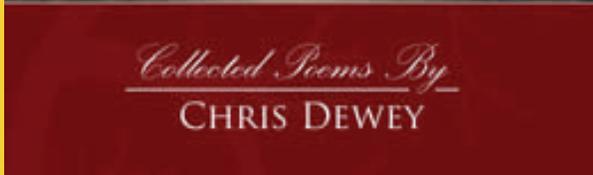
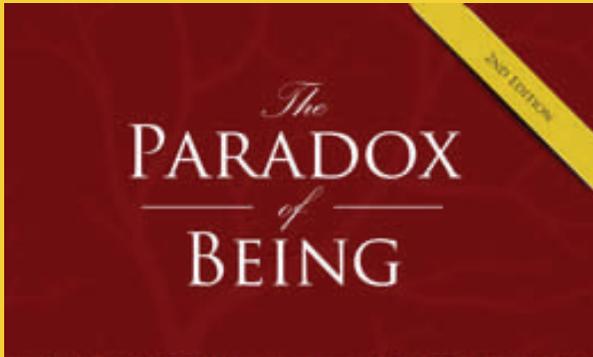
On days when I knew my place, I competed well. On days when I either doubted my ability or thought too much of myself I did not do so well. In both cases I was unable to fully relax and fight effectively in the combat arena. Learning humility and acquiring the ability to relax, while remaining resolute and determined is an art...a martial art.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- ◆ **AKAYAMA SPRING CAMP. TRUSSVILLE, AL. APRIL, 2010.**

"To know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived, that is to have succeeded."

Ralph Waldo Emerson



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