

Pathways

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*Where the mind goes,
the energy follows*

The Nei Jing

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Gratitude.

Perhaps one of the easiest and the hardest of things is to have a pervading sense of gratitude for what is.

During times that we perceive as 'good' it is easy to be grateful. What about the not-so-easy times? It's tough to be grateful if you just experienced some traumatic event.

What's going on there I wonder? My sense of things is that we are accepting of good stuff in our lives much more readily than we are of the so-called bad stuff. Bad stuff is generally going to generate a major sympathy vote from the bystanders of your life. 'Good' stuff will get you some applause, but we often use patterns of misery and heartache to generate support.

So what happens when I say I am grateful for the fact that I just got laid off, or I just fell down stairs and broke my leg? What then? It creates something of an intellectual and emotional disconnect in people's minds. How could you possibly be grateful for this?

What if the apparently negative event in my life was exactly what I needed to create a wonderful opportunity? Suppose that getting laid off allowed me to find the creative artist within me, open my own business and become wildly successful? Puts a different slant on things doesn't it?

There's something else at work here too...well, actually there are two somethings else.

1. It's extraordinarily hard to worry about life if you are grateful for everything that happens. It might sound simplistic, but think on this for a moment. Try worrying about

something for which you are grateful. It's tough. For sure worry may come later, but if you examine what is happening when you begin to worry, the worry fills the void left open when gratitude took a furlough.

2. When you work on being consistently grateful, regardless of circumstance, something really interesting starts to happen: You begin to stop judging. Little by little the words 'good' and 'bad' begin to lose their meaning. After all, opportunity is wherever you choose to see it. So something becomes only 'good' or 'bad' from the perspective of perceived outcome. If I learn to stop judging through an attitude of gratitude, then opportunities begin to flourish in the garden of my life.

I would like to say that this is an easy path, but that would be a misrepresentation.

Being grateful takes vigilance. It takes consistent gentle reminders to self. It takes being kind to yourself and it takes reciprocity because being grateful isn't just about what happens in the external circumstances of your life or what happens 'to you', it is about being grateful for yourself just for who you are..and that's tricky.

All too often we forget to embrace uncompromising gratitude, but persistence brings improvement, and is well-worth the continued effort.

I invite you to spend a week becoming aware of moments in which you can express a sense of gratitude.. You'll be grateful you did. ☺

Patterns

Have you ever noticed patterns in your life that seem to play out over and over? It doesn't matter where they show up. They can be in your relationships, your careers, your finances, your health, or all the above.

What do you think that they are attempting to tell you?

I was having a conversation with a dear friend the other day about this very issue. We were discussing the observation that you can experience the same thing over and over and not even realize it, then it might suddenly hit you what is going on, or it might happen more gradually. Either way, the light begins to dawn, the veil begins to lift.

At some point you become aware that you are repeating a life pattern.

Maybe similar kinds of mates show up in your life and you keep ending relationships in the same way. Maybe you keep having the same response to money, perhaps you never seem to save any money, despite what you say you want. Maybe the pattern relates to the way you behave with respect to career opportunities. Maybe you are great on getting things started, but somehow never seem to finish things.

It really doesn't matter what the motivator is going to be, the patterns are there, as a beacon, inviting our observation and awareness.

With awareness comes choice, without awareness comes repetition. With awareness comes the possibility of asking yourself some really neat questions:

What's going on here?

What do I keep doing?

What is the reason that I keep doing x,y,z?

What am I looking for that I have not yet found?

Suppose that, for whatever reasons, the

same issues keep showing up in your life, as silent hosts for your choices, inviting you to participate in a novel way. It is conceivable that we keep experiencing the same things over and over purely because we have more to learn about the issue.

What's going on there? What is the universe inviting me to do? How well do my current strategies work for me? What opportunities are waiting quietly for me to explore? What am I really doing? What am I missing?

Let's take this one stage further.

Let's say that I choose a different approach to one of my issues. I finally feel like I am making progress. Then something new show up in my life and I feel like I am back at square one.

Really?

As we learn in one area of our lives, become aware and make different choices, new aspects of the issue will emerge in other areas for us to observe.

So let's say I get my relationships in order, then find that a similar pattern is playing itself out in my career. Perhaps it is something that I hadn't noticed before, but now that I look at it, it is similar to the way I played my relationships. Then I figure that one out, only to discover I have a similar relationship that I hadn't previously noticed with my money, my health...whatever.

What happens when you squeeze silly putty? You may squeeze it in one place, but it'll ooze out somewhere else. Is it ever really the same again? ...Well yes, of course it is...it is after all, silly putty...and no, it could never be, it is, after all, a new and interesting shape!

I do so love the energy of paradox.

You see, in this case, it's not really the detail of the pattern itself that is important. What is critical, is the invitation to

observe and become aware. The awareness creates the opportunity to make a different set of choices if we wish to do so. If we do not wish to make new choices, then at least we are aware of the choices that we currently make.

So let's take all those wonderful New Year's resolutions that we made, that are now shuffled off into a corner to collect dust and generate a mild psycho-allergenic response quietly in the background of our lives, until we do the same thing next year...I will lose x number of pounds, I will save x number of dollars, I will get fit.

Each of us has our own pact with self that we made at the beginning of the year...or not. So why did we or did we not follow through?

Were we not ready to make a different choice? Were we unaware that there was a different choice to be made? Were we uncertain about what choice to make?

Let's say that I say I want to be healthy and that my current strategy is not working.

Until I get to the core of the issue, all my good intentions will achieve no lasting effect. The determinants of lasting change are not superficial, they are deep within the fabric of the soul.

Yes, I absolutely agree that we are capable of profound insight and personal change to become who we choose to be, but it takes vigilance at very deep levels of the psyche, and sometimes those changes take us to places and events that we would just a soon not see or visit, so we remain where we are...it is safer, more comfortable than the alternative.

It is one thing to ask a question...it is another thing entirely to step through the door that the answer invites. What is your pattern showing you? ☺

*It takes vision and courage to create -
It takes faith and courage to prove*

Owen Young

Worry, Anxiety, Stress

Tough one.

Many of us do it, every day it would seem...and often for no good reason except that we're all masters at personal worry and stress.

So why do we all get stressed up? Why do we worry? Does worrying actually change the outcome? Does worry help me to perform at a higher level?

We all know that stress and worry have negative health effects, but that seems to act as not the slightest deterrent to our penchant for worrying. Give me an excuse and I'll worry. So what's the point?

Let's go back to my third question. Does worrying really change the outcome? What if the answer is 'No'? What if worrying gets me exactly the same outcome as not worrying? More importantly, *what if worrying gets me a measurably less satisfying performance?*

I'll take an example from my current life. Having retired as a professor and gone back to school as a full-time student, tests are now my seemingly constant companion. What if I were to look at the testing process as a companion that allows me to examine my own knowledge base and improve it, in incremental fashion? How would that change the way I look at testing events?

So what if I do worry about tests? How does it work? My first fear is that that I don't know enough. Then I worry that I don't study enough, and I worry that worrying prevents me from studying enough. And I lie awake at night, worrying that I didn't study the right things for the test in the morning, then I worry that I'm going to be tired when I take the test...O.K....so now I'm worrying that I'm overstating the case...☺

So I exaggerate... But you get the point. You know the routine. Many of us have

been there for one reason or another.

I used test-taking as my example, but you know what? That's just the external environment for worry, and as such the environment is merely circumstantial. Circumstances are, exactly that...they are just circumstances.

The circumstances don't cause me to worry. I choose to worry about the circumstances...Huge difference.

What's more important is that if I can recognize in myself a propensity to worry, then I have choices.

I can choose to become aware of specific patterns of behavior associated with worry that repeat themselves, *regardless of the circumstances*. Maybe for you worry and stress revolve around getting projects completed at work, or finding a job, or making your money stretch to the next paycheck, or your family dynamics or personal health. Again, they're just the circumstances.

The critical component is the recognition of the behavior pattern. You can only avoid what you can see, hear or sense in some fashion.

So let's say I become aware of a stress indicator, like worry. What would happen if I were to entertain the notion that not worrying was an option?

Is it conceivable that I would invest more time and energy into fruitful activities? How would my habits improve? What behavioral changes would I notice? How would my outcomes improve? How would they create a positive feedback loop?

It is a very curious thing that once we start down a proactive and anabolic track, our mind will continue in the same vein until we deliberately derail it. Likewise, the reverse is true.

The fact of the matter is that the mind creates the energy of action.

As I presented in the first quote this month, where the mind goes, the energy follows...if I stress over life, then the energy of stress will grow in my life. If I focus with greater intent upon the anabolic activities of my life (those that build me up), then, in similar fashion, the energy of my life will follow suit.

It comes as no surprise then, to see that there are potential health effects associated with increased levels of stress. Although superficially mental, stress must surely exact a price on our bodies, if for no other reasons than our hormonal chemistry changes with our stress levels.

Think about it for a moment. How do you feel when you are worried, anxious or stressed? How do you feel when you are relaxed, confident and capable?

When there's work to be done, which of those feels most useful to you?

Obviously, it all comes down to levels of personal awareness and increased freedom of choice. Like I said earlier in the article, you can only avoid what you can sense in some way.

The key then is to learn to observe yourself in action and to note the choices that you make, moment-to-moment.

I'm not saying that's easy, far from it, it takes effort and vigilance. Like most things though, the more you practice it, the easier it gets.

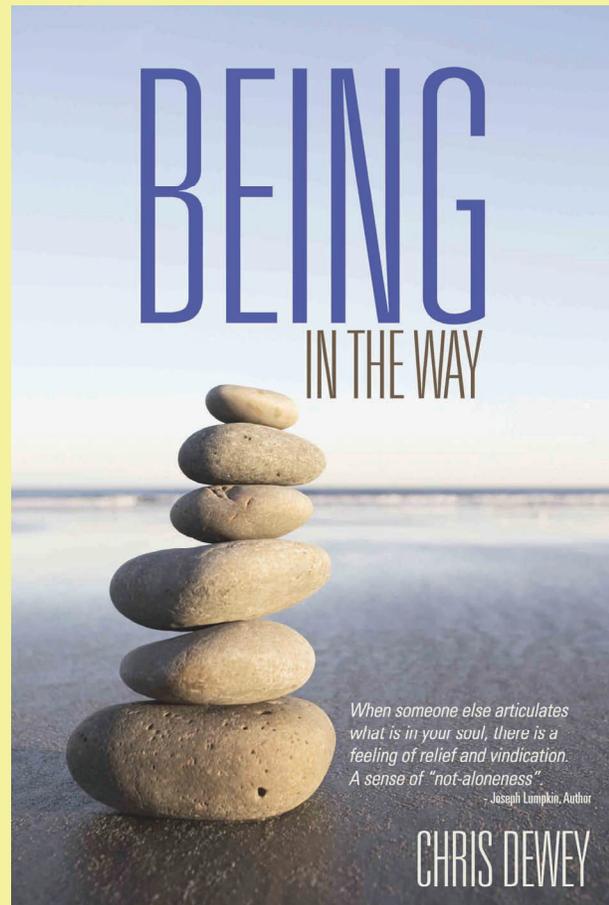
So if I have a message this month, it is for us to invest some effort in watching how we do things in life.

I don't much care what it is that you notice...it could be worry, it could be times when you judge, it could be the time taken to be grateful, it could be time taken for compassion...just notice, be aware, catch yourself in the act...and be gentle with yourself. You are after all, a work in progress. ☺

You cannot run from a weakness. You must sometimes fight it out or perish; and if that be so, why not now, and where you stand?

Robert Louis Stevenson

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