

Pathways

THE CHRIS DEWEY PROFESSIONAL SERVICES NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 23 ISSUE 1

JANUARY 2019



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“No matter how difficult the past, you can always begin again today”

Jack Kornfield



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Choice

When I went through my coaching course, several years ago, we discussed the difference between catabolic and anabolic language. Catabolic language includes phrases like “I must”, “I have to”, “I’ll try”, “I can’t”. “I need to.” Invariably catabolic language breaks us down, little by little. Anabolic language conversely, involves phrases like “I want to”, “I choose to”, and “I can.” Anabolic language gives us freedom. It honors our ability to chart our own course, to choose a path from among several. Curiously, this was not something to which I had given a lot of thought in life.

No, really.

I have always tended to make my own decisions and choose what I wanted to do. I tended not to let supposed obstacles stand in my way. All the big moves of my life were like that...they were all governed by what I wanted to do for my own growth and the discovery of my potential.

The huge blind spot in my life was the learned inability to change those things over which I *believed* I had no influence. Notice my wording here: “things over which I *believed* I had no control.”

It’s insidious. If I believe something to be true, whether it is true or not, it is by default true, in my perception of reality. If you believe a thing to be true, you relinquish control over that thing.

Let’s take an example: “I don’t have time for x,y,z.” The statement is a belief statement. What it in essence says, is that I do not believe that I am capable of achieving x,y,z, in the time allotted.

So what got me started on this article was a quote I heard on the radio that the definition of greatness involved

the development of a plan and not having quite enough time for its execution.

All of which brought up the notion of choice. Faced with previous situation, i.e., a plan and not enough time you have two choices: 1. Do it anyway. 2. Do something else and abandon the plan as conceived.

If you make choice #1, you start looking for ways in which to make something happen. You have, by default, decided that the plan was important enough to execute regardless of the perceived obstacle (lack of time).

Choice #1 is an act of will, an act of intent and an act of belief. Moreover, it is an act that affirms my ability as a change agent for my own life, an act asserting my freedom of choice and my inherent ability (potential) to achieve a thing in the face of obstacles.

Choice #1 is about wanting to do something, and believing that I can do it. It also says that the thing in question is important to me. Consequently, Choice #1 unleashes my ability to create the desired outcome.

So how often do we actually do that? How often do we truly exert our freedom of choice?

How often do we abdicate our freedom of choice because we didn’t even realize we had a choice, or gave it up because of a limiting belief, or a series of assumptions that we made?

Every moment is redolent with the potential for change if we choose it to be so.

You can fill the bubble of ‘Now’ with catabolic language or anabolic language...it’s your life.

What choice do you have?



Arthropodal Constructs

There is an element of resistance to change and the reaching of potential within each and everyone of us. I know that sounds harsh, but really, if you stop and think about it honestly, even for a brief moment there is probably some aspect of life in which you are not living up to your fullest potential, even if you are an Olympic Athlete, Rhodes Scholar, or a top leader in your field.

Please don't take that as a criticism...rather take it as a call to action...one that I can do well to hear in my own life.

After all, is not an easy thing to reinvent yourself and cast aside existing shells...after all they are the shells that we have built for ourselves with such care and deliberation. There is something wonderfully arthropodal about that...ask a lobster.

The reason arthropods shed their old skeletons as they move through different life stages is because they literally outgrow them and because the newer outer covering permits new functionalities, often including the appearance of new limbs and body structures.

So what's happening here? To remain trapped in the wrong skin is to limit potential. Caterpillars don't fly...or have sex for that matter.

To shed an old skin is to embrace possibility and previously unimagined functionality. Going back to the lobster for a moment, on the plus side, the old, hard shell protects the juvenile lobster from the predatory actions of those who are looking for a quick lunch. The cost then is obvious...the

instant the young lobster-ling sheds its old shell it is massively vulnerable and is taking the risk of becoming a quick sea-floor snack.

I believe that there might be a lesson in there about accepting vulnerability and risk in order to grow... Unfortunately, this is where avoidance of fear and comfort with the *status quo* can destroy all possibility of growth. We can become so enamored of, and armored by, our construct of life that we refuse to entertain even the smallest possibility of change.

It is often a reality of living that we create constructs for our lives and then fear and comfort leads us to live within the walls they create, never once looking over the ramparts to see the possibilities that await us. We may even go to great lengths to justify or provide well-reasoned excuses about why change is an impossibility for us. We can even use the structures that we have created to show how we are actually growing and changing...yet in our hearts we know it all to be an illusion. All identities eventually harden into inflexible structures until they are deliberately cracked and cast aside in favor of something newer and more functional.

No matter who we are, what we have achieved, or what we do, each of us is capable of placing (often well-intentioned) limits upon ourselves that eventually harden into rigidly held beliefs about who and what we are. Perhaps what is more damning is that we use those beliefs like a set of binoculars with which to view the future

and to then define what is possible for the rest of our life as we perceive it from the position of the current moment.

As I suggested, most of us do it for very laudable reasons...to be accepted within our little social microcosms. Each of us plays a role that is in part defined by our own inner workings and in part by the society within which we move.

Sometimes, events in life will crack our rigid shells for us and we are almost forced into the daylight of a new life.

Sometimes, we can come to meet change as a deliberate choice, recognizing that some quiet, hidden thing within us is asking for attention.

Sometimes, some new awareness dawns within and we realize that we have been living a partial life. Shades of Frank Herbert here: "*The sleeper must awaken*".

Sometimes, we see that the patterns that we have followed for maybe decades, just plain don't work for us, and we see that it is time for a new paradigm for life.

So what's my call to action then?

Crack a shell.

Grow into a more highly functional life.

Discover who you might be and embrace change.

It doesn't matter how old you are, what your circumstances might be... you have choices.

What do you want to do with them?

☺

***"We imagine that when we [our lives] are thrown [off course] all is lost,
but it is only then that what is new and good begins.***

While there is life there is happiness. There is much, much before us ."

Leo Tolstoy: War & Peace

The Ghosts in the Machine

We are going to require a bit of an historical background and contextual introduction for this one.

Back in the Age of Reason (1641, to be precise), Rene Descartes first suggested what is known as the ‘mind-body dualism’. The idea is that the mind is a non-material entity, temporarily inhabiting the body. The implication of Descartes's position is that the mind can survive the death of the physical body. In 1949, a British philosopher, Gilbert Ryle refuted this notion, and in 1967, Arthur Koestler published a book entitled “The Ghost in the Machine” in which he supported Ryle’s view of the mind.

The term moved into science fiction when Artur C Clark used it to describe virtual consciousness in computer systems in his book “2010”. Additionally, Isaac Asimov used the term and pushed it a bit further in “I, Robot”, when he wrote about redundant pieces of code that eventually begin to create unexpected evolutions within the mind of the Robot.

I’ve got to be going somewhere with all of this...right? Right. I am.

We are all wandering around with bits of redundant code in our computer systems (minds). The code might have been written when we were little children in response to some series of events for which we had no viable solution, so we wrote one.

An example might be useful. Let’s say a child grows up in a home where his/her parents are always arguing and the child feels unable to change anything about what is happening. The child then has (mostly unconscious) choices about what to do with the event to make sense out of it. Although there are any number of potential answers, for argument’s sake, let’s just say that the child writes an “I am powerless to effect change” or an “I can’t make a difference to xyz” code line in order to accept what is happening. The code can then take root and potentially manifest in all manner of different

ways as the child becomes an adult.

The code line might become a part of totally unrelated scenarios in the life of the adult. For instance, it could manifest as anxiety in leadership positions, it could manifest as a learning disability, it could manifest as a victim mentality.

The point is simple.

An outdated piece of code written by a child who had no other coping mechanism (available at the moment of the event) is exerting an effect that is completely out of touch with the coping mechanisms potentially available to the adult.

I am going to pluralize Koestler’s term, lean on Asimov a bit and call these the Ghosts in the Machine...because I have a point I want to make

Many of us are familiar with the notion of being haunted by our past. What if the ‘haunting’ were in fact, happening because of unseen code we have written about events in the past?

I would venture to suggest that all of us have ghosts of one kind or another. Many of our ghosts come from trauma of various types and unresolved events that occur as we move through life. Why the ghosts are there is less important to me than what we do with them and how they affect us.

So, if there are ghosts in the machine, pieces of code written years ago as a response to some series of events, it raises some interesting possibilities.

The key question of course, is: “What do you want to do with that knowledge?”

The first step might be to recognize that the G’s-i-t-M can hijack our lives in a number of ways, because in fact the pieces of code are a) old and redundant and b) often playing out in the background of our lives. Perhaps, most destructively, they can cause us to get trapped in some loop or cycle (life trap) that repeats over and over until we see the cycle for what it is. Once we begin to gain the awareness

that we are repeating a particular cycle and have identified both the trigger and the manner in which the cycle plays out, we have potentially acquired the power to change our outcomes.

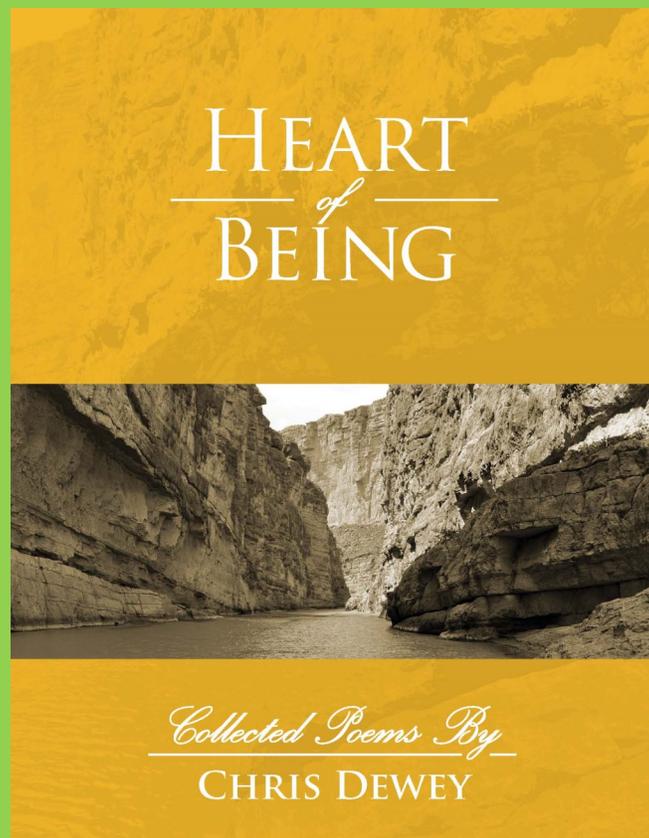
It’s kind of like being haunted by the past. It’s not exactly that we are re-living our traumas, although that is possible; it is more that we are playing out a series of computer programs that have long outlived their usefulness.

It’s one thing to recognize some deep trauma, it is something else to be unable to get past it, and...it is something else again to be unconsciously living out the same cycle because we are unaware of the impact of any given past life event.

In any event, it is a given that we are altered by our past. What is perhaps not so obvious is that once we gain awareness of what is happening with the ghosts, we are empowered to change the interpretations, assumptions and beliefs that we create as a function of past events.

Look at any memory of your past. Do you notice the interpretations that you tie to the memory of the actual event? As adults we can examine the ghosts created by those interpretations and the power that we have given to them. We can ‘re-view’ our memories and create different interpretations of the past event and different assumptions about how similar sorts of events might play out in the future. Lastly, we can change what we choose to believe about ourselves in the greater fabric of life. Do I view the event as damaging to me? Or could I view it as creating the opportunity for learning? I am not suggesting that we pretend something didn’t happen. I am suggesting that we can, however, look at it in a different way. If I change what I believe about my past, how might I change how I live in the Now?

It’s a New Year... Maybe it’s time for a new way of looking at how you play the game of life? ☺



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