

Pathways

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**"I know what I know,
and I deal with my life
based upon what's hap-
pening right now"**

Michael Jordan

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Inspiration

One of the wonderful things about being a parent, is that if we are open to the process, our children can teach us as much or more than we'll ever teach them. Through my son's eyes, everything is possible and setbacks are treated as opportunities to do the anything again and get better. How many of us, I wonder, are able to maintain that trait when we grow up and become adults? It's all about our perceptions of what happens to us in life.

Today is the day after Christmas. My son has just inspired me to write this article. Please do not read this as an attempt to brag on my boy...it isn't. It is simply that I was awed by what he showed me, while I watched. We gave my son a 20" bicycle for Christmas and within fifteen minutes of mounting the thing for the first time, he was riding without a care in the world. He's still got problems getting on the thing, but once he's on it, there's no stopping him.

That's not the inspiring bit...the inspirational part to this story is that everytime he fell off the bike, he'd get up and laugh and say things like: "Look dad, I'm getting better." or "Look, I'm practicing." I kid you not. It was amazing to me. Not once did I hear him say, "I can't do this." Most of the time he wanted to do it on his own. When he wanted help it was just to maintain balance as he got on the thing and started moving, but even then he'd say things like "I'm on it, look, I'm riding."

Very quickly he was riding circles in the driveway holding a conversation about how much he liked the bike,

how he was a big boy now and how much faster he could go than he could on his little bike.

To my five-year old son, failure is not an option. It's not that he refused to give in, it's more that it never dawned on him that failure was even a possibility....and who are we to dissuade him?

As my son has grown, his little legs have outgrown his first two-wheeled bike and it seemed time to let him tackle a larger challenge....one that was almost (but not quite) too big for his body (but not his mind or his heart).

Some of the gifts that my son has given his father have been truly remarkable. In these few moments, I have seen courage, determination, optimism, positive expectation, joy and tenacity.

Some children could look at the bike and be intimidated by its size or the ability to keep it balanced, but not my son. He takes an approach of overcoming the challenge and mastering it. It is all in the approach he takes going in and the way in which he boks at his setbacks along the road to learning. He has much to teach many of us.



Perception

One of the things that strikes me so often is how radically different our perceptions can be. How many times do we hear that perception is everything? How many times do we see things in a different way to the way others see the same event?

As many of you know I have published a poetry book and I am often amazed by the ways in which people's own filters of personal experience affect how they read my words. Of course, this is as it should be....after all, poetry is supposed to "speak to us" or it doesn't work.

All of which is an introduction to the main point: Perception is individual, personal, unique....and very commonly incomplete.

As I said last month, most of us do not take the time to truly, deeply listen, and so we draw incomplete or incorrect conclusions from what we hear from others. (Even if we assume that we are being presented with the entire picture.)

I tend to believe that for the most part, most of us are wandering around in a fog of incomplete data and inaccurate perceptions...all of which is a comment about our ability to communicate with the people around us, our planetary environment (and our entire universe for that matter). To me, science is about the journey toward a more complete understanding of the universe and history is the record of our journey. But that's just my perception. So what is mis-perception? Most differences in perception are due to inability to comprehend, failure to pay

attention or some form of either conscious or unconscious avoidance.

If you drop me in the middle of Romania, I suspect that I will be able to demonstrate an inability to comprehend...regardless of how much I desire to comprehend or how much I pay attention...I simply do not have the tools of language....but I can learn.

Sometimes, when I teach classes either at the dojo or on campus, students fail to grasp what it is I am attempting to convey because they lack the ability to pay attention....they may have the intellectual skills to grasp my meaning but they have failed to focus the mind upon the subject at hand. Lastly, there are times when all of us simply do not want to or care to see any other alternative other than our own. We simply refuse to believe what we see or hear.

In the first case, I can learn a new language and increase my ability to accurately perceive my new situation. In the second case, I can learn the skills of concentration, or if distracted, simply bring my attention back to the present moment. In the third case, things probably will not change because what I am seeing or hearing is in direct conflict with a deeply rooted belief or habit. In this circumstance, I am more likely to reject what is being presented, or refuse to listen to the person speaking rather than open my mind to a new way of perceiving my world.

One of the hardest things in the world is to cut adrift old ways of looking at things and accept something new. This is one of the reasons that people develop such strong attachments to

negative behaviors, even when they know that the habit is undermining their chances for success in life or destroying their relationships. To see things in a new way is often frightening, always disturbing and more often than not rocks the foundations of our lives.

The problem that I see is that creating rigid structures about what we are willing to accept and believe prevents us from seeing alternatives to our "problems" and creates an inability to tolerate the opinions and beliefs of others.

From an immediately practical perspective, when I struggle with a problem, I fail to see the solution because my mind is so wrapped up in its own way of seeing things. It is only when I relax my mind and allow the "problem" to find its own solution that I have "aha" moments, which provide me with solutions I would not otherwise have seen.

From the perspective of the global scale of society, when you look at history and the number of wars and millions of souls who have perished as a function of religious conflict, it is easy to see intolerance at work.

At a personal and local level; what will you do the next time someone challenges you to see a new way of looking at something or when you have a personal challenge in your career or relationships? Will you truly listen? Will you be open to a new perception? Will you attempt to see things from a different perspective? The results might surprise you. ☺

"I'm so connected to this moment that I don't make assumptions about what might come next, because I don't want to lose touch with the present" - Michael Jordan

Perception II

So let's move on with this idea and look at perception from a slightly different perspective.

We filter every experience we have through the sieve of "that which is good" versus "that which is bad": getting a pay raise is good, getting fired is bad...you know how it is. I just failed a course, that is bad; I just got laid off at work, that is bad; I just wrecked my car, that is bad.

We don't see the alternatives that might exist: I failed the course, changed my major and found my true vocation. I just got laid off, which led me to open my own business and it changed my whole life for the better. I just crashed my car, but walked away unhurt.

An event in our life is just that, an event. We color the event individually, according to our perceptions of the moment. In the cases I gave above, our perceptions are colored by our inability to see the future....which is probably a good thing!

I've made a stack load of mistakes over the years. I've fallen flat on my face more times than my ego likes to admit, and yet each time I fall over I discover some valuable lesson, right there at my feet...you know, right where my face is!

So was falling over a bad thing? It depends upon your perspective. If I learn something valuable every time I fall over, should I fall over more often? It depends upon your perspective.

Almost every personal success story

that I have ever read contains some statement akin to the fact that the only difference between successful people and unsuccessful people is the greater number of seeming failures that successful people have had. Again, it's all about perception. Successful people also have very high failure rates!

People who choose to succeed at whatever tasks they embrace in life are successful in direct proportion to their willingness to risk failure. Failures teach us about the ways that will not work, and ultimately brings us to the way that will work. It's all about perception.

From almost twenty-five years of advising at the university level, I can tell you that students who fall over and who stand up again, embrace the lesson that they have just endured are much more likely to succeed in the long run than those who fall over and start blaming their teachers, the system, their parents, or whatever other target they wish to blame.

Let me give you another example that I have used recently. In order to learn Judo well, you need to fall well. In order to learn how to throw, you must learn how to be thrown. It's that simple. People who take more falls and relax in the process become good at Judo. People who resist falling and stiffen at the thought of being thrown, have a tough time learning Judo.

So it comes to this: A relaxed, open mind is able to perceive possibility. A closed mind is trapped within its own

prison.

Learning to live life well, is about learning to acquire clarity about things that happen. This involves a willingness to see things from a different perspective than the one you might otherwise have chosen.

Rather than choosing to look at the things that happen as being "good" and "bad", I work on accepting what happens and looking for the opportunity that lies hidden within the event. This is not always easy. Belay that... often it's downright difficult! This is one of my great challenges in life. Sometimes it is easy to say "No you're wrong!" and much harder to say "Wait, let's look at this again and see things from another perspective."

In moments of clarity, I am able to see different perspectives and new solutions to old problems. I am able to step outside of my habituated responses and choose another path.

There are many situations in my life that I can look at, which, given one perspective might have been seen as the worst possible outcome and from another perspective could also be seen as the best thing that ever happened. So perception is largely a matter of habituated choice.

Each of us has the choice to step outside of our pre-conceived notions of what we perceive and see things anew, or remain trapped within the prisons of our own construction.

☺

"Once you make assumptions about something that might happen, or might not happen, then you open up the possibility of making mistakes. You start limiting the potential outcomes"

- Michael Jordan

Choices

Much of what I have been writing this month relates to choices and our perception of whether they are good or bad.

Several years ago, I took a professional coaching class as part of my business leadership development plan. One of the things that my coach asked me to do was to take several sheets of paper and make list of all the "good" choices I had ever made and all the "bad" choices I had ever made. I was instructed to separate the choices into areas like: personal and private, education, family, career and finances etc.. Since we spoke once a week in my coaching sessions, this was an enormous task. I guess the longer you live, the more daunting the task becomes! What made the task even larger to me was that I was supposed to give the choices some kind of arbitrary ranking. You know the sort of thing: This choice had far reaching, life changing effects, this one had relatively minor ramifications.

So far so good. I do organization. Anyone who knows me at all well, knows that I can organize pretty much anything I put my mind to. Some of my friends have a word for it. I simply like things to be organized.

The week the assignment was due, my coach asked me to read out some of my choices and then he picked on some highlights to discuss. The point of his message at the time was that things that I looked at as "bad" ended up producing some pretty good results. His point was well taken.

We tend to color our world by the inferences we take from the choices we make. Ultimately we even go so far as to define who we are by the sum of the choices we have made in the past...as though our past really defines who we are right this moment...unless we let it.

I was listening to an audio CD on the way to the dojo last night and the

speaker made the point that each and every moment is complete in and of itself and needs nothing outside of itself. Each moment is therefore a complete opportunity to become anything that we wish to become. Pretty airy stuff....no?

Well look at this for a moment. Suppose I take that exercise again and look at the so-called "bad choices." How many "good" things came out of them over time? And then try the reverse...How many seemingly "bad" things came out of my so-called "good choices"? The point is clear: By labeling choices as "good" or "bad" we are missing the point. Choices are what they are: Choices. We make them all the time....on inadequate information, out of emotional reaction, as a snap judgement, with too much debate, without considering all the implication, with too little consideration for the effect on others around us....you get the idea.

Choices are part of living. I wake up every morning. I can either choose to get up with a joyous spirit or drag myself out of bed wishing it were the weekend, or that I was someone else, or somewhere else.

Back to the point. The supposed "good" versus "bad" choices that I have made in my life are not a simple linear relationship. Much good has come out of many of the choices that I have made that I would say were less than wise. So where does this lead us? I think it leads us to a sense of positive expectation. Whatever happens to us in life, we either choose to look at it as a "bad" thing or a "good" thing. If we simply look at it as a "thing", and remain open to the possibility that great good can come from our choices, we are much more likely to lead positive, productive lives, which can't be an altogether bad thing! ☺



February						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28				

January						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

- ◆ Tennessee State Judo Championships, Clarksville, TN, February 11th, 2006
- ◆ Waka Mu Sha Judo Tournament, Atlanta, GA, February 18th, 2006
- ◆ Mississippi State Judo Championships, Jackson, MS, March 6th, 2006
- ◆ USA Judo National Championships, Houston, TX, April 20 - 22nd, 2006
- ◆ Peachtree Judo Tournament, Atlanta, GA, April 29th, 2006
- ◆ Akayama Summer Clinic, Jacksonville, AL, July 15-16th, 2006

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