

# Pathways

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

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*"I am not discouraged,  
because every wrong at-  
tempt discarded is an-  
other step forward"*

Thomas Edison

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## Your Inner Critic

For each of us, there is a continual internal dialogue with self. For some, the dialogue is positive, nurturing and supportive. For some, the dialogue is corrosive and debilitating. For most of us, the dialogue is somewhere between the two, and is strongly affected by our environment, our circumstances and our emotional state.

Interestingly enough, our inner dialogue can also **have** a big impact upon environment, circumstance and emotional state. Perhaps it is a chicken and egg sort of thing...what comes first? What do we say to ourselves about our experiences as they occur and how does what we experience affect our internal chatter?

Take public speaking for instance. Your internal voice will be very active when you prepare and stand up to talk to a group of people for the first time. Most of us have a deep-seated fear of public speaking and our inner critic will be shouting at us with words filled with anxiety and fear of embarrassment or failure. Once we have overcome our fears, the inner dialogue uses new words and can remind us of how we have been successful in the past and how we can establish rapport with an audience.

In the first instance the inner critic spoke from a lack of understanding and fear, in the second instance the inner mentor spoke to us from a position of understanding and confidence. Sometimes it can be that easy.

Sometimes working with your inner critic can be a monumental task. Your inner critic knows every weakness you have and will be only too happy to show each and every weakness to

you in bold relief, high definition color and stunning detail...if we allow it to do so.

The inner critic will remind us of every mistake and failure we have ever made and warn us to be cautious and careful. Slowly, over time, if we give it the power to do so, our inner critic will bind us with chains that are not easily broken. I sometimes think that it is not the world that prevents us from becoming successful, but our willingness to believe our own inner critic.

I don't have to tell you about your inner critic, you know who it is. You know its character and you know what it says to you.

If your inner critic gets the best of you at times, try the following exercise. It may take some time before the results of the exercise take root, depending upon how strongly influenced you are by your inner critic. Stick with it.

O.K., so here's the exercise: The next time you find yourself listening to the inner critic, imagine yourself standing at the end of a tunnel or in a large, open field. Give the inner critic a face, a character (you already know who this will be for you). Then move away from the critic and listen to how quiet the voice becomes, just like someone speaking to you from a long way off. The next part is critical: Thank your critic for looking out for your security, but emphasize to it that right now, your critic is getting in the way. Then slowly, turn your back on the critic and see the opportunity you are facing. See and hear the other person inside...the inner mentor and listen to the words he or she has to say. ☺

## Fifty

I'm not sure about this one...it seems like only yesterday I was in high school and definitely not ten years ago that I opened the Starkville Martial Arts Academy. Where *did* the time go?

I sure as heck don't feel like I'm half a century old...or young, depending upon your perspective. I still feel like I have learned so little about life. So what does it all add up to....and why do I want to write about it?

It seems to me that my life has been mostly a series of questions to which I have found incomplete answers. I have fallen flat on my face more times than I like to admit, but thus far, I have managed to stand up one more time than I have fallen over. I can see some of the price that others have paid for my mistakes and my choices. There are things that I regret doing, and things I regret not doing, but for all of that would I change things? I think, probably not. Of course that's a silly thing to say because we have no other reality with which to compare our current circumstances.

So I guess it comes to this: I can look at the world that I see around me and the effects that my life has had. Are they good effects? Has the world with which I interact benefited from my being here? If I can answer in the affirmative, then I would argue that the path has been worth the price and the effort of all those involved.

I was talking to one of the parents of a child in our dojo over Christmas and he used a phrase that hit a chord in my heart and has stuck with me. He talked about people who have a "service heart." I truly believe that he struck right to the heart of living. Viktor Frankl, in his book "Man's search for meaning" addressed this exact issue. Life is about finding a service of value.

If there is one theme running through my life it is that I am a life-long student and

teacher. I get my greatest fulfillment seeing the "students" with whom I work, rise to success. I think of this as *my* service to humanity, small though it is.

If I look for a purpose to my life it always seems to come back to learning and giving, learning and giving. Nothing of what we learn is intended to be kept, it is intended to be shared. Tied to that theme is the notion that whatever I know, it is not enough and that it is therefore inevitable that I shall fail (as a teacher) time and time again. But this is as it should be. It is only the arrogant who think that they have found all the answers.

The role of a teacher is always that of a student and the reverse is also true. Teachers who learn from their students, recognize that their teachers are all around them.

So when I think about my life, this is my service heart. Perhaps it is not the same as the parent meant when he used the term, but each of us has a purpose and an integral role to fill in the community of humanity.

After fifty years of trying to figure this out, I am still uncertain of the environment in which I should be providing my service. The role that I am supposed to fulfill, for which my genes seem to be hard-wired, is not, however, a matter of doubt.

So this brings me to a larger question: Am I so very different to anyone else around me? Don't we all spend our lives learning and giving? Don't we all fail and stand back up?

Ask a parent. Parents spend their lives in service to their children in one form or another. Even when the children are grown and independent people in their own right, the giving and learning is not over. And what of the children?

I can honestly say that my son has taught me more in his short span of life than I ever imagined possible. How many times

have I failed my son with the wrong words at the wrong time and yet for all that, his heart is constant, resilient and loving. Yes, being a parent has been one of the crowning events of my life.

If being fifty has brought anything with it, it has brought a sense that there is still so much to do and that perhaps I have squandered some of my time.

A lot of it comes back to living in the moment, showing up for life and being fully present.

Too often do we get so wrapped up in so-called living that we become separated and disconnected, both from ourselves and from those around us. In the effort of living we forget to see through the eyes of our children, or to appreciate the world for what it truly is, rather than what we take for granted.

We lose time, because we don't *take* time, or spend it wisely. I can see so many times in my past where I was not a wise user of time.

As I get older I have become aware of a second self...the observer of my life. Years ago, one of my Judo instructors told me to stand at the edge of the mat and watch myself compete. This was a difficult task. The bottom line, however, is that each of us can be that observer. We can watch ourselves living....we can see if we are connected to the flow of life around and within us, or whether we are merely going through the motions on the way to something else.

Time is the final arbiter of our lives. It is how we ultimately measure everything that we do or become. It is the source of our joys and also our regrets. I have said this before, but it bears repeating here.... when I take my last breath I would like to be thinking "Wow....what a great ride." The only way that will happen is if I value the time, moment by moment...regardless of how many moments there may be ahead of me. ☺

Hope is the better half of courage

Honore de Balzac

## Beginnings

This month's newsletter seems to be about choice, time and purpose, which leads me to thoughts of beginning. These are not necessarily new thoughts for us in this newsletter, but let's play with them for a few moments in the context of the other articles.

I steer my ship of life through an ocean of choices steering with the rudder of intent, blown about by the winds of circumstance. Within this image is the unseen assumption of a place and time at which I put to sea and a place and time at which I shall reach some harbor. It is possible that I may pull into a safe haven along the way to ride out a storm. It is possible that I might sail in the face of the storm. It is possible that I shall be off course at least part of the time. It is even possible that I can be profoundly lost at times.

So what?

No matter where I am in the voyage, each moment is a moment of definition, it is a moment of beginning. The problem is that most of us don't see that truth with its full meaning anywhere near often enough. Let me say it again: *Each moment is a moment of definition, it is a moment of beginning.* So often we spend our lives hurtling along buffeted from one crisis to another or one event to another and we miss the beginning moments that lie between.

We do not take the time to look with fresh eyes, or listen with new ears, or feel with an open heart and open hands.

Beginning (again) is after all...well,

difficult. It is much easier to keep on the road we're on rather than make a turn, or go back, or ask for directions, or look at the map.

This is what beginning is all about. It is about challenge, time and integrity. Our past is the road already traveled and we can see where that has led us. Our future is the unknown map in front of us with all its possible routes to the intended destination (assuming that we have even the slightest inkling of what that might be).

The challenge is negotiating the space between where we are on the map and where we think that we want to go.

This, then, is the space for beginnings. Beginnings are about re-dedication, renewal, invigoration, faith and belief, trust and integrity. Every moment of every day we face new potential beginnings. Every day we let them slide by, too busy to stop for a moment and re-chart the course. Maybe we just don't think we need the help.

So, sometimes I think that there is an arrogance attached to it too. You know what I mean: I know where I'm going, either help me or get out of my way. Occasionally a little healthy skepticism might not go amiss. We may like to think that we know where we are going, but until we get there, are any of us sure? We all know where life leads us in the end, but how we get there and the manner of our end is not known until the last moments of life. Hence my comment that we tend to tread the road of life with a degree of arrogance.

I for one, could not have predicted my

life as it has occurred, and yet all along, I absolutely knew for sure what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go. Having said that though, although I have achieved many of my goals in life, the current path upon which I tread was not the one I foresaw.

What a curious paradox...all along I was so sure of myself, yet all along I had no idea that it would all lead to this particular place and moment in time with all its nuances.

Life is after all, a journey of discovery. We delude ourselves about the existence of a map. As pilgrims on the road of life, the map really only comes into existence after we have walked a piece of the terrain and drawn the road upon it. Ahead is *terra incognita*. For sure, there are some locations up ahead that we can see, but the route to getting there is uncertain at best. As an example, who can truly chart ahead the road between school, career(s) and retirement in complete detail? Who knows the turns or twists the road will take.

It makes sense then, that each moment is an opportunity for a course correction, a new direction, a re-evaluation of the route.

There have been a lot of new beginnings along the way, and there will be more new beginnings ahead.

In the spirit of using time wisely, life is involves being aware of the opportunity for new beginnings and the obligation to be fully present at the start line.☺

It is not the amount of time that we have to live, it is the quality of the moments when we were truly alive.

Anonymous

## Choices

Living is all about choice. Life is about the choices we make at a conscious level and also those unseen choices that we make a less than conscious level. By way of example, it is my choice to sit here at the keyboard and write, which is a conscious thing. The conscious decision to write, however, is driven by a deeper, more silent, subconscious decision to find answers to the questions of my life.

I think that the same can be said of most of the choices we make in life. There is a conscious reason behind most of the choices we make and lurking, quietly behind the conscious reason is an intent, or a motive force that gives us the power to act.

Moreover, in any situation that we face, the choices we make are selected from a sort of drop-down menu of potential pathways that we might follow. Sometimes, we make selections from the menu in a nanosecond, sometimes we may mull over the decision for days or even weeks, before coming to a conclusion.

It is probably also true that having made a particular choice concerning some matter once, we are likely to select the same or a similar choice the next time we are confronted with a similar scenario. Over time, these choices become our habits, our obsessions, our addictions, our character, our values, our ethical framework and our moral compass.

Let's take a simple example: A person is rude to me. I have several choices available to me as a response. I can ignore it, I can get angry, I can be rude in return, I can be kind, I can ask if I have given an offense....you get the idea. Chances are, that you will select your response in an instant, having rapidly balanced the situation, compared it to previous experiences and decided upon a course of action. How we react act that moment can become a defining character of who we are and how we treat those around us. Equally,

it might become a defining moment in our relationship with that particular person.

Having said that though, I also believe that we have within us the power and ability to overcome almost any problem or challenge we face in life if we have the desire to do so and the discipline to act.

Clinging to our fears is a choice, as is letting them go.

Change is therefore a choice, as is resistance to change. For sure, some of our changes may be very difficult and require repeated exercises of willpower and determination, but they are for all that, still, just choices.

How we choose to see our challenges and problems in life is another choice. Some of our problems can be of our own making, and some we will wonder where they came from.

In the same breath though, we can either elect to see our problems as "problems" or we can choose to see them as learning opportunities. I tend to think that most of the challenges that I face are opportunities for personal growth and learning. Some growth is rapid and sudden. Perhaps some growth will be incrementally slow or will involve a lot of reversals along the way, but it goes back to what we said the other month....if we are acting from a position of internal, personal integrity, then the outcome is assured.

Sometimes, all that is needed for progress to occur is to make a resolute decision and act upon the decision for a challenge in your life to be ended. Some habits can be like that. Other habits can take concerted effort for the rest of our lives. Twelve step programs are a testament to that reality. Choices have huge amounts of power in our lives. It is our individual choice how we wish to use that power.

☺

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- ◆ PAF Spar-A-Thon, Starkville, MS, February 17th, 2007
- ◆ MS State Judo Championships, Jackson, MS, March 3rd, 2007
- ◆ Frayser Judo Tournament, Memphis, TN, March 31st, 2007
- ◆ SMAC Tournament, Greenwood, March 24th., 2007
- ◆ Akayama clinic, Charlotte, NC. April 14th., 2007

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