

Pathways

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*“Top live is not to learn,
but to apply”*

Legouve

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Personal Power

Personal Power...there's an interesting concept. I sometimes think that we lack personal power, because we spend so long giving it away. We abdicate our power to jobs we can't stand, relationships that undermine us and situations about which we feel helpless. Why, I wonder, do we do this?

There is a part of me that believes that we bring into our lives the people, events and opportunities that are commensurate with our internal belief systems, which can end up creating a negative feedback loop...if we allow it to do so. If I believe I am powerless, I will create situations in which I lack power or in which my power is muted, or lost.

Conversely, if I engage in positive self-talk, then I will tend to create positive environmental situations around me. It's the 'can do' attitude that achieves, not the 'I'll try' attitude. There is a young lady in our dojo who could teach a lot of older people a thing or two about personal power. When she first joined us, the young lady in question was withdrawn and uncertain, but she had one trait that was an absolute gem. Whenever we taught her something, even if she did not understand, she always said "GOT IT NOW!" She still says it. This is personal power in action. Her words cut through her self-doubt like a knife through butter, and she continues to grow from strength to strength. Such is the power of a positive self-dialog.

Personal power is quiet, unassuming. Often you find it in places where you least expect it. It is not boastful or ar-

rogant, demanding or demeaning of others. Personal power is synergetic. People with personal power do not indulge in self-pity or victim behaviors. People with personal power exhibit a quiet courage to overcome their challenges with tenacity, perseverance, resolve and assurance. I'm not saying that people with personal power do not have their fair share of challenges, but they do meet them with a different set of skills.

When we lack personal power we feel lost, cast adrift, or stuck, we lack direction or purpose, and there are times when we all feel like that.

A very dear friend of mine once told me that fear and fatigue makes cowards of us all. She was so right. In moments of self-doubt it is difficult to remember moments of personal strength, and it is sometimes too easy to see the current challenge as all-consuming.

So what's the message here? I think that I am attempting to tell you that personal power is an undercurrent of our lives. Sometimes we are aware of it and can tap the resource, at other times we lose our connection and feel less capable.

Recognition and acceptance of personal power is a self-awareness of a sort. When we are aware we can flow, when we lack awareness we become ensnared by the briars of life and they tear at us and slow our progress.

There are days when I am aware, and times when I lose that awareness, but always, in the undercurrent, is my sense of connection and purpose, from which I derive assurance, hope and personal power...if I allow it. ☯

A Little History

I think it's time for a little history lesson. The dojo doesn't exist in a vacuum, it is the most recent link in a chain of events that leads back thousands of years. In the moves we practice are the clues to our historical base.

Martial arts did not begin as 'arts.' Martial ways began in the orient, (as they did everywhere on the planet) as formalized training systems for inter-personal combat, often in group settings. Most martial systems that date back a thousand years or more, deal with battlefield tactics and are intimately tied to the notion of personal survival in an environment of escalating change. Nothing about the modern battlefield has changed, except the mechanisms that we use to slaughter each other. We do the same things: kill each other. We simply do it with different tools and perhaps for different reasons.

So much for the upbeat part of the article...just kidding...

When the samurai of Japan codified their fighting systems they did so as clans and developed systems to gain an edge over their enemies. If you look at the Samurai arts that predate the late 1800's Meiji restoration in Japan you will find that they were taught to the young to prepare them (as children) to become technically proficient adults for the battlefield and were often held in trust by the old heads of system who were survivors of combat. The skills of war became a science of repetitive refinement and slowly the most efficient answers were preselected by battlefield survival.

In some ways the Samurai were the epitome of honor, discipline and science. In other ways they were no different to the Hwarang warriors of Korea, the Shaolin of China, the medieval knights of Europe or the Special Forces of today. They were the elite for their time and location and ac-

quired status accordingly. From the skill sets of the Samurai come the basic forms of unarmed and armed combat as we see them in the modern dojo (about which, more in a moment).

The problem is, though, most of us will never put the skill set to test in an environment in which our lives will be the final arbiter of the test. The result is that over time, the martial arts have been taught as something other than pragmatic, survival-based systems.

They martial systems have become, in the very real sense of the term, 'arts'. The martial arts as most of us practice them now are derived shadows of their combat predecessors.

What follows is a general statement, so don't take it out of context...many derivative styles developed because something was *removed* from an original system and the result is less 'martial'. It was true of Judo coming from traditional Ju Jitsu roots, it is true of Hapkido and Aikido, both coming from Aikijutsu, and it is true of Tae Kwon Do coming from the original Japanese Karate Jutsu and Chinese Wushu lineages. It is also true of much of modern Kung Fu as it is taught today (under the same name, but with most of the application, healing and internal stuff removed).

Most of these systems evolved to meet the needs of a modern citizenry that is not required to face life and death moments on a battlefield. Some of the modern systems have retained their pragmatic base of self-defense, and have application to the real world of personal conflict, where predators look for potential victims. Many systems, however, lack a viable combat application. For examples of this think of the ground fighting, grappling base of Brazilian Ju Jitsu, the flying, jump kicks of Tae Kwon Do or the big elegant throws of some Aikido styles. They all have their place, but it is not the street. Like I said, don't take these statements out of context: I not putting

these systems down, I'm simply stating that they are removed from the real world of inter-personal combat on the street or on the battlefield.

Man is an inherently competitive creature, so in adapting to modern societal change, many of the 'fighting' systems today have been modified with a set of rules that work well in controlled combat settings such as the competition arena, but competition is not combat. Survival on the street does not have a set of rules or a referee to stop the match when someone commits an unacceptable act. In a combat environment involving peaceful citizens, a violent attack is, in and of itself, an unacceptable act.

So what do we teach today?

After the Meiji restoration, the older, Samurai Bujitsu styles necessarily adapted to societal change to survive and became the Budo styles from which our current crop of base 'arts' were formed. Those base arts...kendo, kyudo, judo, karate-do, aikido...are all ways of personal growth, physical development and fitness, spiritual enlightenment and awareness. While some of them retain a competitive component, competitive ability does not translate to pragmatic, street-smart, combat skills.

In recent years the 'arts' themselves have been further removed from their roots by the development of the ultra-modern styles, like MMA and Tae Bo. It is important to have no delusions about what you are doing when you come to class and what you can expect from your training.

It is vitally important that you recognize that some things have real street value, some have competitive value and some things are done for mental training. Everything has its place...be sure that you understand what it is, and if you are uncertain, ask.



Reasons

As we emerge from the last article there are some unanswered questions about why we train. Firstly, children train for different reasons than adults, and novices train for different reasons than seasoned players.

I guess it would be safe to say that most children do not train for self-defense. I do know that this was why I started in Judo...I was getting bullied at school because I had victim behaviors. Judo changed my behavior and the bullying stopped, but I never had to fight to prove it. In schools today that espouse a 'no tolerance' policy, I don't think self-defense is at the heart of why children come to us. Mostly, children come to us because the parents are looking for mental focus, discipline and personal accountability. Some parents bring their children to us for a physical activity for their children, and some simply because the child has seen movies and thinks it would be cool to be a ninja!

Adults come to us for a whole host of reasons, but ultimately they all come to us because they want to feel better about who they are. Some seek physical training, some seek self-confidence, some seek competition, some want to lose weight, some want to change habits, overcome issues, try something new...the list goes on.

Having said that though, no matter what the reason was that got you started, it is probably not the reason that keeps you going.

As we grow, we change, we gain insights into our characters and the rea-

sons that we do stuff change. Hopefully, we become more self-aware and understand our motivation for the choices that we make. It is natural then, that the reasons why we would stick with an activity would change over time.

....The only reason that never changes is that it is simply fun! Fun is, after all, a very powerful motivator.

So, if most of us are not training for self-defense reasons, what is this all about?

The modern martial 'arts' extracted something from their roots and emphasized it. In the older warrior styles there was a commitment required, a mental discipline and a focus upon the immediate technique, because failure meant death on the battlefield. As far as the Samurai was concerned the sword was not a forgiving weapon, a moment of indecision or distraction could result in death...hence the sense of focus that was required for training. Most of us will never need that level of focus, but there is something there that is of value to all of us, regardless of age.

It was this sense of mental training that became the center of the martial arts, and the move away from combat tactics began.

Unfortunately, when you extract something from its roots, some meaning is inevitably lost and meanings migrate over time as new interpretations are added. As martial arts training moved from being something that was reserved for the warrior class to

something that was available to everyone, the training changed as a function of necessity. In itself this was not a bad thing, it was a natural step in the evolution of the process.

The result, however, was that the martial arts systems had to adapt to a range of players who covered the entire spectrum of ability and age...so inevitably, those of us who have been training and learning, teaching and learning for decades begin to ask some question about what we do and why we do it.

As we age, strength will fail, endurance will fail, memory will fade...the only thing we will have left is technical muscle memory....I have seen this truth in old true masters in the martial and you can see it in many areas of artistic performance.

It is my belief that when we finally let loose the reins of ego-driven desire, and allow the martial arts to teach us, we discover the same focus and mental abilities that the warrior needed on the battlefield. The skills will probably never find use on the battlefield in my life, but they will find application in every interaction I have with every human I meet in my life. Ultimately I train because I seek to be a wiser person tomorrow than I was today. We all have to find our own reasons and walk our own paths, but it is important to know why you are doing it.

☺

**"Action without study is fatal.
Study without action is futile."**

Mary Beard

Personal Strategy

In one of the classes I teach on campus, there is a sub-text to the first assignment of producing a resume and a one-page biography. The sub-text is about discovering, stating in words, and understanding our own personal mission in life.

I would argue that we each have a unique set of skills that can be used in a synergetic way for the benefit of all around us, but until we actually discover the purpose of our lives, we will feel a sense of uncertainty and in some cases even, failure. I know this, because I speak from personal experience.

There is a sense in me that life is a journey of discovery of purpose. Until I come to terms with who I am, what I want and what I am willing to do to get it, I will be plagued by a sense of loss and doubt. There are areas of my life in which I have a very clear sense of purpose and meaning; there are others in which I am not so certain.

When we are uncertain of what we want to do in life, we can become trapped, or stuck in the status quo, uncertain what to do next, or which path to take. From that sense of uncertainty can come a sense of being out of place and there is also the potential to become bitter with our lot in life. Combined with a sense of feeling trapped, there comes anger and resentment...none of which is healthy, either emotionally or physically.

So there seems to me to be another path that avoids the potential trap and

that is the path of personal enquiry and examination.

Why is it that we do the things we do? Why is it that we build the skill sets that we do? What are my unique skills and talents? How do I use them in the most synergistic way?

Not all easy questions to answer.

Sometimes we hide our heads in daily living and pretend that the questions don't really exist, but in our hearts, we know they are there, nudging us gently for meaning.

Occasionally some event will knock us out of our personal slumber and trigger a period of examination, but all too easily we can slip back into our personal slumber.

Intentional living is difficult. It takes effort until it becomes a habit, and even then, it is not always easy. Intentional living requires some tough choices on our part, simply because there is a sense of purpose and direction to the path we are on. If we float along on a whim, we will be driven off course by every little breeze, but intentional living keeps us on track.

When I was younger I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I wanted to be a university professor and a geologist. There was total intent behind the idea. I was young and foolish enough to mistake an idea for effort and on more than one occasion nearly failed to reach my goal.

And it's still true today...there are things for which I have a clear intent and am working towards. I will not

discuss them with others, they are my personal vision. But as I also said earlier, there are other areas of my life where I feel lost because I have no sense of purpose or direction.

Also do not mistake me here either, I am not saying that doing things on a whim is somehow bad...I like to do things on a whim,. Sometimes it can even provide a surprise or a welcomed new insight.

The point is that there is an *overall* strategic plan to my seemingly random activities. The daily tactical efforts either get me closer, or further away from my strategic goals. The strategy itself is reviewed from time to time and modified as my vision matures.

Intentional living is simply having some sense of a road map.

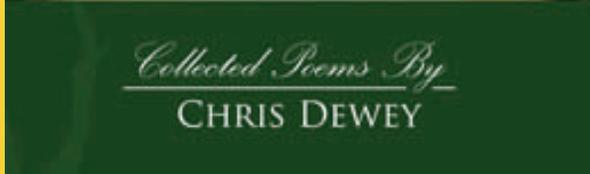
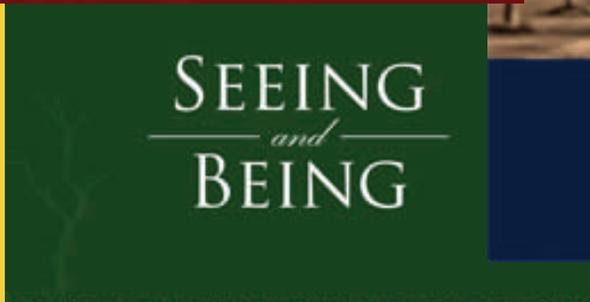
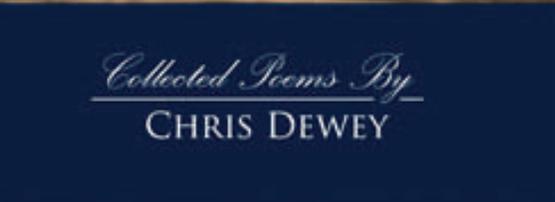
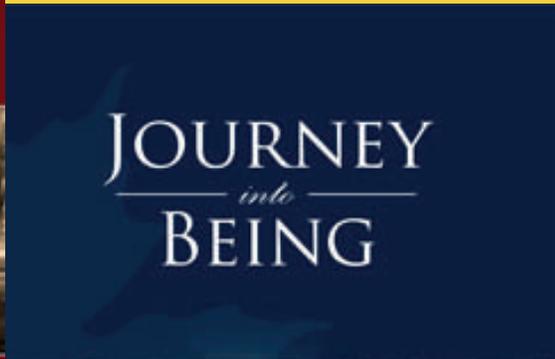
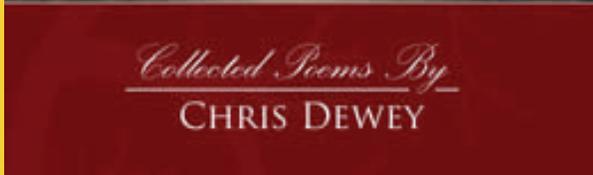
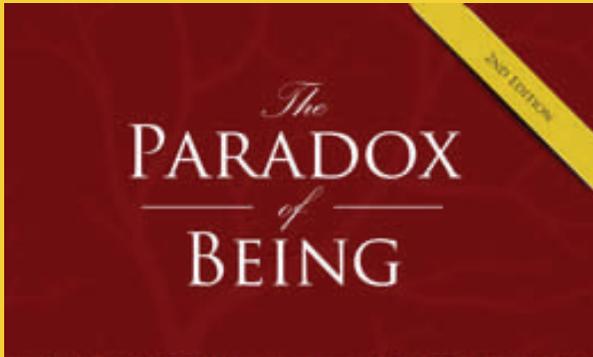
Where do you want to end up at the end of your life? How will you know if you got there?

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- ◆ **AKAYAMA SPRING CAMP. TRUSSVILLE, AL. APRIL 10TH, 2010.**
- ◆ **AKAYAMA SUMMER CAMP, ORANGE BEACH, AL, JULY, 17 & 18TH, 2010**

“A little experience often upsets a lot of theory”

Cadman



**Find out for
yourself what
my Word's
worth!**

**For enrollment information contact us at 323 5522 or
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