

Pathways

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*If you want others to be happy,
practice compassion. If you
want to be happy, practice
compassion.*

Dalai Lama



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Existential Crises

An existential crisis is a turning point in life. Often an existential crisis leads to a radical change in direction for the fabric of your life. A substantial course change in life, for many of us, leads to a re-evaluation of who we are, what we do and why we are doing it. An existential crisis is not always something for which we planned, though that can certainly be the case.

For some, the crisis comes when a significant aspect of our lives is drastically altered by some process or series of events. For some, the crisis can be a deliberately planned, intentional change in direction (like choosing to become a parent, or changing careers). Some of us face multiple crises, some face a single defining life crisis of tectonic proportions. For some the crisis/crises comes/come early in life, and for some, later.

Ultimately, it's not really about what happened (or when) to initiate the course change, it is what you choose to do with it that is key. In a lot of ways it really doesn't matter what the nature of the course change might entail, we are essentially presented with two options, both of which we play out to different degrees. You have the option of being the Victim, and you have the option of being the Warrior. In one setting we look at a life-changing event from the perspective of something that has happened **to** us, and from the other, we see it as an event **from** which we can grow. Invariably we all embody both of these traits to some extent at different times in the process. Some of us, perhaps, veer more to one end of the scale than the other. Some of us can get trapped when events seemingly overwhelm our perceived capacity to process and adjust.

I believe that each existential crisis

offers an amazing gift of humility. If I have learned anything in my journey through life, it is that one of the most important things we can discover is our true nature and how we choose to manifest that nature during our time here. Sometimes that particular lesson can be humbling. When faced with an existential crisis, the Warrior-self, searches within for the resources and potential not just to cope with the crisis, but to actually thrive. Meanwhile, the Victim-self indulges in blame-finding (it's not fair, it's not my fault), coupled with resignation through a seeming inability to alter the outcome through personal action (there's nothing I can do).

Like I said, we all know both sides of that coin, it is just a case of where we eventually choose to hang out.

Mark my words though, I am not saying that existential crisis events are easy to face or resolve. If they were not challenging to us at our deepest levels of being, they would not be, by definition 'life-changing'.

An existential crisis is the crucible of life. It is the anvil upon which our characters are either beaten into submission or forged and tempered into something resilient and more powerful.

It is not for anyone to judge how anyone else negotiates their time in the crucible or on the anvil. It is, however, for each of us to discover ourselves and, perhaps, to become something that we did not know was in us to become.

Surely then, the possibility exists that as each of us faces our own personal existential crisis, we are being given a gift, even if it does not seem to be so in the moment. ☺

Persistence

Persistence.

Determination

Tenacity.

Resolve.

They are all the same thing, right?

Maybe. Maybe not.

While they are all aspects of the will and can reveal a lot about character, each of them has subtle differences that can drastically affect outcome.

Let's start with 'resolve.' Resolve is that unified state of mind in which we banish doubt about the correct course of action. We may still entertain uncertainties about how exactly things will play out, but we have created a clear, focused, major definite purpose and we are resolved to see it through. Resolve is a single-pointed intent. Resolution is a laser-like focus.

Determination is the creation of a decision from which we will not be dissuaded. Determination might come before resolution, but it is resolution that allows us to marshal our resources, tap our potential and move ahead. Without a unified presence of mind and the single-pointed intent, determination on its own will get us nowhere because we can still be fighting a war at home...with our own selves. I have seen plenty of people (self included, at times, if I am honest) who are determined to do something, but do not get to the end point because they are fighting themselves. Basically, they are determined, but lacking resolution and are therefore tripped up by self-sabotage.

Next, tenacity.

Tenacity is the grit that keeps us moving forward no matter what obstacles occur, no matter how little energy we feel we might have in the moment and no matter what others might say about our chosen objective. Tenacity is what enables us to see something through to the end, even in the face of unimaginable challenges. Tenacity is the knot at the end of the rope that says 'hang on, you are not done yet.' Tenacity is what enables us to take the next step forward even in the dark nights of self-doubt. It is therefore resolve that fuels tenacity. When the mind is fragmented, then tenacity falters. Resolve banishes the self-doubt at the same time as recognizing that it exists, and by doing so, it keeps the fires of tenacity alive.

Persistence is not the same thing as tenacity...no, really. The difference is subtle though. I can persist at doing something, even when a course change is clearly dictated. Tenacity will respond to the need for a course change, persistence will not. For sure, persistence is important, but what is more important here is the ability to see what actions are required at what time.

I can be persistent in slamming my head into a brick wall. All it will achieve for me is a bloody forehead and a headache. I can demonstrate tenacity in negotiating the wall by using a ladder to scale it, a tunnel to go under it, a gate to go through it, or explosives to blow it up. There are times when persistence and tenacity

can be the same, but when we persist in doing something that leads us nowhere desirable, then it is not tenacity. To my view, both tenacity and persistence are goal-oriented but tenacity is willing to adjust to the prevailing circumstances in order to reach the desired goal. Persistence can be both blind and deaf.

While much of this may seem like an exercise in semantics, a deep review of self shows me when I have been determined but lacked resolve and when I have been persistent but lacked tenacity.

I said that it is resolve that fuels tenacity, but I believe that there is more to it than that.

Nothing is achieved without the passion of the heart fire. The analytical mind can come up with plans and strategies, but ultimately it is the passion that we have for a thing that drives us forward. It is passion that brings the mind into unified focus. It is the passion of willpower in the presence of a single defined resolution that enables us to forge ahead with tenacity until we see the fruits of our labors manifested in the acquisition of our desired objective.

In my mind then, resolve and tenacity are critical. Determination and persistence are able serjeants when employed correctly in the pursuit of our goals and dreams.

So what's missing? Only something to which you can aim your considerable resources, talents and potential.

☺

“when old words die out on the tongue; new melodies break forth from the heart; and where the old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders.”

From Gitanjali by Rabindranath Tagore

Learning

Life is a journey of learning. You enter each new moment with not the slightest clue as to what it might contain. Every one of us enters the future as an amateur. For sure we can have intentions, ideas or assumptions, but all of them are based upon what we learned in the past about how we think the future will unfold. If you doubt me, ask a turkey the day before Thanksgiving.

What enables us to navigate future waters is how we process the past, what we learn from it, how we are able to adjust to changing conditions and our dominant thought processes. Now we can take the idea of learning from several perspectives.

At the simplest level, we can look at it as academic learning. Some people want to learn just one thing really, really well. Others want to learn multiple things. Some people want to go to university and beyond, some want to learn a trade and never go to college. It matters not. It all requires academic learning. No matter what we do in life, there is a learning curve for the acquisition and the application of knowledge.

No matter what your career, someone, somewhere had to give you the basic tools of the trade and you had to learn how to use them.

So, initially then, success stems from the acquisition of appropriate knowledge.

The next part of success is the appropriate application of the knowledge you have gained. We learn most effectively by 'doing.' I can show you

how to change the oil in your car, but until you actually do it for yourself, the knowledge is theoretical. Watching a master at any skill speaks to the untold hours of honing a craft through personal experience and dedication. For sure, innate talent plays a part, but I have seen any number of people who have talent at one thing, but choose to do something else entirely with their lives. As a martial artist, I have seen talented individuals achieve nothing, and I have seen less talented players work hard with what they knew, honing their skills to become national caliber athletes.

But even the application of knowledge only gets us so far. The application of what we have learned inevitably leads us onward to invention and innovation. We are told that necessity is the mother of invention, but I tend to think that experience leads to invention and innovation, because as we apply what we know in any endeavor, we learn new ways to do something in a more effective and efficient manner.

Learning therefore continues along an unending and ever more deeply personal path. We have theoretical knowledge first, then applied learning, then innovative self-learning. In all of this there is a steady undercurrent of which we are only sometimes aware: Self Reflection.

The ability to stand outside of self and see yourself learning, growing, applying and innovating is one of the qualities of self-reflection. If we do not take time to reflect upon the ex-

periences that we have acquired in life then in many ways, we are living an unexplored life. Our minds have the ability to reflect on what we learn from our experiences in life and can make adjustments according to the outcome of our reflections.

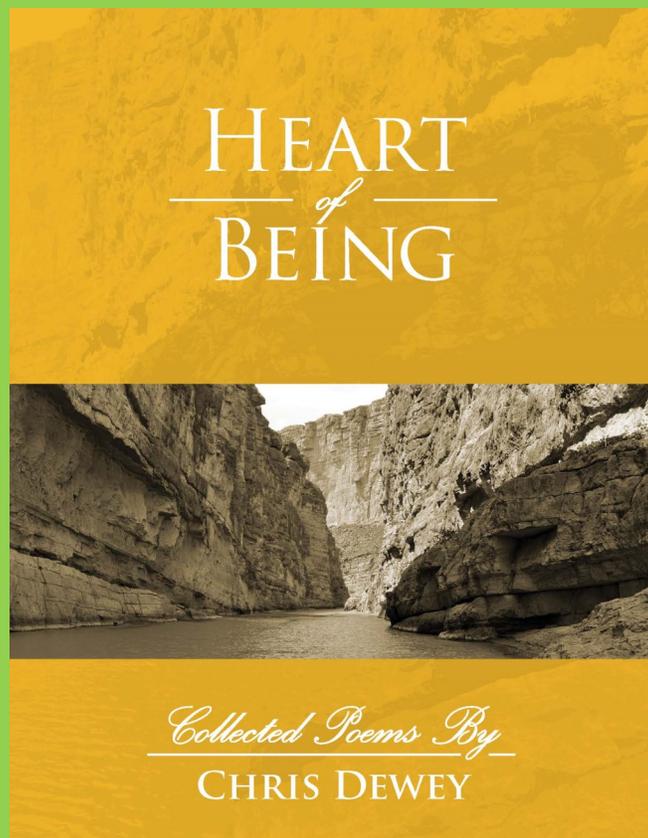
When I was an advisor at Mississippi State University, I would frequently work with students who wanted to change majors. The ensuing change in direction was an outcome of reflection. We study something, discover something for which we have more passion or realize that our current course is not tapping fully into our potential and we make a change. So reflection then, is also a part of uncovering the inner self and what motivates us to make the choices we makes. Reflection is an integral component of learning, for without it, we simply acquire knowledge and experience without ever assessing its value in the journey of life. What I am talking about here is discernment...the ability to discern that which serves our greatest highest self and is in complete congruence with our life purpose.

Living a complete life involves uncovering and working towards your life purpose. Knowing and living your life purpose will absolutely require ongoing learning in every aspect of your being. I think that ultimately that is what it means to be a life-long learner. So...what have you learned recently? And how will you apply it?

☺

“My debts are large, my failures great, my shame secret and heavy; yet when I come to ask for my good, I quake in fear, lest my prayer be granted”

From Gitanjali by Rabindranath Tagore



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