

# Pathways

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

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## CONTENTS

Looking at Life .....	1
Listening again. Janet Dewey.....	2
Gifts of Growth.....	3
Conditions & Habits.....	4

*"Rule of Thumb: The more important a call or action is to our soul's evolution, the more resistance we will feel toward realizing it."*

Steven Pressfield, *The War of Art*

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## Looking at Life

To some people, a roller coaster is the best thing since sliced bread, to others it is a trip though hell. Odd that! It's all about perspective. It's the Baskin and Robbins Theory of Life. If ice cream only came in one flavor, B&R would go broke, but people are wonderful creatures who as a community enjoy endless variety, but who, taken individually may not like much variety at all. When you find yourself confronted with a person who seems hell bent on making your life miserable...look at things from their perspective for a moment and see if there isn't a second side to the issue. A lot of stressful relationships can be avoided and healed by looking at the other person and his or her needs.

One of the things that happens when we believe that other people have hurt us, is that we take things to heart. We store them for future reference, we harbor grudges and we are unwilling to let bygone be bygone. Years after some perceived injury was done to us we can harbor ill-will toward a person (which, in itself does nothing but make us unhappy). In reality though, it is entirely possible that we missed a point somewhere along the way, or we were unduly sensitive.

There is much more room in the heart for empathy and compassion when we choose not to harbor ill-will, grudges or score cards. Life isn't about getting even, or even getting ahead of the next person in line...it is about helping others to reach their potential. You see, on the way to helping others, you will discover so much about yourself and your own skills, talents, abilities and potential.

Life has the potential to be full of events that can stress us out every day...if we choose to let them. Change your perspective and there is no stress. So what am I telling you? Let stuff go. Don't make things into a big deal, when in all likelihood it is only our perspective that is making them so.

Another part of this issue is that the more you build negative energies of stress inside you, the harder it is to combat illness. High blood pressure, ulcers, headaches, depressed immunity and a whole host of other health challenges are waiting for you if you want to live a life full of stress. Is it really worth it?

In place of stress I seek synergy. It is rapidly becoming one of my watchwords for life. I get involved in situations that will have high levels of synergy and avoid situations in which synergy is unlikely to occur. I teach because I like to watch people succeed. I like to be a catalyst in the process of growth. When I see my students achieve something that they did not believe possible, I know I am doing something of value. This is the deep undertow of my life.

It has taken me a lot of years to figure this out...and way more stress than was necessary. But perhaps that too was a necessary part of the process.

There are lessons in every step of life if we choose to see them. So life is either hell or it's the thrill of a roller coaster ride. What's your choice? Your answer to that question will make a big difference to the quality of your life and those around you. ☺

## Listening again...this time by Janet Dewey

I used to think active vs. passive listening were different, but they aren't. Let's take active listening, trying to be there all of the time and catch everything. Sounds Herculean because it is! Sometimes the mental cloud is due to listening to too much...or failure to listen to the essence of a thing. Conversely, we can be passive listeners and just become a sounding board for that which goes on around us. Passive listening takes little effort and often gets a bad rap, but it can have immense value under the right circumstances. I find the most effective type of listening is a marriage of the two. Sometimes it is better to be a passive listener, to distance oneself and one's interests and wait for the underlying current or essence to rise to the foreground and follow the thread. There will be one thought, need, act or statement which, for lack of a better way to explain it, resonates at a higher frequency and is more true or urgent. This is the part to which we need actively listen...the thread to follow.

This is what I do with gardening. I have a bunch of self serving interests...things I would like to do in the garden. If I rush in and do them, I usually end up regretting it a year or two later. What I find myself doing is walking around the garden and smelling it, touching the branches to find out how supple they are, imagining it with and without certain elements, watching the interplay of light and wind and watching the places where animals concentrate. I acknowledge all of these things and then let them go again. At the same time, I have my interests in mind and I cast them out into the realm of possibilities as I walk along and then let them go again...it's rather like asking permission. I find the longer I walk and *just be* in the garden, the easier it is to know (to listen to) what the garden wants of me! Some of my great ideas the garden accepts immediately, some of them I am told to wait for and some of them simply aren't a good fit. When my interests and the interests of the garden coincide, every-

thing drops into place... the task becomes simple, the timing falls into place, the weather cooperates and the shrubbery usually ends up on sale!

It is much the same with people. Whether we realize it or not, it is nearly impossible to listen with only the other person's interests in mind. The great dichotomy of listening is that we have to perform mutually exclusive acts. In order to actively listen we have to be interested...to have an interest...to have a stake. In order to pick up the other person's interest / need / stake in the conversation we have to abandon our own and listen passively. Does this sound like a circular argument? A good piece of music consists of a melody and harmony; bits of both dip into the foreground and background and circulate around one another. The interests of one subsume the interests of another for a time and the roles reverse. A truly great piece of music lingers long after the melody has stopped and the harmony has faded into the distance...a thought, a thread...the essence. Did you catch it? Life is a lot like breathing. You take it all in, keep the bit that is immediately useful and chuck out the rest for later recirculation. As I was writing this article and taking it all in and letting it go in favor of a thread which was the essence, I was reminded of my years as a student and my study process. The process of learning is a good example.

- First you accumulate bits of information.
- Then you start chucking bits out until you have isolated the essence of the lesson – that which drives all of it.
- Then you re-acquire the discarded bits and attach them to the essence in the places that have importance.
- Then you chuck it all out again in favor of what is important NOW.
- Lather, rinse, repeat.

Learning is both an active and a passive process...the key is figuring out when to employ which part of the process. None of the information is lost. Each bit can have immense value or no value at all, depending on time, place and need. This

process is valid for studying for an exam, learning a martial technique, having a conversation, writing a term paper, growing a relationship. You can't take it all in at once, but you can take in each bit over and over again a number of times when it is in a useful form at a useful time and place.

When I write a paper, there is an initial flurry of activity of intelligence gathering. Some of the information appears useful, some appears out of place and some of it is downright confusing. So I typically put it away for a while. That doesn't mean nothing is happening, it just means I can no longer to continue to suck in air without converting some of it to something useful and exhaling the rest. My brain is unconsciously processing the data and picking useful threads out of it. All of a sudden one day, I'll know what to say and begin another flurry of activity: writing, collecting, reanalyzing and discarding. Each time I go through the process, there is increasing clarity.

Living is no different. How do you handle time? Do you cram 26 hours worth of doing into 24 hours of being or do you allow yourself time to review the day? How to you manage your finances? Do you keep the budget so full that you can't afford to hiccup or do you actually budget in an amount for "fun"? How do you manage your relationships? Do you spend so much energy trying to live someone else's life and satisfy everyone else's needs that there is no energy left to live your own? When you give yourself permission to take a break in your day, squander a little on something that makes you happy, or devote some energy entirely to yourself, you will find that you need fewer breaks, squander less and have more energy for others.

There is a time to inhale and a time to exhale...to be active and to be introspective (meditative if you will). Each part of the cycle builds on the previous and a sense of peace and clarity ensues. So in the process of living, don't forget to breathe. ☺

## Gifts of Growth

I want to share with you a story and a dialog this month that came from the father of one of our students. I have changed the boy's name, but the story is accurate and my response exact. I am sharing this story with you because it says so much about who we are and what we do, not just in this dojo, but also in the larger scheme of things.

This story is about what I believe that we are supposed to do as communities and societies. In some ways, the story is a call to action for each of us to dedicate ourselves to the needs of others. In some ways it is about raising children and giving them opportunities to take responsibility and demonstrate their innate abilities. When I read the message from the boy's father, I was reminded of Zig Ziglar's often used the line that you can get anything you want in life if you give everyone else what they want. Likewise Viktor Frankl said in "Man's Search for Meaning" that a person's internal sense of personal value is defined by the level of service we give to others. So here is the father's message:

Doc, I wanted to share a moment with you about Derek. It is great to see how your teachings are having positive effects in our son. The determination to focus on the task at hand in order to complete it in an acceptable manner and to accept a challenge is unbeliev-

able. He wants to please his parents at all times. He watched me split wood this evening and ask if he could help. I told him the splitting maul was very heavy and even harder to hit your mark. He said he had watched me enough to give it a try so I let him give it a lash. He demonstrated concern for safety, placing his feet like I had instructed him to do and making sure his area was clear before swinging. He took aim and gave a hardy swing, striking the log close to center. His immediate look at me wanting to know how he did was wonderful. I commended him on a great effort! He attacked the log with a tremendous amount of determination to split it. I stood and watched as he remained determined and focused to meet what ever resistance the log gave him. As he became hot, tired and steadily more exhausted, he became even more focused and determined to accomplish this task. The attitude, the strength, and control was very impressive to me. In the end he did accomplish his goal and split the log in order for us to have wood to burn for the evening. His mental and physical skills are really developing at a rapid pace. He has a lot of responsibility here on the farm and so far he has been a great help. He is growing into a fine young man. I take this opportunity to tell you this in order for you to enjoy some of your teachings when they are completely out of your sight and occurring in the child's home and in "his" own

world. Who knows how long Derek will remain training in the martial arts, but I can assure you I will encourage him to continue what I believe to be very beneficial for personal development. I told you a long time ago it is very hard and very risky to find a trusting person to teach your child in the world we live in today, but you my friend in my eyes are one of few and I thank you for that.

My reply to Derek's Dad:

As you say, we live in a very uncertain world, often lacking in trust, and each family that comes to us at SMAA is a precious gift. What we do, is work in a slow, careful way without making a big fanfare in the hope that the lessons will take deep root in the life of each child and bear fruit in their own time. I see us as catalysts for positive change and each student as an amazing gift of unknown potential. Our job is simply to find ways in which the students can allow the potential to reveal itself and manifest itself throughout all aspects of their lives...whether we are there to see it or not....This is the great gift that teachers give to the world (and to themselves). Thank you for your support and encouragement. Have an outstanding day....

☺

**"And so the day came when the risk it took to remain tightly closed in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to bloom"**

**- Aniais Nin**

## Conditions and habits

Stress is different things to different people, but for all of us, stress is a bag that we pick up and carry by choice. We may not realize that we are making the choice, but if we can choose to let the stress of life go, then we can also choose to get stressed.

This thought, combined with a conversation I was having with Becky (our Program Manager) and Doug, (our lead Taekwondo Instructor), led me to consider how many habits we have that are conditioned into us when we are very young and beginning to understand the world into which we are growing.

Becky, Doug and I were talking about perceptions of what we say.

I can tell you something that I think is very clear, and yet in your mind there is a completely different meaning attached to my words than the one I intended. Since each of us has no other frame of reference from which to operate, we both assume that the other person understood what was said and meant what was said in the way it was said. Herein lies the beginning of mis-communication.

Let me give you a very simple example. I gave my wife a gift once, when we were dating and she told me it was nice. I was crushed. I had put a lot of thought into the gift and was very hurt. My wife is from the New Jersey and I am from England, we both understand exactly what is meant by the word "nice." This is not something we need to check. The problem was though, my cultural background and her cultural background created completely different meanings for the word as we grew up. For my wife, "nice" was a warm, friendly, caring, feeling loved, happy-to-receive-your-gift sort of word. To me "nice" was a didn't-much-care-for-the-gift-but-I-am-too-polite-to-tell-you sort of word. It didn't take us long to figure out the problem, but it does highlight the

potential pitfalls that await each of us, when we make assumptions about what other people should think and feel about the things we say and do.

Now let's get personal and go inside. As I said at the beginning, a lot of what we do, think and say is based upon a lifetime of learning and is often reflexive, conditioned habit. If you see room for improvement in your life, then the first thing that you have to do is recognize the habit for what it is and truly have a desire to see it changed. We all have habits that do us no service at all and we could all stand to do a little clean up work on past conditioning.

Go back to the front cover and re-read that quote again....the older a habit is, the harder it is to change. It takes a lot more energy to change the wiring that created the habitual response, than to simply leave things as they are. Psychologists might tell you that it is unlikely that you will change, but people who do change and who overcome significant obstacles in their lives will tell you otherwise.

As with most things, it is a personal choice. If the price of staying the way you are becomes too high (see the second quote on page 3) or the benefits associated with change become attractive enough, we change. It is all about desire. Do I really want to change, or do I want to remain as I am?

So the next time you find yourself in a conversation that is foundering, ask yourself what you can do to change the outcome....you might be surprised if you ask the other person what they thought they heard you say and what they thought you meant. It might just open a whole new vista of learning for both of you.

Life is full of opportunity...or it isn't and that too is merely a choice and a habituated one at that!☺

March						
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April						
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16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

- ◆ Akayama Spring Clinic, SMAA, Starkville, MS, March 25th, 2006
- ◆ SMAC Karate Tournament, Ridgeland, MS April 8th, 2006
- ◆ SMAA TKD upper belt rank test, April 17th, 2006
- ◆ SMAA Ju Jitsu rank test, April 20th, 2006
- ◆ USA Judo National Championships, Houston, TX, April 20 - 22nd, 2006
- ◆ SMAA Judo upper belt rank test, April 25th, 2006
- ◆ Peachtree Judo Tournament, Atlanta, GA, April 29th, 2006
- ◆ SMAC Karate Tournament, Hernando, MS, May 13th, 2006
- ◆ Melton's Judo Tournament, Jackson, MS, May 20th, 2006
- ◆ Charlotte Camp, NC, USJA Judo Camp, June 23 - 26th, 2006
- ◆ Akayama Summer Clinic, Jacksonville, AL, July 15-16th, 2006

*Summer is going to be here soon...are you in  
the shape you want to be?*

*Perhaps we can help....*

*Call Miss Becky for details*

**323 5522**

*Do you have sparring gear?*

*Another good reason to see  
Miss Becky*

*...(please don't get the pink though)*