

Pathways

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

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"Our subconscious minds have no sense of humor, play no jokes and cannot tell the difference between reality and an imagined thought or image. What we continually think about eventually will manifest in our lives."

—Robert Collier

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Tell it like it is

Every once in a while I get just a little bit miffed by our PC culture. We talk about challenges and opportunities and put a positive spin on everything, all of which is highly commendable...to a point.

I don't know about you, but when my world takes a nose dive, I don't experience challenges...I have problems. Let me see if I can explain .

Having lived in the academic world for most of my life, I am a great believer in problem-based learning and discovery-based learning. Moreover, having owned my own business for more than a decade I am fully aware that entrepreneurs live in a very real world; a world in which business failure can lead to financial collapse and all that this implies.

On the basis of my life experience, I would suggest to you that people learn best from direct experience and that direct experience often brings with it a fair number of problems.

So to me then, the issue isn't about 'challenges' or 'opportunities' it's about facing problems for what they are and finding solutions that bring the maximum benefit to the maximum number of people in the most efficient and effective manner possible...given the starting conditions. That being said, it becomes obvious that not every situation will lead to a positive outcome for everyone involved, no matter what we might want or wish for.

For sure, problems challenge us and, just as certainly, within each problem is the potential for personal growth and therefore an opportunity for learning. It should not be implied, how-

ever, that the potential opportunities for growth do not come without significant amounts of suffering along the way or that they cannot exact a very high price tag.

It seems to me that almost everyone I have ever met has seen some form of suffering in his or her life and these people do not describe their times of trial as a challenge. More often than not, those who talk deeply to me about their life experiences talk of deep, heart-wrenching problems that stretched their personal resources to their limit and sometimes beyond. Some of these people were left with scars and others were left with wounds that healed slowly over time, but almost all of them were changed by their experiences.

Going through the crucible of life or the furnace of change is not easy work; it takes resolve and courage, it saps our energy and our will, it can leave us weak and sleepless, short-tempered and afraid.

We are, none of us, therefore, strangers to suffering of one kind or another. We are none of us immune from heartache or tragedy.

When we are done, however, and come out the other side, we are wiser, more resilient, hopefully more understanding and more compassionate, rather than bitter and resentful.

All of which leads me to this: Treat those around you with compassion and care; you have no idea what they may be going through in their lives. You may not know what burdens that they might be carrying in silence.

Need, Plan, Benefit

I was at Toastmaster's the other day, when one of the speech evaluators talked about the concept of "Need, Plan and Benefit." In her evaluation my mentor was talking about the need for doing something, the plan for implementation of the work and the benefits that would accrue for the completion of the work.

The words were very powerful to me at the time, especially as I was looking at my life with something of a critical eye.

How often do we consider the need for doing something?

I watch my young son; he is moved by his whim of the moment. He wants to do something, so he does it. He doesn't stop to consider either the implications or the ramifications of his actions at this stage of his life. That's O.K., he's still young and has time to learn. But...how many of us behave in the same way? How many of us are motivated by our wants and not by our needs? I know that if I am honest, I am moved by my wants far more often than I should like to admit.

Moving on to the second word...planning. How many of us really take time to look at the plan as we go along? How many of us start moving in a particular direction and are carried along by momentum rather than following a particular plan? As I look back over the twists and turns of my life I can see times when I was following a plan, and times when I was simply being carried along by the current, unaware it seemed of my direction or path. I'm not sure that this is not a natural part of living, but equally I am just as sure that it is a good idea to know where you want to go...after all if you don't, how will you know when you arrive?

Life is in some ways like a very elaborate game of chess. It's important to know both strategy and tactics. It is important to be able to flow with unexpected events and to make tactical decisions on the fly that are in conformity with the overall strategic goals of your life. It's also important to make sure that you are not getting in your own way and that you are using the available resources to their fullest potential for the benefit of all involved.

So perhaps, that's the tricky part?

It is very easy to look out for number one, but it is much harder to make decisions on the basis of their effects upon everyone concerned.

There is a maxim in Judo that talks about mutual benefit and welfare. It was the intent of the founder of Judo, Jigoro Kano to create a moral precept from the maxim, which stemmed out of an application of the physical practice.

In Judo, even in competition there is no room for selfish intent. To win at any cost, without consideration of one's partner is not the way. For sure in any competitive arena (be it a classroom, a boardroom, a business environment or a martial arts tournament), there can only be one player who goes home with the gold medal. But the true gold medal winner is the person who leaves the competitive arena without leaving behind a trail of destruction. This is a very difficult thing to do.

Machiavelli, in *The Prince*, extols the virtue of utterly destroying an enemy, so that neither your enemy nor his descendants will be able to come back and harm you later. In Judo competition there is something to be said for being feared by those whom you will have to fight. It creates a psychological advantage dur-

ing the match. At some levels of competition perhaps this is appropriate, I've never fought beyond the national level, so I cannot say.

I do know, however, that those competitors who earn lasting respect are those who consider their opponent whenever they step onto the tournament mat.

In a match it is important to give everything that you have and hold nothing back. Your opponent deserves no less. But that utter commitment to the contest is tempered by the awareness that we are both there to learn and grow. When we stand on a line in competition we want to find our truest potential and we want our opponent to give us their best. If I win, I do so because I am the better player (for whatever reason) on the day. If I lose, I learn something about how to improve my skills or my preparation or my determination. More importantly the way I take either my win or my loss, teaches me something about my character. Am I humble in victory? Do I whine and complain in defeat? Do I brag about my laurels or do I get angry when I lose?

It is not difficult to see the lessons here.

The precept of Kano's maxim holds true. Everyone involved learns and grows, and mutual benefit and welfare becomes a ruling theory for our lives.

Judo tournament taught me a lot about how to live my life. I daresay that there is much more for me to learn; but here, now, I am thankful to my mentor who reminded me once again to consider: Need, Plan, Benefit. ☺

Anger, Intolerance, Impatience, Irritability

I was listening to one of my CD series the other day about how we deal with stress and the author made the comment that four of the great 'negatives' that can fall out during times of stress are anger, intolerance, impatience and irritability.

Well, let's be honest here...I'm an absolute saint! Not!

Ask my son the next time he pushes me just one step too far. I can score highly in all four categories and it takes an ability to step outside of the moment to see where the road is leading.

It is easy to become angry when we are tired, frustrated, stressed and working on little sleep. It was my friend, Lynn, who told me years ago that fear and fatigue make cowards of us all. When we are afraid and tired it is easy to lash out at people and I often think that anger is a cowardly response. Anger creates a rigid emotional barrier behind which we can hide and over which we can hurl a torrent of abuse. It takes an effort of will to hold back the anger and to wait, listen and see other people's perspectives.

Just today I was reading an article in one of our martial arts magazines in which the author was discussing the notion that martial arts schools should be selling anger management classes. He is probably right.

I learned early on in the martial arts that anger is only a weapon to be used by my opponent in a match. When I got frustrated and angry with myself or my opponent, I became

tight, inflexible, blind and rigid in my thinking. In a match, I invariably lost very quickly. Balance of body is closely tied to balance of mind. Move an opponent's mind out of balance and it is easy to move his or her body.

Another thing that I learned from the martial arts is that there is often more than one right way to do something and to be absolutely sure that you are right all the time is a sure way to intolerance and an inability to learn. An ability to see other perspectives, honestly, with an open mind can bring great rewards in learning and growth, but often we are unwilling to do so. Opinions that challenge our position on a particular matter can permit us to see places in which we can learn more and understand more deeply. The problem is though, for the learning and understanding to occur, we must be open-minded and tolerant.

Thankfully, I think that tolerance is a learnable skills. We can teach ourselves to listen and we can teach ourselves to stop the tongue before it speaks out of turn. In time we can learn to become tolerant...if we are willing to be a little bit patient.

I'm a fix it kind of guy. I don't generally like to wait. If something needs dealing with, I like to get on and deal with it. Life, however, doesn't always work that way. A lot of times you simply have to sit and wait and let events take their course. Wow! This takes a lot of effort. Paradoxically, both nature and the

martial arts have taught me a lot about patience. Sitting at the bottom of a tree for hours waiting for a red-headed woodpecker to show up and offer himself to my camera lens is an exercise in patience. Waiting for a technique to turn into a skill over years upon years of repetition is an exercise in patience.

As a society, we don't do patience well. We want our fix, and we want it now...and if we don't get what we want, when we want it...we get...well...irritable. Watch people in traffic. How long does it take a motorist to get irritable? I'm sure there are certain things that get you bent out of shape very easily, whereas a little more patience might just serve us each well.

When I am stressed I go to nature and sit. I try to make as little noise as possible for as long as possible. I attempt to become a part of the environment and watch.

Invariably, when I return to my problems, they seem more manageable and my energies are more positive and on a more even keel.

When anger, intolerance, impatience and irritability start to work their way out of me, I find that both space and time work wonders. Give yourself some space and some time to wait, watch, listen and look. Allow the boiling energies within you to calm down and then return.

Stressful things happen to all of us, we don't have to make those around us pay for them though. ☺

*One of the Secrets of Life is to make stepping stones
out of stumbling blocks*

Jack Penn

Silent Times

There are times in life, when standing up and putting one foot in front of the next takes a supreme effort of will. These are times when you can become conscious of every breath as though it were something rare or precious. There are moments in life when living is just plain difficult. These times test us, forge us and make us stronger, more resilient and hopefully more caring.

In stressful times when people think you are zoning out, or drifting away, you might be completely engrossed in the activities of a sparrow, or the feel of the wind against your face. Stress can do that to you.

For sure, stress leaves us vulnerable, fatigued, afraid and uncertain, but it also leaves us open and capable of seeing so much more than we do in our "normal" lives. I see stress in two different ways. I see acute stress as a sudden thing, like a physical attack or a car accident. I also see what I call chronic stress, which is often more akin to less immediate, but longer lasting stresses like the health, relationship, career and financial stresses that can arise in life.

In our self defense classes we talk about adrenaline stress response, which as acute stress response and results in a narrowing of visual and auditory range as a function of a sudden psychological stress. ASR also leads to a time dilation or time shortening....things happen really slowly, or really quickly. ASR is all about our fight or flight responses, which work well in acute stress situations.

Long-term stress can create similar, but distinct responses. On the one hand long-term stress can leave us closed off, absent, distant; and on the other hand it can leave us much more aware, sensitive and conscious of the world around us.

It has been my experience of long-

term stress that time stretches for me....things take f-o-r-e-v-e-r....even watching a spider walking across a leaf, can take an inordinate amount of time...almost time enough to count the hairs on its legs. I kid you not.

If you are still with me but are not altogether sure that I have a strong grip on reality...there is a reason why I started this article in this particular way

It seems that most of this newsletter is about stress and its effects, but in this article I want to look at some of the positive, forging effects that stress has upon our psyche.

Forging a steel blade is a slow, careful process and takes repeated heating and hammering. The forging of character through long-term stress is no different. The process takes repeated heating and hammering to make the metal malleable and ultimately stronger.

Part of the forging process involves time and our perception of time under stressful conditions.

When time slows down for you during a long-term stressful period of your life, there is much to be learned. Watch the world. Sit. Be still. Be silent...really silent. Perhaps more than at any other time in your life being silent can be remarkably easy. In silence you can feel the world around you move, you can learn to wait.

As I said in an earlier article this month, I'm a fix-it sort of guy. I like to find answers and I don't appreciate it when I am forced to wait by circumstances. Learning to sit, just to sit, has taught me so much about waiting on life. Life moves at its own pace, not my pace. I do not control everything...heck...I don't really control anything! Do any of us?

Sitting and watching and being silent

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- ◆ **AKAYAMA SPRING CLINIC, BIRMINGHAM, AL, APRIL 5TH, 2008**
- ◆ **AKAYAMA SUMMER CAMP, NEW ORLEANS, LA, JULY 12-14TH, 2008.**

can teach you this. Sitting can teach you patience...and if there is one thing that you will need more than anything else during a stressful time, it is patience.

After you learn to be silent and acquire some patience you can learn to let go. Sometimes we grip onto our stress for all we are worth, but it is the relaxed spirit that will thrive under stress.

And that's what it comes down to in the final analysis: THRIVING. Not just surviving but...THRIVING.

Long-term, life-altering, chronic stress offers us a truly great gift of learning. If we allow it to do so. Long-term stress can teach us how to thrive. I don't mean thrive in the sense that you might commonly think about the word. I mean that you learn resilience, endurance, patience and an ability to see life with different eyes.

Long-term, chronic stress will change you. You will enter calm waters again as a different person. You might as well do it as a new improved version with all the new service pack features and updates.



Come and see us at the International Fiesta Demonstration at the Junction by the Stadium on the Mississippi State University campus.

April 5th...don't miss it.

Join us here at the Starkville Martial Arts Academy in the months of March and April and save \$50 on your enrollment. You'll be glad you did.

Akayama Ju Jitsu Weapons Clinic

When: Saturday, April 6th, 2008, 9:00 till 4:00

Where: Trussville Dojo, Alabama

- **Train with all the weapons of the Akayama Ryu system**

For registration information contact Ania: 323 5522 or ania@starkvillemartialarts.com