

Pathways

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*The thing in the world I am
most afraid of is fear.*

Rabindranath Tagore



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SMART Goals. Are they?

Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Reasonable or Relevant, Time-Bounded

We all know the acronym...but do we do it?

SMART goals are all fine and good until your Inner Critic, a.k.a the Gremlin, the Perfectionist, the Inner Child chimes in. How many times have you set laudable goals and fallen short of the mark? How many times has the Inner Voice beaten you up for it?

Let's take an example. Let's say I am in sales (aren't we all?) and I set myself the goal of making five new clients a week, that's twenty a month and 240 a year. Now two of the big parts of goal-setting are a) being disciplined and b) holding yourself accountable. Enter the Gremlin. The first time that you don't make five new clients a week, you start looking at what you are doing wrong and 'try' to work harder. Then it happens again and you begin to beat yourself up for your inability to succeed. I can say this because I have done it. I have set goals, missed them and then beaten myself up just for the fun of it. Or not. We are even given lovely admonitions like "It is better to shoot for the stars and hit the moon." Really? Try telling that to Neil Armstrong.

In medical testing we look at results as precise and accurate. Precise is well-clustered, accurate is on target. Results can be one or other, or neither, but in an ideal world we want both. Same thing with goals.

If I shoot for the moon and miss...well, I am likely dead. In our goal-setting we want to be both precise and accurate. And reasonable. Not relevant. Really? Yes. I may think a goal is relevant to my life, but is it reasonable for my current level of de-

velopment? As a salesperson, finding five new clients a week may be relevant for job security, but is it reasonable? Depends where I am with my skill set as a salesperson.

So how do we do it?

1. Know what you really want to achieve. AND WHY. You will only ever be truly motivated when you know your REAL 'WHY.'
2. Where you are now? Break down your current performance as units of success per unit time. Factor it out over a larger chunk of time (a month, a quarter, a year). Calculate the average. That's your benchmark
3. Examine your current skill set for operational improvement and opportunities for growth in your current performance environment.
4. Stretch it with a new goal for the YEAR. Average it out per unit of smaller time (day, week). That's the goal. Is it reasonable? Take action. Repeat and refine.

Now here's the tricky bit. Let's say you set yourself the goal of finding three new clients a week and two weeks go by with no result. The following week you find five new clients and the following week you find four. Are you on target for your goal? Not quite. You have nine clients in four weeks. Are you three clients down? Not necessarily. You set a YEAR goal with a weekly average. You *are* making progress, you *are* creating success, you *are* learning. In short, inspect what you expect and adjust accordingly. Don't focus so entirely on the immediate daily performance, rather, keep an eye on the yearly goal. One gives the Gremlin ammunition to shoot you down, the other keeps you motivated with opportunity to excel.

☺

Your Stuff

I think that we can agree that we all have stuff. Mostly it's stuff we don't want to acknowledge or talk about, but it's there. It's the psychic elephant in the room. And it goes everywhere with us and gets triggered all the time. When I was travelling around the country years ago, teaching Judo camps during the Summer, one of my mentors would tell the camp attendees that we are all afraid of everything, all the time, so go ahead and do it anyway. He was talking specifically about the courage to really engage Judo, but also he was talking about life in general and the lessons that Judo had to offer.

You see, the real elephant in the room isn't our stuff, it's our fear of our stuff. We all know pain, trauma, stress: that's just life. It's what you do with it that is key.

When I lived in Mississippi there was a beautiful pond on our land, and one of my delights was to sit by the lake on moonlit nights and study the night sky through the reflections. You can think of your life like the surface of the pond. It will never be quiet, still, perfectly serene. There will always be some annoying little kid chucking pebbles into the lake for the fun of it and creating ripples. There will always be wind making waves, insects darting over the surface. The surface of the pond is dynamic, and rightfully so, because were it not so, the air would not mix with the water to keep it aerated so it would become stagnant and life would have a tough time surviving in the water.

Hmmm! An analogy and a metaphor appears. Fear wants things to be predictable, reliable, unchanging and controllable, but you know what? That's just not how life works. I mean really...what can you control? Can you control whether you get your next breath or your next heart beat? So what makes you think that you can control anything outside of yourself?

The best thing to do is to dive in and swim, let go of the desire to predict, rely and control. Accept that life is an uncertain adventure.

Easy, right?

Riiight. So long as everything is going along swimmingly. As soon as we enter turbulent waters and our stuff gets triggered, all bets are off.

You see the thing about fear is that its primal role is one of protection, defense and survival. Mechanisms of protection and defense are all about building walls and moats and putting up barricades, creating impenetrable armor and making ourselves spikey to keep all the things that scare us out of our lives. And we are good at it. Really good at it.

Sad.

Humans have become fearful of so much: intimacy, isolation, acceptance, rejection...the list is enormous.

So what can you do? Well there is the notion of facing the fear and doing it anyway, but I believe that only gets you so far. One thing I learned in oriental medical school, that had been a long time in the hatching, was the notion of letting it go, because you know what? I can't control all outcomes in

life. I can, however, do the best I can with what I've got in the moment and be content with that.

When my stuff got triggered in oriental medical school, and believe me, it did, in sooo many ways, eventually I learned what life was trying to teach me: Let it go Chris, chill. Yeah, I know you're afraid, lonely, desperate. It's OK, let it go.

It's a step beyond facing the fear and doing it anyway...facing the fear was the step that got me to oriental medical school to begin with. More growth was required.

Letting go actually isn't about letting go, it's actually about acceptance and non-resistance. The real meaning of Judo (the way of softness). Taoism even has a term for it: Wu Wei, or non-action.

Letting go is about not getting triggered, not reacting, accepting life, learning, releasing and discovering that the great reward is an ever-deepening sense of peace.

Do I still get triggered? Sure...I still have a ton of stuff to process. I have a big elephant (or so it appears to me). Now, at least I have options. And the really cool part? I don't have to go around infecting others with my stuff just because they triggered me.

Wu Wei.

Do it.

You might like it.

I guarantee those around you will love it. ☺

***“It is not death that a man should fear,
But, he should fear never beginning to live”***

Marcus Aurelius

Train Rides

When was the last time you sat back and watched yourself do life?

No, I'm serious.

Another Judo mentor of mine, from Canada told me that I would do Judo when I got out of my own way and could watch myself from the edge of the mat. He was so stunningly right. Wow! What a game changer that was when it happened for the first time.

The previous article was as much about being the observer of self as it was about allowing ourselves to be triggered by life. This article then, is about becoming a witness to self-in-action.

Watch, observe, allow.

I'm sure you have probably done it yourself, maybe in passing, maybe as a deliberate intent. But for whatever reason you will be doing something and then realize that you are watching yourself do it, as though you were some disconnected observer of someone else entirely.

Curious.

When I was a little kid, one of my grandma's lived in south London beside a railroad that ran along the top of a viaduct, which in itself was an amazing feat of Victorian engineering. The thing about that house: I was deathly afraid of the dog, who was almost as tall as me at that age (more stuff), so when we arrived at the house, I would seek the earliest opportunity to go upstairs to Aunt Florrie's apartment and watch the trains. I could be alone and safe

(more stuff) from the dog and I could watch the trains. I could watch them for hours, but I never left Aunt Florrie's kitchen, I just watched the trains.

The lesson here then, is not the dog, the fear, or the trains really...it's about being the observer, the witness. One of the key things about learning to meditate is not to work on emptying your mind...like that's ever going to happen! The harder you try to empty your mind, the more the monkey mind just keeps coming up with new things for you to think about, to distract you from the real purpose of meditation. That's one of the reasons we are told to focus on the breath, we won't be so focused on our inane inner chatter.

A curious thing happens though, when you don't do anything special, when you just sit and watch. Instead of trying to control your mind and stop thinking, you just sit back and watch the thoughts. Watch them like passenger trains going who knows where. And you let them. You can enjoy watching the trains, you don't HAVE to get on one and go for the ride. When you simply watch your thoughts, you are doing the same thing, watching, but not going for the ride. Now here's the curious thing: After a while there are fewer trains, and they seem to go by more slowly. All you are doing is noticing them, but taking the path of Wu Wei...non-action. You are not going for a ride,

you are simply watching. Nothing has really changed, except your relationship to the thinking process.

Imagine if that's how you lived. Thoughts, emotions, events, triggers are like those trains, we can either buy a ticket and go for the ride, to be further hijacked by whatever happens down the line, or we can watch the train go by as a curiosity to witness.

This is not to imply that we are not fully engaged in life and living it as the adventure I spoke of in the last article, but it means that we have options. As a witness I can choose to engage and cease to be the witness/observer, or I can choose to let self live life and observe how I do that.

The notion of perceiving life from position of the witness to self-in-action is not always an easy one to deal with long-term. All too quickly we discover that we purchased a ticket some time back, hopped on the train and then we realize that we are not the observer anymore.

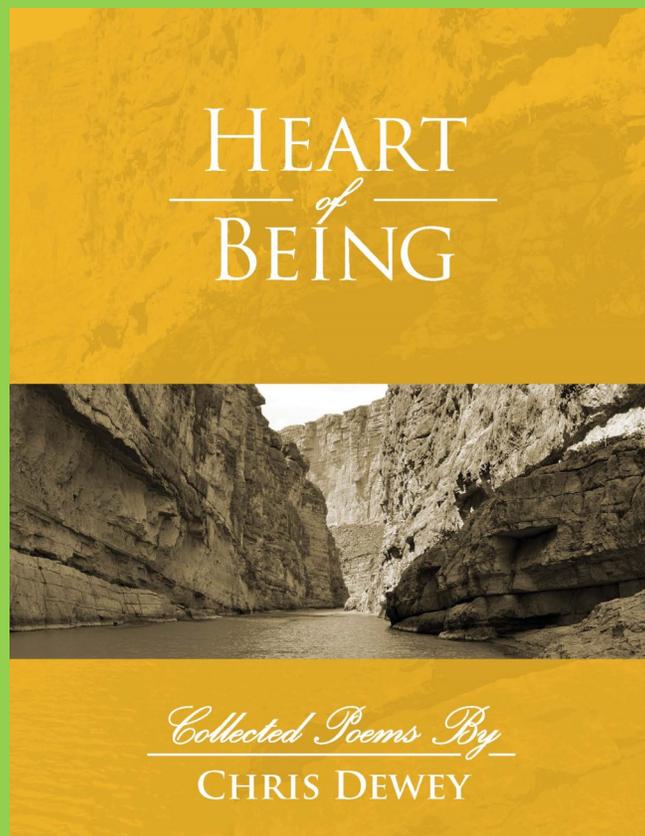
Of course the notion of being a witness to self brings up all manner of interesting philosophical questions about the nature of life and the purpose of being here.

But the big freedom is that we can more easily let things go, because we are not so massively invested in controlling what happens next in life. Life gets to be a lot more fun when you stop trying to control everything.

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“Fear is an acid which is pumped into one's atmosphere. It causes mental, moral and spiritual asphyxiation and sometimes death; death to all energy and growth.”

Horace Fletcher



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