

Pathways

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**It is not about the challenges
that we face in life, it is about how
we meet the challenges we face**

Small Victories

One of my students was speaking with my wife last month about why she does Judo. What transpired during the conversation says a lot about the reasons for doing martial arts. Judo is not always forgiving of its students: Learning to take a fall is not always easy. Sometimes being thrown, or taking a fall or even doing the throw can be a significant personal challenge. Sometimes doing groundwork can bring feelings of helplessness and claustrophobia. It is a times like this that I see the metaphor for life that represents learning Judo. Learning Judo is about small victories over self, which culminate in a new image of self; one that has been refined and faced itself and overcome its fears. Judo is all about life. We take falls all the time in life. Life often deals us cards that we do not want, but cannot change. We all, at some point, have to

deal with personal, career and financial set backs. In Judo we learn to take a fall with grace rather than resistance. Life brings us moments of hardship that leave us feeling helpless and Judo brings us face to face with learning to face moments of being "trapped." Judo teaches us the way of adaptation and relaxation. It teaches to blend with the moment and to overcome both our selves and our opponent. (As though they were different?)

But Judo also brings us little victories, one step at a time, one lesson at a time. Those victories on the mat add up over time. For some classes, just showing up can be a victory in itself, for any number of reasons. In some classes there is a victory over some self-imposed limitation of performance. In some classes there may be small victories of insight that bring with them a new

awareness. My wife and I have see a wide variety of personal victories over the years, but I think that the greatest moments for me, happen when I see a student finally see the point and a whole new world of personal opportunity opens up for them. All the little victories up to that point were the preparation of the ground. For some of our students, that moment may take years of training; for others the moment comes after a relatively short time. It really doesn't matter. What matters is that the students keep training, using the little victories as a personal reinforcement to come back over and over until one day those victories add up to an insight into self that redefines who and what we are and what potentials lie within us. Little victories are the little things that we grab hold of along the way.

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The Value of Pain

In general people stay in their comfort zones until something nudges them out. Often the nudge is distinctly uncomfortable and quite frequently painful either in a real physical sense or in an emotional or psychological sense. It is at the times when we are nudged out of our comfort zones that we are most vulnerable and most susceptible to receiving instruction. One of my colleagues in Ju Jitsu has a quote on his website which goes as follows: "That which hurts, instructs." My initial reaction was that this was probably not the sharpest marketing ploy in the world and was probably not going to have new students clamoring to join his dojo.

Upon deeper reflection, however, it comes home to me that people often join the martial arts because of some sort of personal frustration. As martial arts instructors, we are problem solvers. People come to us because they have a pain of some sort and we help the pain to go away. The pain can be a shaken sense of personal security or a feeling of being overweight or lazy.

So the people I meet on the martial road are those who got nudged out of their comfort zones. For many of us we eventually got nudged out of our comfort zones when the pain of our situation became greater than our resting inertia. Eventually we got up and did something about it. Eventually the pain of doing nothing was overcome by the need to do something. Even the

student who comes to us because "I always wanted to learn martial arts" has, at some level decided that the "pain" of not knowing the martial arts is unacceptable.

It is at exactly the critical moments in life that pain truly does instruct. It is at these moments that we are open to learning about our potential or our true selves. At my moments of greatest fear or greatest loss I am in a position to learn the most about my true self and my true role in the world.

So it is then, that at the moments of greatest difficulty in our lives we come face to face with a bold, demanding statement that commands our attention: "That which hurts, instructs".

Having run a for-profit business for seven years now, it does not come as a surprise to me that many of the world's richest people achieved success only after facing financial ruin. Equally, people who go through emotional trauma often make great strides in self-understanding as a direct result of their experiences.

Ultimately it comes to this: Mediocre experiences tend not to elicit great emotion and difficult times bring the seeds of opportunity and learning.

Anything of value brings with it a costly price tag. We may not know the cost up front, but we can resolve to pay the cost if the achievement of the goal is important enough to us. Sometimes, achieving an important goal requires sacrifice and dare I say it... pain. But when we reach deep in-

side ourselves for that quality, which prevents us from giving up, we find the true mettle of our character. In those moments of stress we refine our spirits and strengthen our self image.

We are wiser after the storm than we were before it. That which hurts, instructs.

In many ways my friend's website is about as honest as it could be. It speaks with a clarity of purpose that is easy to overlook in the comfort of our lives and it speaks with integrity. It is honest and forthright. It hides nothing and is a call to action.

In the final analysis, we take action because to do otherwise would be to endure greater pain than we already bear.

The path of the martial artist is a road that instructs. It is not for everyone. It is for those who will not shrink from their fears and who will take responsibility for their lives. The martial arts are not always comfortable, but I don't think that they were intended to be so. They were intended to illuminate and instruct us about the world and ourselves.

The bottom line is simply this: We ascribe a value of some sort to the people, things and events in our lives. The value is often directly proportional to the price that we had to pay emotionally, spiritually or physically to bring those people, things and events into our lives.

There is always opportunity if we are willing to pay for it.

Self Discipline

I have heard it said that self discipline is making yourself do the right thing for the right reason at the right time whether you feel like doing it or not. The key here is the last clause to the sentence. It is always easy to do things when we are in the mood, or it feels like it might be fun, or when there is some tangible immediate reward. It is much harder to do something when we don't want to do it, are not in the mood or when the reward is at some murky point in the future.

It is always easier to put off the things that we know we ought to do when we don't feel like doing them. Ask any child with homework or a college student with assignments due. But the whole key to the exercise is that the very act of forcing yourself to do something you don't want to do because you know it is the right thing to do helps you forge your character.

Character is something that develops because of the inner battles we fight, not because things come easily to us. Character is forged by developing self-discipline.

For some of us the battle might be overcoming a negative habit. For some of us the battle might be doing the extra work to achieve the good grades in school or university. For some the battle might be letting go of the past. The battle can take many forms.

It really doesn't matter what the issue is, what matters is that we each face our own issues and overcome them because if we do not, then the Law of Exclusion is always at work: When I make a decision to do one thing, I automatically decide not to do anything else. When I use self-discipline to face my issues, I consciously make a decision not to let my issues control me. When I make a decision to undertake a task I know needs to be done, then the Law of Exclusion says that all other potential activities are less important to me. I make a decision to do one thing at the expense of everything else, which in a roundabout sort of way, says that I wish to spend my time on this activity rather than that one. Every time I make a decision to do the right thing at the right time for the right reasons, whether I feel like it or not, I am making a sound investment and spending that most precious of commodities — time — wisely. Time is the greatest gift of life and yet we spend it in front of televisions, eating junk food and procrastinating. At the end of life the one thing that you will want more of...will be time. It is so valuable and yet we squander it as though there were no value to it. Every time I choose the path of self-discipline I choose to improve my use of time, which means that I see my time as being more valuable than when I

squander it on tasks of lesser importance.

You see, there is a part of us that tells us the great lie: Do it later. But we never do. We only get to spend each moment once. We can either spend it growing or we can spend it on frivolities that lead us nowhere. Once the moment has been spent doing something other than what we knew we should have been doing, the moment is gone and we know that we have undermined our own self worth.

Ultimately it all comes down to self worth doesn't it? How much do you value yourself? The value you place on yourself is often directly related to how you will spend your assets of time and resources. When I see that a task needs to be undertaken in my life and choose not to do it, I am telling myself that I am not worthy. Every time I choose to do the task I am telling myself that I am worthy. Self worth, just like self discipline is built incrementally, one choice at a time.

Every choice I make screams out to the world that the action I have chosen is more important to me than any other single action that I could have chosen for that same moment of time.

So it is that we build our lives, one moment, one event and one investment at a time.

It is the constant and determined effort that
breaks down resistance and sweeps away all
obstacles

Claude Bristol

Calendar of Events:

- ◆ Swamp Classic Judo Tournament. Lafayette, LA, April 3rd, 2004
- ◆ Peachtree Open Judo tournament. Peachtree City, GA, April 17th, 2004
- ◆ SMAC Karate Tournament, Ridgeland, MS April 24th, 2004
- ◆ Judo Tournament, Tulane, LA, April 24th, 2004
- ◆ Melton's Judo Tournament, Jackson, MS, May 22nd, 2004.
- ◆ Camp Catawba, Charlotte, N.C., June 16th–20th, 2004
- ◆ USJA Junior Nationals, and Coaching Symposium, Chicago, IL, July 9th-12th, 2004
- ◆ Akayama Jujitsu Camp, Biloxi, MS. July 17th, 2004
- ◆ USJI Junior Olympics, Ft Lauderdale, FL, July 23-24th, 2004
- ◆ Gentle Wind Judo Tournament, Baton Rouge, LA, September 25th, 2004

Lessons

Sometimes the lessons in life seem to come hard and fast. Sometimes our lives seem to get rocked by one thing after another. Sometimes life is just plain hard. These moments come to all of us sooner or later.

It is not always easy to negotiate our way through life when it is “not a bowl of cherries.”

Although I wrote this newsletter over a span of two months, one stream of consciousness writing after another, I seem to have returned each time to a central theme of difficult choices, how we face them and how we learn from them. I like to think that learning the martial arts helps to prepare us for life's less than easy moments. I know that in my own life this has been the case.

I have written before about the 80/20 rule: That you get 80% of the result from the last 20% of effort... or put another way around, only 20% of the result from the first 80% of the effort invested. Learning martial arts teaches us to commit to the training, to our partners and ourselves over time. There is an unspoken idea behind the commitment that it is indeed worth the effort and that it is “all good stuff.”

I often think that this is how it is in life. We are often tempted to walk away from difficult situations just when we reach the 80% effort point. Just a little more effort and we would find the answer. Certainly, in running a business I can look at moments when I wondered if it was all worth it personally or financially,

and yet each time the business goes through a moment like this and I go along with it, we both come out stronger afterwards.

Learning martial arts is a metaphor for learning how to give the last 20% of effort and from having done so, discover that there are hidden qualities within each of us that we would never have discovered otherwise. It is never about the first 80% of anything that counts, it is always about the last 20%. It is the last 20% that contains the defining moments. Everything else is getting prepared.

When life is difficult and the lessons are hard, it is then that we draw upon the strengths that we gained from “going to the mat” and “going the distance” in all our previous trials of life. It is then that all the investments that we made in the last 20% start to pay their dividends. Every time we go the last mile, or give the last 20% we learn that we are capable and have the abilities to negotiate our way through difficult times. We gain personal strength, insight and wisdom.

I think that what I am trying to tell you here, is that it is the moments when we do give the last 20% that bring us the assurance that it is “all good stuff.” When we don't invest that 20% all we gain is doubt. We become encumbered by I should have..., If only..., What if I'd....

The essential truth about education of any kind is that it is always and everywhere, in all circumstances, about a personal choice to go the distance.

You are never given a wish without also being given the power to make it come true. You may have to work for it, however.

Richard Bach

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