

Pathways

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"One of the secrets of life is to make stepping stones out of stumbling blocks."

Jack Penn

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I believe

I was talking with the children's class the other day about achievement and I gave them a line to remember: "You achieve what you believe." I'm not sure where I first heard this line, but it is so true and so powerful...and like most things in life it can serve as our greatest gift...or our nemesis.

We achieve in life exactly what we believe in our hearts is possible, regardless of what we say we want. Conversely we can achieve no more than the limitations of our own belief systems, whatever they are. Fortunately though, belief systems are things that can be subject to change, we change what we believe as we learn more about life. Experience teaches us what to believe, but at times experiences might hold us back. Last month I wrote about breaking habits and the conditioning process that creates our habits. It takes a great force of will to overcome our deeply entrenched habits, or it simply take an act of belief. Put another way, no amount of effort will change anything until we believe it to be possible.

So what am I saying? In essence I am saying that we expend huge amounts of effort in life in the name of success. In May we do a fund raising event for our scholarship children and as part of that event we join schools nationwide in a world record breaking attempt. Every year schools all over the nation work together to break as many boards as possible in one hour. But to break even a single board, you have to believe that it will break.

I watch people training for the break-a-thon and you can tell whether the board will break in class, just by

reading the face and the body language. If the student does not believe that the board will break, then the board will not break! There is a huge correlation here between what we believe we are capable of doing and what we actually end up doing in life. Breaking boards is a metaphor. Breaking boards is about breaking self-imposed limitations, creating new paradigms of possibility and creating new belief systems. It's just like getting to Black Belt and beyond. When we start the journey, Black Belt seems so far away, so impossible. But as we learn and grow we discover that more is possible than our earlier belief systems would have allowed and so, with time, we progress. For each of us though, there are areas of our lives where forward progress is much harder and we meet more and more internal resistance. This is the resistance of core-belief systems. It is relatively easy to change surface beliefs (I can break a board), it is much harder to change a core belief system (I am loveable, I am capable, I am valuable). Unfortunately, many of the core belief systems are created by our early experiences at home, at school and in the world at large as we discover it. Often in changing these beliefs we have to first see them for what they are...self limiting beliefs systems created on the basis of incomplete information and a lack of full understanding. Once you can see a self-limiting belief system for what it is, the world changes and new beliefs become possible...as do new levels of achievement.☺

Past and Future

When I talk to my students, I am surprised by how many of us live a good chunk of our lives regretting past choices or feeling anxious or fearful about the future. The fact of the matter is that we cannot undo that which is done or past and we cannot know what is ahead.

All any of us have is this exact moment, that's it. The past is done, gone, over. The future is not here and is unknowable, but that does not make it something we should fear. I suspect that most of us know this, but few of us actually live it on a daily basis. Too often we let the past control the future and in so doing we restrict the range of possible opportunities that would otherwise have been there for us.

I have always wondered why some people, like inventors or explorers are drawn to the unknown, whereas other people are afraid of the unknown and shrink away from it. I tend to look at the future from the perspective of an inventor and an explorer...I have no idea what's out there, but I am eager to explore and do have some idea of what I'm looking for along the way. I have no idea where I will end up or what things I will end up doing, but it is an adventure. I certainly don't want to reach the end of my life full of regret or ridden with guilt or sadness. I have said this before...when I breathe my last, I'd like to be thinking: "Wow, that was a blast!" I suspect it affects how I live my life.

So life is a wonderful journey of discovery full of mysteries and questions. It's really not about a destination so much as the journey itself. Each so called destination (school, job, family, home) is just a way station along the road. Many of us will change jobs several times; many of us, sadly, will get divorced, our children will grow up and make families of their own. None of the destinations we claim as indicators of a "successful" life are permanent. Each one of them is just a transient moment.

Having said all of that, there is certainly a link between what we have done in the past and what we are likely to do in the

future.

Clearly, our past decisions will influence what we are likely to do with the next moment, but they do not dictate what must happen. I like to think that there are always possibilities.

Let's say I have a history of getting home from work, eating dinner and collapsing into the sofa exhausted to watch TV rather than play with the kids because my tolerance for their antics is too low. What are the chances that I will do this every weeknight? Once I get into the habit, the chances are pretty high, but every night presents the opportunity to do something different. All I have to do is to see the opportunity and take it.

A lot of people who begin Judo are afraid of falling, and given the lessons they have learned about life, the fear is not without reason. Most of us fell over as children and hurt ourselves and were told countless times "Don't do that, you'll fall and hurt yourself." We internalized the message until it became some nebulous, unfounded fear of falling. The sad thing is that if we allow our children to explore the world, they rarely fall over. Humans are self adjusting creatures and learn to manipulate balance control at an early age...if they are allowed to experiment and are rewarded their success. I often think that we don't allow children to make their own mistakes and learn valuable lessons from the consequences. Instead, we place upon our kids the baggage of our own past... "don't fall" (implication: you are unable to achieve balance because I didn't as a kid), "you'll hurt yourself" (implication: I fell over and I got hurt and I want to protect you). But is it really protection? If there is no real danger to life and limb, then there is no need for protection, a child will learn phenomenal balance and not acquire our fears.

Over time, unfortunately, we tend to build up a whole set of fears based upon the lessons we have learned. And so, over time some of us become anxious about the future, we fear what might happen and waste inordinate amounts of

energy on things that never come to pass.

So where am I going with this? I am actually going to two places:

1. Let it go
2. Have goals, but don't be rigid about them.

Let's take each of these separately. Letting go of the past frees up huge amounts of energy in our lives and opens opportunities that were previously closed because we can now see them or take advantage of them. If we wear the straightjacket of the past, there will always be things that we wish we had done, could have done, should have done....and ultimately regretted not doing. The tricky bit to all of this however is the actual letting go. After all we define ourselves by our experiences all of which are deeply rooted in our past. Example: First the Definition: I have a doctorate in geology. Second comes the Implication: I cannot get a job in the veterinary medicine department. Third comes the Conclusion: My past limits my future choices. Is that really true? Could I get the required credentials if I really wanted to?

I used the example of my own academic career because I see this a lot with student advising. It is very easy to have plans and goals for the future and lose sight of other opportunities because we are so fixed upon the supposed goal. Ambition can be a rudder and or a straightjacket, depending upon how you use it. Sometimes we can set goals and reach them and feel disappointed because what we ended up with was not the same thing that we thought we wanted when we set out on the journey.

The thing that we lost was the journey itself. We were so intent upon some future event coming to pass, that we lost sight of the process of getting there. Live your life Now...not in the past and do not wait till later, it will never be there. ☺

Intent and Compassion

Have you ever wondered what martial arts really teach? If you are an observer you might say that the martial arts teach us how to hurt, maim and kill. After all, they did evolve from the battlefields of human conflict. That's a fair statement; you certainly cannot argue that this was not the original intent of human conflict. Look at the word *Martial*, it is derived from Mars, the Roman God of war.

If you are a law enforcement officer, you might say that martial skills enable you to defend yourself and the community you serve against those who would bring it harm.

As a private citizen you might say that martial arts are a last line of self-defense for yourself or your loved ones when your life is threatened, when all other recourses have failed.

So from these positions martial arts are a series of defensive and offensive skills designed to protect yourself and bring harm to others. Perhaps that's being a bit harsh, but it is a perspective that I have heard on more than one occasion.

If you are in the martial arts already you might say that they are sports that take old battlefield tactics, and by applying a set of rules to prevent unnecessary injury we can safely compete and see who is the better martial artist. Maybe you do not care one whit for competition. Maybe you do martial arts as a means of staying fit and healthy and to keep the aging process at bay. Perhaps this is another form of *self-defense*. Perhaps you use martial arts as a form of concentration and focus, and as such it becomes a sort of moving meditation and stress relief. Again, by relieving stress in our lives, we are performing a kind of *self-defense*.

Regardless of your position, every one of these perspectives will teach you something about yourself, provided that you do one thing: Train with com-

mitment.

Training with commitment is an interesting thing. I was talking with my Ju Jitsu class after class the other day about how I am able to switch from "free fighting" in Judo or Taekwondo to "free fighting" in Ju Jitsu, which has no real rules. I told my students that when I free fight in Ju Jitsu, I am able to draw upon my entire range of skills and I do so with complete intent. In the martial arts we call this 'Kime': An act of decision.

Practicing with intent means that it is my intent to punch, kick, throw or joint lock my opponent, but because I know I am "training" and not in a real life or death situation I temper my 'intent' with compassion...I stop short of hurting my training partner. There is a flaw here, as there is in all training for battle: You cannot actually hurt your partner, but you might need to do so if you find yourself in a live combat situation. Consequently the best that you can do in a training environment is to train with the mindset of complete commitment.

There is a massive plus side to this sort of training: You learn that along with skill comes compassion and a suppression of the ego driven anger or need for getting even. This may sound strange but training with full intent (Kime) leads to compassion, gentleness and improved skill. Which brings us to the next stage; The more you train and learn, the more you discover pragmatic, efficient and elegant ways to hurt or maim an opponent. Your choices in any given situation therefore increase and as a direct result, your decision tree becomes dramatically more complex. The problem here of course, is that the more complex a decision tree becomes, the more time it takes to arrive at a decision, and in a combat situation time is rarely on your side.

Amazingly, at this point in the discus-

sion, the decision tree suddenly becomes remarkably simple: As paradoxical as this might sound to you, the more you train in the martial art the greater value you place on life. Life becomes something that you honor. Honoring life requires compassion.

It is not surprising to me then, that a good proportion of Medal of Honor recipients are awarded the medal, not for the number of people they killed, but for their self-sacrificial efforts to save the lives of their comrades in arms. From this position then, martial training is about total commitment to a cause.

If the situation required it, would I lay down my life for the sake of my son? In a heartbeat.

So why do I train? Ultimately I believe I am on a journey of discovery. It started out as a journey of self-discovery, but I suspect that there is more here than I currently see. I suspect that I will continue to train for the next several decades because I value life...ALL life.

As I have continued to learn I have become able to train with intent when I choose to, train for the sake of my training partners when I need to and train with compassion much more often than I did when I was a much younger martial artist.

Looking back over nearly forty years of training, I can see that my martial journey has become deeper, richer, more complex and at the same time simpler and easier to manage as the years have gone by.

I know that one of the main reasons that I am training now is to find a level of deeper internal peace and resolve my own inner turmoil. For me at least, the "enemy" is internal not external, but that too is just a perspective based upon incomplete insight...a perspective that is changing with higher levels of compassion for all life, mine included. ☺

Having the Sense

We live in a world that we sense as complete. Most of us live with our senses of sight, touch, sound, smell and taste. And most of us, whether we recognize it or not also live with a sense of intuition. Our entire world of color and light, form and structure, sound and echo is processed through the brain as a series of electrical impulses that are translated into meaning.

In essence we sense our entire existence through our physical being and interpret the information we receive through what the brain tells us about the world "out there".

Yet beneath the world we sense are energy vibrations that we do not sense in any direct way. Take for instance radio, T.V. and cell phone transmissions that we cannot see, hear or feel. Also, we can study physics or chemistry, astronomy or geology and obtain a different view of the world through understanding, but I cannot actually hold in my hand or see or hear a single photon of light or a single sub-atomic particle. And yet, we take it on faith that this is the stuff that the world we actually see, hear, taste, smell and touch is made of. We may intuitively understand that the stuff of reality is merely energy moving at very low frequencies, but we cannot actually sense it as being so.

All too esoteric for you?

O.K., try this: We can simplify everything I have just said in a single sentence. What we perceive as real, is. Go back to the first article for a moment and think about your belief systems. Let's say an event happens in my life and it affects the way I see the world. From that moment forward it becomes part of what I believe about the world. If I believe I can be successful at something, then this will become my reality. If I see possibility in any situation I will respond differently than if I saw no freedom of

choice in a particular situation.

There's a lot more though. It's not just that we believe what we see (most of the time). It's also that we are connected to everything, in ways that (most of the time) we cannot imagine. So let's go a step further...if everything really is just energy slowed down, then we are, all of us, all of the time, connected intimately to everything around us and everything that we say, do, think or feel affects the energy of the universe in some way.

Too big of a step for you? Then try this: Walk into an office during the silence immediately after someone has been chewed out by his or her boss. Can you feel the energy? Can you actually see it though? Now walk into a restaurant and watch two people sitting across the room, out of earshot, who dearly love each other. Can you see the love? Can you feel it? Have you ever walked into an empty house when you were buying a home that didn't feel right? How did you do that?

There is something intangible in all these situations that you can neither directly sense, nor easily explain. For sure, there is the body language in the first two situations, but there is also an intangible intuitive awareness prior to the interpretation of the visual cues. From this perspective is it really such a big step to accept that everything and I mean *everything* is connected? If this is so, then our typical, daily sensations of the world are anything but complete and there is a whole world out there for us to discover.

Training in martial arts leads us to heightened awareness of these interconnections, simply as a function of learning to interpret subtle changes in the energy state of our training partners during both practice and free fighting.

Of course, that's just what I think is real!☺

May						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

April						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
30						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

- ◆ SMAC Karate Tournament, Ridgel and, 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
- ◆ Mel ton'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

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for details of our classes
and drop the stress*

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