

# Pathways

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## CONTENTS

Doubt, fear and panic .....	1
Targeted inattention.....	2
Falling into relaxation.....	3
Learning to swim.....	4

*"All men are frightened. The more intelligent they are, the more they are frightened. The courageous man is the man who forces himself, in spite of his fear, to carry on."*

*General George S. Patton, Jr.  
War As I Knew It*

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## Doubt, Fear and Panic

I wasn't going to write about this topic this month, but several events, both at the dojo and on-campus have led me to believe that perhaps it is in order.

In the last week or so I have personally witnessed at least four full-blown panic attacks.

Panic is an interesting phenomenon, it hijacks all logical mental processing and freezes the mind in a frenetic state where wild imaginations are blown out of all proportion to reality. I can say this because I have been there...I have felt the world crushing in and my own inability to do anything about it. I have also learned that panic is something that you can control...yes, I did say that.

Panic is a demon that will take as much power as you give it and then demand more. Panic will enlarge and feed upon your fears and make them into terrifying monsters...especially in the lonely hours of the morning when you are alone and the world (as you imagine it) is resting peacefully, while you face the terrors of your mind racing out of control. I learned an acronym for F.E.A.R. years ago: False Expectations Appearing Real...I've used it before in this newsletter and it's pretty accurate. Rarely do any of the things I fear actually come to pass in the way I had imagined them. If I give them power, however, my fears will master me and destroy my potential. My fear will undermine my confidence and kill my latent abilities.

It all begins with a question, seemingly it is a small question of self, which in turn raises a doubt, and then, when we are most vulnerable, when

we are tired, overworked, sick, stressed out for whatever reason, our fears emerge and gain strength. Panic is only a step away at this point.

It is at this point also, that you are still in control. Look at your fears, laugh at them, face them square in the face and use the theater of your mind to reduce them in size and project them way out into the distance. Take control of your mind, see yourself doing it...observe the process of control. Recognize that you have the personal authority to control your own thoughts and place them in perspective.

It will take effort to begin with, but it is a necessary step in panic control, Sometimes, if you have the opportunity, reaching out to someone who will truly listen to you, without judgment or comment, can also be very helpful...just to be able to hear yourself talk out your fears can be enough to derail the panic process and bring you back to an even keel. Picking the right person is crucial, you need someone who can deeply, empathically listen to you, but who is NOT going to give you advice about what to do, or how to do it...you need a listener, not a talker.

If you cannot find a real person in the here and now, then use a mental projection of someone you respect (living or historical) and talk to them, give them permission to listen and watch yourself have the conversation. Again, it's the process that's important, it's your mind, it is yours to control.

Learning to control your tendencies to panic from fear will ultimately yield major dividends in self-confidence and self image...a victory over self. ☺

## Targeted Inattention

Ever had one of those moments when you couldn't remember a tune or the title of a movie or someone's name? Do you notice that it seems as though the harder you try to remember, the more frustrating it becomes.

For instance, you can see a person's face and the context in which you know them, but you just can't come up with the name. Then later, when you are doing something else entirely, the name will come to you...seemingly out of the blue. Often the name comes in the form of a dream when you are asleep or when you are relaxed and engaged in some other activity and there is seemingly no obvious trigger to the remembering event.

I mention this type of remembering because it is a form of targeted inattention. You have sent your mind a message "remember so and so", the conscious mind failed at the task, so the problem was shunted off to the subconscious mind who went to work on the problem without being disturbed by, well...you.

As humans, it is exactly these sorts of targeted inattention events that can actually save your life in a moment of extreme stress. You see something or hear something that arouses the subconscious mind and if it is significant enough, the event is brought to the conscious mind who then hijacks the entire mind into a life-saving series of actions.

Another form of targeted inattention can be a deliberate action on your part.

I use targeted inattention to write poetry and also to write this newsletter. Sometimes I have an idea about which I wish to write, but the words won't form, so I let the subconscious mind deal with the problem and I get on with something else. Sooner or later, the inevitable occurs...the subconscious mind shunts forward an entire newsletter ready to be typed...in fact, it's happening right now. This topic is something "that's been on my mind" since I wrote the last newsletter, so I let the idea go and got on with something else till the newsletter was ready to be typed.

Another example of targeted inattention is meeting your goals or coming up with a solution to a problem that you might be facing. If you build goals, and set deadlines, or try to find solutions to a problem and keep running into obstructions, then sometimes it is better just to let it go and focus on something else. When the mind and the time is right, the goal emerges and is completed, often faster and more easily than it was when we first "attacked the problem."

Targeted inattention is innate in us but it is also skill you can learn to improve.

Targeted inattention is a form of meditative practice. It is a deliberate attempt to employ the subconscious mind in the solution of a problem or the achievement of an objective.

One of the places in which you can learn targeted inattention is in the competition arena or in free sparring

during martial arts classes. In Judo tournaments, there is little point just blasting your way in with your favorite technique unless your opponent is so inexperienced that they simply have no defensive capabilities...and even then you can get surprised by your opponent's intuitive inventions! During a Judo match you look for opportunity and you attempt to induce your partner to create opportunities for you. But if you focus all your attention on one attack only, you miss all manner of other opportunities. If you can maintain a focused awareness on the match, but also maintain an open mind your subconscious will see opportunities, and will hijack your entire attack system into a throw and you'll be completing the throw before you even realized what happened....another form of focused inattention. Some of the best players I ever knew either when I was competing myself or when I was a national referee were players who pulled stuff out of seemingly nowhere. They looked completely relaxed, confident and capable...they exuded a sense of calm awareness. They had targeted inattention and used it to advantage.

Are you getting the message yet? There are few situations in which targeted inattention will fail you. You can use it in your relationships, your studies, your careers, your hobbies....the possibilities are almost endless.



**"it is not death that a man should fear,  
but he should fear never beginning to live"**

**Marcus Aurelius**

## Falling into Relaxation

If I have learned anything from Judo over the years, it is this:

Falling teaches you to trust.

Falling teaches you to let go.

Falling teaches you to relax.

Falling teaches you to breathe.

There are no shortcuts here. Falling with grace takes time and effort. Learning to relax when you fall takes practice. Additionally, because we have been conditioned by societal response since we were toddlers that falling over is painful, learning to fall over in Judo can be very scary for the beginner. Sometimes (even as advanced students), if we get out of the habit of falling, falling can hurt because we lose the sense of the circle and acquire corners again. Falling teaches us to be round and relaxed; it teaches us to get rid of the corners.

We tell beginners to relax when they fall, and they tell us they are relaxed. It is only after much falling that the truth emerges and our students see how rigid they were before they learned to fall with relaxation. Some of our beginners will carry their fear for a long time and it is almost as though the continual little hurts of falling like a tree is beating the student into relaxation...that's a tough way to do it though. It is much better to let the fear go and to enjoy the learning experience. Progress is faster, enjoyment skyrockets and the range of learning opportunities increases.

As an instructor, watching anyone falling over during a Judo or Ju Jitsu

class instantly can reveal to you how much stress your students are carrying. It also tells you about how open is the mind and the heart.

When it is done correctly, falling over is a thing of beauty and grace; it is both elegant and natural. You can't force falling over from a throw. Sometimes you will see people 'jump' for a throw, rather than actually trust their partner to throw them correctly. An experienced eye can instantly tell when a student got thrown and became part of the throw, and when they jumped for their partner.

Falling is, therefore, first and foremost, all about trust. There are multiple layers to this trust. When I talk about trust here, I am talking about trust in self, trust in the planet, trust in the process, trust in the partner, trust in the teacher, trust in the art we learn, trust in the dynamics of the action. ...and that's a lot of trust.

To fall well you have to give yourself to the process. In essence you give yourself to your partner and allow them to throw you...we are not naturally prone to do this sort of thing. In fact, society teaches almost the exact opposite. Trust is difficult for us, so giving ourselves to our partners and saying "Here, throw me into the planet. I'm cool with that." tends to generate a degree of resistance in the mind and then the body.

As we grow in the martial arts and move through the rank process, we discover that falling over is a mirror, it

is also a metaphor and a tool for self-discovery.

We also discover self-confidence from learning to fall with grace and ease. We begin to learn that every time we fall, we can get back up and do it again. We learn that falling doesn't have to hurt. We learn that falling is a natural part of learning to succeed. Most importantly we discover that falling over is not a reason to quit...this is perhaps the biggest metaphor of life that we learn from the process of learning how to take a fall.

I can recall days when I was immersed in a martial arts clinic that I simply fell hundreds upon hundreds of times in a single day. The more I did it, the easier it became and the faster I learned the technique that was being taught, because I was not getting in my own way. It was like being in a crucible of intense learning.

What I got out of these sorts of events was that I was greater than my fears, that my potential was only limited by my fears and that I could achieve things that I had only hours ago thought impossible.

So in closing I will tell you this: Learning to fall over with grace and ease has been one of the greatest gifts that the martial arts has given to me. It wasn't easy, but it was worth every drop of sweat, and it has paid dividends in all manner of unlikely places in my life, not just in the dojo. ☺

**"Fear is the 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**

## Learning to Swim

When I was a kid, learning how to swim, we used to play this game with the Styrofoam float boards. The object of the game was to push the board to the bottom of the swimming pool and stand on it in the shallow end, and then look as though you were taking a rest from swimming and call your friends over to chat. As soon as they were in range you step of the board and it shoots to the surface of the pool and hits someone. More often than not, if you didn't control the way you stepped off of the board or if you timed it wrong, you ended up getting hit in the face by the board, instead of your friend. It was a silly game played by boys...who will after all, be boys.

Looking back from the vantage point of several decades, I still laugh at how many times I got this game wrong and how many times I hit myself in the face, much to the amusement of my friends, who used the game to see how many times they could get me to hit myself with the Styrofoam board. It was worth the risk, just to see me hit myself, then, because they were all better swimmers than I, they all shot off to the

deep end of the pool, leaving me to nurse my embarrassment.

So what's the lesson here?

Well let's say it's metaphorical.

Let the Styrofoam be stress or anger. Let the water be life and let your feet be your attempts to control your stress by holding it in and not letting it go. Let the bounce of the board be the inevitable consequence of one too many stresses or one to many annoyances that cause us to lose our cool and snap at someone.

Styrofoam floats. That bit's easy. So why cling to stress? Why hold on to it and try to keep it in. Allow it to flow with the water and let it go. Same thing with anger. Why cling to it? Why harbor ill will? Allow it to dissipate with the energy of the water and flow away from you peacefully.

These are not always easy things to do, for some reason we like to cling to our stress and our anger and I wonder how often they backfire. When was the last time clinging to your stress was a good use of your energy? All clinging to stress does is make us sick.

My suggestion to myself and others is to learn to swim.

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- ◆ AKAYAMA SUMMER CAMP, ORANGE BEACH, AL, JULY, 17 & 18TH, 2010.
- ◆ SMAA JUDO TOURNAMENT, SEPTEMBER, 18TH 2010
- ◆ SMAA TKD TOURNAMENT, NOVEMBER, 13TH 2010

IN THE FALL WE WILL ALSO BE HOSTING OUR FIRST **BIG BLACK BELT RANK TEST** SINCE WE'VE BEEN IN THE NEW DOJO....SO LEARN YOUR STUFF AND GET READY. ALL ELIGIBLE RANKS WILL BE EXAMINED...NOT JUST THE BLACK BELTS.

ADDITIONAL DOJO TOURNAMENTS ON A SATURDAY IN 2011, FEBRUARY (JUDO) AND APRIL (TKD) ....STAY TUNED FOR DETAILS.

CHECK OUT THE CALENDAR OF EVENTS ON THE WEBSITE AT:

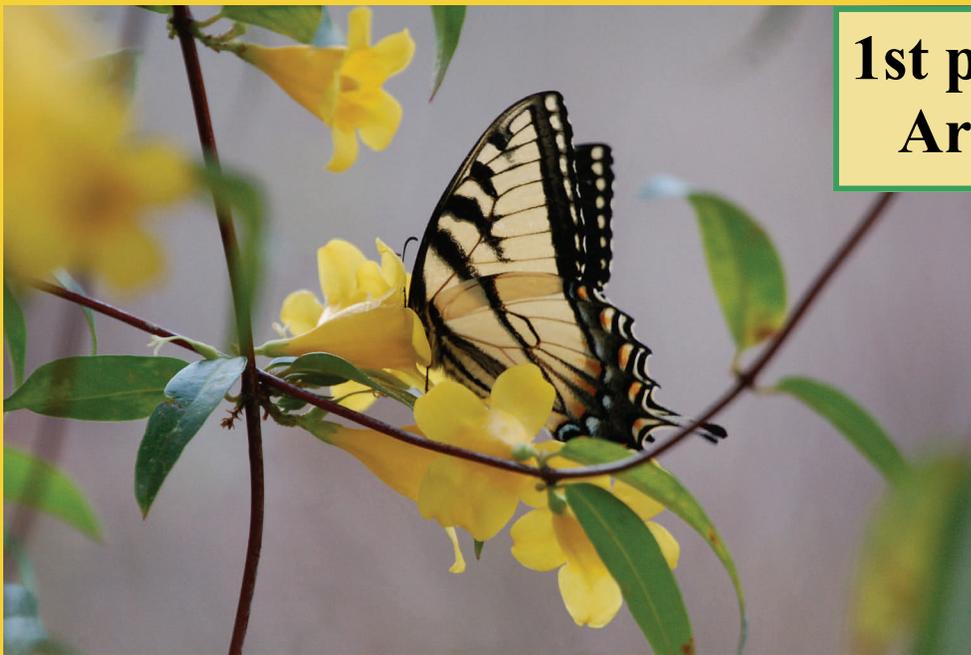
[SMAA@STARKVILLEMARTIALARTS.COM](mailto:SMAA@STARKVILLEMARTIALARTS.COM)

*Our doubts are traitors and cause us to miss the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt*

*William Shakespeare*



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