

Pathways

A monthly newsletter produced by the Starkville Martial Arts Academy

Volume 8, Number 05

May 2 004



**What we do today,
echoes in eternity
Gladiator, the Movie**

Decisions 1

Have you ever wondered about the trickle down effects of your decisions?

I was recently struck by the comment that the secondary consequences of any decision far outweigh the primary consequences. How many of us consider the implications of this statement during our day to day actions? We seem to live our lives with little thought for the consequences of our words and actions.

The part of this comment that I would like to examine is the effect that we have on our children. Most of us attempt to raise our children to the best of our abilities, and yet in the process we give our children our own preformed perspectives and phobias about the world. Our children carry these notions within them for their entire lives and wonder why they harbor seemingly irrational fears. Or maybe they wonder why they feel incapable of

doing certain things.

My own child has an intuitive sense about him; he is fully present in the moment and could teach his dad a thing or two about living mindfully. When my son acts he does so with full intent as he discovers the world around him. His parents try to color in the images for him: This is good, this bad, this behavior is acceptable, this is not. It's all part of raising a three year old. But in the process it is so easy to take a part of his personality and distort it to fit our own view of life rather than let him find his own truth.

Let me give you an example. Some of you already know the story, but I want to share it anyway. One afternoon my wife and I found our son kneeling in his room in front of an open window watching a gentle rain fall. He sat there, motionless for more than half an hour, lost

to the experience of the rain. His was kneeling with his hands in his lap, his toes crossed behind him and his back perfectly straight, and he did not move for the entire time. I almost felt that I was robbing him of something as I took the photograph and watched in gratitude as my young son taught me about mindfulness and meditation. It is natural to him, he doesn't think about it, or plan to do it; it just happens.

Now here is the tricky part. It would have been easy to sit beside him and ask him what he was doing, or seeing or to ask if he was bored or sad or try to share the moment with him. It was however, the right thing to do to leave him alone.

In that moment, I was completely aware that by doing nothing, I was doing everything necessary.

It was my decision. It was my pebble cast in the lake.

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Yield and Learn

It may be because I am giving a talk on “How to use Judo to teach life skills to children” at the upcoming USJA Coaching Symposium this summer; or it may simply be that synchronicity is at work....but here’s the thing: Over the past couple of months I have been struck by the number of times that Judo as a Metaphor for Life has been the crux of several conversations in which I have been involved. For sure, this is not a new thought for me; after all, Judo is about the “perfection of the human character”....at least to its founder, Jigoro Kano. But last Friday night, as I was casting around for a final article for this month, I found myself crystallizing my thoughts into four words that I gave to a student who is entering a time of rapid personal growth. My student had a gift for me by asking a question that shone light into my mind and provided a catalyst, which gave me a much needed insight.

The four words were: Yield, flow, feel and learn.

This IS Judo. Yield to the oncoming force, flow with it and do not meet it with your own resistance; feel the direction and purpose of the force and blend with it so that there is nothing against which it can push and learn how to dissipate the force with minimal effort.

Yeah, so? I know that.

Well, the fact of the matter is that we build around ourselves containment fields that keep the

world out, and our own stresses and emotions under control. When those containment fields collapse for whatever reason, there is a huge vulnerability and we often feel uncertain or unstable.

Interestingly enough when we referee a Judo match, we are told that a valid attack is one in which the attacker places him or herself at some risk. If there is no exposure to risk then there is no serious effort to throw the opponent. This goes to Sun Tsu’s comment that “Invincibility lies in defense, the opportunity of victory lies in offence.” The corollary to this statement is that in order to seek victory, you must be willing to risk defeat....or: It’s easy to stand behind your battlements and fend off the world, but you are not going to be going anywhere, either. I spoke about this very principle in my Junior martial arts class, and you could watch the light bulbs go on as they began to see the implications of the discussion *beyond* the obvious framework of the class lesson plan.

Stepping onto a Judo mat for the first time is a risk. It is also a profound opportunity and as I approach forty years in the arts I begin to see the inestimable value of that first step in my own life.

As I watch, I begin to see that resistance in self is merely reflected outward through lost opportunities and disappointment. A more yielding, softer approach to self leads to a greater sense of awareness of the people and events

around us and consequently brings with it much greater opportunity for learning and growth. Of course, there is also risk. When the attitude of resistance goes away, people can see into our lives and often we are uncomfortable about that.

I am not sure where that resistance comes from. Certainly, we start to develop walls as young children, and then we spend the rest of our lives trying to either reinforce them or tear them down, it is entirely a personal choice. I think part of the wall-building process comes as a “necessary” step in the development of self, which of course implies “other” and that which is “me” versus that which is “not me.” In such a world there must be boundaries between self and other, and here is where we find the location of our resistance, both physical and mental. If I am resistant, when I fall, I am brittle and break. If I yield, I can recognize the oncoming force sooner and can blend with it and redirect it. Clearly there are as many physical examples of this process at work in our lives as there are psychological.

I will close this article by simply repeating Sun Tsu and leaving you to think about how it works in your own life: “Invincibility lies in defense, the opportunity for victory lies in offense.” Always and everywhere, it is your choice

Unlearning

Are you ever your own worst enemy? Your own roadblock to success? If this is ever true for you, then there is a very good chance that you need to unlearn part of your mental programming. You know.... the stuff we cling to so tenaciously, whether it serves us well in life or not.

One of the great things about learning martial arts, is that it challenges the obvious. It gives us insights that change our perceptions of how things work and if we allow it do so, our training will give us a new perspective about who and what we are.

The most valuable thing that you can do for yourself when confronted by one of these moments is to let go of your pre-conceived notions about life, the universe and everything, and see it afresh without the prejudice of an already-formed opinion.

Let me give you a simple example: I teach a difficult technique to a group of beginning students who have no idea that the technique is "difficult" and are stair stepped to the point of being able to do something that higher ranking students might balk at. Another instructor looks at what I'm doing and tells me that it is irresponsible, that you can't teach beginners that sort of stuff, it's too difficult. I counter by referring the instructor back to my students, laughing, enjoying themselves and doing "difficult" stuff, which to them seems easy.

It's all about putting a label on something. This is difficult, that is not...who is to say? What is difficult for me is easy to someone

else and vice versa. As an instructor, I do not want my students to pick up my perceptions, I want them to discover their own potential, personally, without me giving it a flavor for them: "You'll never do that, you're too old, tall, short, big, small, slow, fast... whatever." You get the point.

Now how about what we do to our kids? "Oh Johnny isn't good a reading yet, he's only in the first grade." So what does Johnny think? What does he learn when his mom says that to one of her friends while he's standing close by?

The fact of the matter is that if you have grown to adulthood, there is a very high probability that you have a good deal of faulty information wandering about in your brain. Quite simply, you have built a vision of yourself that is inaccurate, but only you can change it. You built your image of who you think you are from what you accepted about yourself from your parents, your teachers, your friends. But you know what? They have faulty images too!

At some point, if we wish to get around the roadblocks that we find in life, we each must unlearn part of our programming and be willing to learn a more useful set of parameters for our lives.

So, we come back to the martial arts. Frequently, the martial way presents us with images of ourselves that are exact and at the same time, prejudicial. That is to say, the martial arts represent a mirror to our deepest self and we see all our prejudices about what

we believe we can and cannot do. Paradoxically, learning martial arts gives us the opportunity to shatter that very same mirror and create a new image that more truly reflects our innate abilities and thus far, hidden, potential.

Some of us don't like to look in that mirror, it is not always very flattering. Some of us are afraid of shattering the mirror, for fear that we will not get another one.

It is always about letting go, unlearning and beginning again.

No matter what I learn in the martial arts and in life, I know that I have yet to see clearly. I have still not found all the answers I seek and in order to do so, I must be willing to unlearn some of my past programming. Equally, I have a responsibility as an instructor to not program my own students with false images of who they are...now that's a truly tricky task!

The first step of unlearning is being willing to recognize that we cling to parts of our self image, whether or not they do us service. The second step is to be willing to take each experience as it happens and to avoid coloring it in the light of previous experiences of a similar nature. Both of these are things that we do almost subconsciously most of the time. Perhaps, learning to unlearn is a lesson itself, but either way, unlearning some of our negative programming can only lead a more useful self image and greater opportunities.

The way is always ahead, never behind.

Calendar of Events:

- ◆ Mel ton's Judo Tournament, Jackson, MS, may 22nd, 2004.
- ◆ Camp Catawba, Charlotte, N.C., June 16th–20th, 2004
- ◆ USJA Junior Ntl s, and Coaching Symposium, Chicago, IL, July 10th-12th, 2004
- ◆ Akayama Jujitsu Camp, Birmingham, AL . July 17th, 2004 Tentative
- ◆ USJI Junior Olympics, Ft Lauderdale, FL, July 23-24th, 2004
- ◆ Battle of Indianapolis, August 9th, 2004
- ◆ USJI Ladder and Fall Classic, Northglenn CO, Sept 3-5th, 2004
- ◆ Gentle Wind Judo Tournament, Baton Rouge, LA, September 25th, 2004
- ◆ Akayama Winter Camp, Gulf Shores, MLK Weekend, January 2005

Critical Point Analysis

It is a characteristic of tightly coupled, complex systems that small changes can create massive consequences. What is of significance here is that within in any tightly coupled, complex system there is some point that is more vulnerable to change than any other part. For instance, consider a car. A car is made of many parts, but some of them are capable of bringing the car to a screeching halt with only a minor change in conditions. Consider the implications of a nail in a tire or water in the gas tank. Or consider a mechanical clock mechanism. You can apply a fair amount of force to some of the big cogs and nothing much happens, but apply a small amount of force to one of the balance arms and the clock stops.

Judo is much the same. When two people are engaged in free fighting (randori), each is looking for some advantage over the other wherein a small amount of force (off balance) in the right direction can cause the collapse of the whole system (successful throw).

Have you ever wondered how similar this is to our lives? We go cruising along in life oblivious to the things around us and then all of a sudden (or so it seems), something knocks us out of kilter and our lives are destabilized. As I said last month, we tend to stay in our comfort zones until something nudges us out and forces us to do something. Frequently those “nudges” occur as a result of the application of force at a critical point in our tightly coupled, complex lives. So what are we to learn here? Once again Judo is a metaphor for life. In Judo we struggle against partners

and in life we struggle against ourselves, looking for an edge or a way ahead. Sometimes we push in all the wrong directions as we struggle against ourselves. We live complex lives and we are faced with thousands of choices every day, by pushing in all the wrong directions we expend huge amounts of emotional (and sometimes physical) energy in our efforts “to get ahead.” The application of some Judo principles offers a simpler way. Apply the concept of critical point analysis and locate the place in your life, where a small amount of well placed effort, could cause significant positive change. The trick is, of course, to know what it is that you are supposed to be doing in life and then to do it, come what may. When we are in conformity with our life’s purpose we are using our life’s energy efficiently and effectively. When we locate the critical point in our lives and use force efficiently we are, in effect, leveraging our lives and obtaining major steps towards our goals.

Of course the whole critical point analysis idea works in reverse also. Sometimes we are hit from an unexpected direction and our lives are toppled over because we were not prepared to meet the challenge and it caught us off guard.

So long as we live complex lives we will be vulnerable to critical point force applications that can either help push us forward towards our goals or destabilize us and cause us to back up and re-evaluate our lives.

Judo offers us real time lessons about how to manage our lives and deal with the ongoing balancing of the forces we meet in life.

USJA is offering a new membership special for the Summer:

\$20

Don't miss this one!!

We have a Project Action Foundation Scholarship open for a qualified At-Risk child.

If you are interested in knowing more call Miss Becky at 323 5522