

Pathways

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"So much to do, so little time to do it in."

Cecil Rhodes

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Peace of Mind

My son has a new book. It is called "The Diary of a Spider". In his diary, a young spider finds out that a daddy longlegs has been rude to one of the young spider's friends. He decides to go and give daddy longlegs a piece of his mind. The following day he goes to visit daddy longlegs and discovers that he is bigger than expected and decides to give daddy longlegs a piece of his lunch instead! It's very cute.

As it happens, I was reading another book about "Peace of Mind" and it crossed my mind how often giving people a "Piece of Our Mind" often does exactly that...we end up giving them our Peace of Mind.

I wonder how often our anger and our sense of being wronged results in giving other people our peace of mind. I sometimes watch people seethe over some real or imagined slight until they get so worked up over it that they just have to do something about it. So often in these situations, if we just let it go, we can keep our peace of mind and avoid discord.

Something I have learned in my own life, is that often when I give someone a piece of my mind, I am the one who ends up in the wrong because I missed something in the event that got me all worked up in the first place. I guess it brings me back to seeing what is real, versus what I want to see as being real. It also brings me back to the difference between my perception of an event and someone else's perception of the same event. Amazing as it may seem to my ego, I am not always right. If I just maintain

my calm, readjust my perspective and look at things from the other person's position it often transpires that instead of giving a piece of my mind, what I really need to do is offer my peace of mind. By offering my peace of mind to the situation I can often help to find a different path for everyone concerned that results in understanding rather than entrenchment.

When we give someone a piece of our mind we are often choosing to place ourselves in the "right" and the other person in the "wrong", we are choosing to be intolerant, blind and judging. We are putting ourselves in a position that leaves us unable to listen because we are so intent upon our ego's purpose. Moreover, we do nothing beneficial for our health. Giving someone a piece of our mind raises our blood pressure and creates a hormone dump that is similar to the hormone dump we get during times of conflict. We get agitated and lose the opportunity for joy.

When we offer to share our peace of mind in a situation (especially when we do it silently), we end up bringing calm into our world and open the opportunities for reconciliation, understanding, compassion and hope. We also avoid the negative consequences of getting ourselves all stressed up with nowhere to go... except downhill.

So, the next time you want to give someone a piece of your mind, think about offering them a piece of your lunch instead. You might just see things differently. ☺

Lifelong Learning

Having a young son is an excellent opportunity to see things through new eyes and from new perspectives. There is so much to learn. I have never been a parent before and everyday since our son was conceived has been *terra incognita* for me. It seems as though there is hardly a week that goes by that my son does not offer to me an opportunity for an “aha” moment or a “duh... how could I have been so blind” moment.

Without offering you any explanation for it, I tend to believe that children choose their parents and vice versa for the lessons that we have to learn from each other.

As a direct consequence of this perspective on our relationship, I see my son as a gift, as my greatest teacher. In the same breath I see my son as a person in his own right, not *my* son....not a person who is *mine*....as I said, he is a gift; not a possession.

Our son is with us for a part of this journey through life together and as such has insights, understanding and wisdom that are different from my own. Very frequently, if I am open to the notion, my son brings gifts of learning to his dad that enrich his dad's world.

I was thinking about this last night after the world was quiet and everyone had gone to bed and gone to sleep. Graham and I had had a difficult afternoon and I had discovered something after the fact, which, had I known before hand would have changed how I dealt with a situation that occurred. My son has yet to develop the facility of understanding to explain in words everything that he feels, so what you get is the raw emotional outburst. Sometimes the raw emotion is not the real problem, even if, as parents, we address it as such. Underneath the outburst is often something that my son feels but cannot yet express adequately so the frustration builds up in him until we get a five-year-old mel-

down.

So anyway, there I was in the quiet of the early hours of the morning pondering the day and how much being parent, a student of life and a teacher are all the same. This is not exactly a new thought for me, but in that early morning darkness, it seemed that I was seeing the thing for the first time.

I have spent the bulk of my adult life as a teacher of one kind or another. I sometimes think that this is one of my defining characteristics. At the same time, I have spent almost all of my life creating situations from which to learn. I am a lifelong student of life.

I have said countless times in this newsletter that everything counts, nothing is neutral and it is certainly so in this case. Everything carries a seed of learning if we allow it to do so. Every stress, every action, thought, word and deed; every moment of the day carries within it something new, something previously unseen, unheard, or unknown. What a gift!

How sad it is to me when I hear people say that old cliché: “Been there, done that, got the T-shirt.” How could they possibly have been there before? Every moment we take a new breath it is exactly that: A new breath. We may have breathed countless times before, but this one is new if we allow it to be so. What I am saying here is that I sometimes think that we fall afoul of forcing new situations into old paradigms of response.

We learn from our experiences and we have a tendency to use our past experience as a standard from which to judge a new situation. It is all about pattern recognition. By recognizing patterns we are able to negotiate our way through life. The trap, however, is that by forcing new situations into old patterns (albeit at an unconscious level), we can become blind to the novelty present in a new situation.

You see, we live between two extremes: We are either similarity-based

or difference-based. Similarity-based people compare new situations or information with previously experienced situations or information and look for the commonalities. Difference-based people look for the distinctions. In truth, we all live somewhere between these two extremes, sometimes being difference-based and sometimes similarity-based, depending upon circumstance.

There is learning to be had at both ends of this spectrum. Many years ago, while I was doing my doctorate, a very insightful advisor told me that “I was a bright guy, but that I hadn't learned to see the links between a pineapple and a doorstep.” What made this comment so much more profound to me was that up until that moment, although I respected the man for his towering intellect, I had “written him off” because he was untidy, disorganized, seemingly incapable of showing up to give his lectures on time or finding anything when he needed it. What a gift of learning *that* moment was for me.

I started looking for links in things, while at the same time seeing the freshness and newness in things. I started to do two seemingly paradoxical things at the same time. Anytime that you can hold a paradox in mind for any length of time and not see conflict, you are opening yourself to massive opportunities for learning. Taking an either/or stance is often to shut down the process of processing, which in turn shuts off the possibility of seeing more deeply into the nature of life. Life, it seems to me, is all about acquiring insight...seeing into, penetrating the surface veneer of the obvious in search of that which is hidden. Life then, is a lifelong journey of learning. It is the same for the teacher and the student, because, in truth, you cannot be one without being the other. Thank you for that lesson son. ☺

End Game

In the martial arts, self defense, and life in general, how you finish something is at least as important as how you begin.

When we train in the martial arts there is a thing called zanshin, literally finishing or remaining sprit. Zanshin relates to how we follow through on a technique or how we complete a move. In a real life combat situation, zanshin could manifest itself in compassion for your opponent or could result in significant injury for your opponent. In either case and in all cases between those seeming extremes, there is no room for relaxation, lowering of guard or inattention.

An interesting paradox in the martial arts as they relate to real life self-defense situations and the application of zanshin, is that the more we train, the more options we have in any given situation. The upshot of this is that where a lesser injury can be inflicted to neutralize an attack and maintain safety, compassion dictates that this is the path we should take. All life is scared and zanshin is a response to that statement. Consequently zanshin, taken literally almost implies that we remain alert, focused, concerned and aware of the possible ramifications of our actions in all settings.

Inside the martial arts school, zanshin may manifest itself in helping our partner to fall safely, punching and kicking with control, not applying joint locks with jerky, full-force actions and generally considering the safety and well-being of our partners. When giving a demonstration of form, zanshin means that we finish the form with as much focus, determination and attention as we did when we began the form. I was at a tournament a few weeks ago and watching some of the young children do their forms was an illustration of this very point. Some children started out really well, but lost focus at the end of the form and

other children maintained that same intensity all the way through to the end, even when some of them made mistakes in the middle of the form. Invariably these children outperformed the children who “let it go” at the end.

So let’s take this beyond the martial arts and apply it to life.

There are some people who are great coming out of the gate, but not long on endurance. Some people start things they never finish. Some people finish, but have no life left in them at the end of the task. A spirit of zanshin in life suggests to us that we finish what we begin, that we take it to whatever its conclusion might be. A spirit of zanshin also dictates that we are as focused and aware at the end of the process as we were at the beginning.

How we end, is at least as important as our intent at the beginning. Using an analogy from chess, the end game can completely undermine a winning strategy through a lack of attention in the last few moves of the game. My dad taught me this when I was young. We’d play chess at night after I had finished my homework and sometimes I’d get ahead of him, but as the game wore on, I’d lose attention and invariably I’d make a silly move that would cost me a major piece or two or place me on full defense with no time or room to develop my own attacks. I lost attention and paid for it.

I see it in my students on campus. Some of them are great at the beginning of the semester, but lose focus and let their attention wander towards the end of the semester as competing demands upon their time lead to unwise choices. Often these students end up doing not as well as their potential would indicate. The price they pay at the end of the semester is paid in the economics of attention to, and focus upon, the end game.

As an entrepreneur, I have to be con-

tinually vigilant for the health and vitality of my business. It has a life of its own, but requires my continuous attention to maintain its vigor. If I cease to pay attention to the business, it languishes and everyone it serves pays a price. It is not *my* business in that sense of the word; it is a business that serves the needs of its clients, so my responsibility is not actually to the business but to its clients. Inattention on my part is not failing the business; it is a disservice to its clients. Our clients deserve the best. They deserve the best at the beginning of our time together and for as long as we share time together. Zanshin dictates that I keep this in mind at all times.

You have read many times in this newsletter that everything counts, nothing is neutral. This is no less true with regard to the end game. How we play out the end game is not just about us, it is about those with whom we interact and those who will come after us.

One day I shall die and if things work out as they are supposed to in most families, my son shall outlive me. When the end game of my life is at hand it is my intent to have a spirit of zanshin, if, for no other reason than my son deserves no less of me.

All of which brings me to the significance of zanshin in the larger view of things: The next time you start something and have difficulty following through, look at your attention, look at your intention and look at your focus. Bring your full mind to the process and finish with zanshin, not just for your own well-being, but for the well-being of everyone with whom you interact in the process or who will be affected by the process. After all zanshin isn’t just about you. It is about your obligation to life and to living: In the final analysis, zanshin is an action of gratitude.☺

Radio of the Mind

Do you ever listen to the radio? Really listen? Or is it sort of a background noise to which you half listen during the day? Do you do the same thing with your mind?

Our sense of self and an instinct for survival keeps most of us tuned to WIIFM radio most of the time...you know, What's In It For Me! The problem is that along with the useful radio programming there's a bunch of useless radio. Along with thoughts of love, compassion, honor, sincerity and loyalty are a mix of thoughts including fear, doubt, regret, worry, shame and guilt.

Most of the time we don't pay much attention to the babbling self-talk, it's a habituated monologue with self that goes on day in and day out, often without any consideration for changing the radio station.

I am reminded of listening to the radio as a kid in England and the things that I learned from the radio by subconscious assimilation. I often find it amusing that I can remember things from the radio that I heard when I was very young....theme tunes to radio shows, voices of the radio presenters, some of the stock phrases...all filed away in the mental computer for later. As a corollary, much of what we think today is built upon the history of our yesterdays. I once read that our thoughts barely change more than 10% from day to day...that is to say something like 90% of my thoughts today are similar to those I had yesterday. That's distressing and amusing, both at the same time!

So, if we have an equal mix of easy listening (love, compassion, kindness etc), classical (childhood and other memories) together with less pleasant themes (worry, fear, doubt etc.), I guess that we also have the ability to select the programming to which we choose to listen.

Do you remember the line: "We interrupt this program to bring

you..."? Well, this is the way I tend to see changing the radio programming of the mind.

When you find yourself dwelling on, and listening to, doubt, fear or regret or worrying about things, interrupt the program.

By interrupting the programming as often as it comes up, we de-rail the process and eventually we create new mind paths and new mind programming to which we can listen with more beneficial results. That's not to say that this is easy. Some of our radio programs have been in the mind since we were very young and we have listened to the program for so long that we have adopted it as "our own special theme." Not to worry, it may take more effort to interrupt the program, but it is still possible to do so.

O.K., so we interrupt the program whenever we hear something we don't enjoy...what do we listen to instead? It seems to me that one of the most powerful interruptions to which we can attune, is any programming that focuses upon love of someone or something outside of ourselves.

When I find myself enmeshed in my negative radio programming, I attempt to bring my mind towards the great moments of my life...the people and places that gave me the greatest sense of belonging and connection or of joy and peace.

I'm not always successful; indeed the more entrenched the program that I want to replace, the more often it plays itself and the more often I have to interrupt it. By interrupting the program, I am serving notice to the radio station that it is time for tuning in some new programs.

It's a sort of mental clearing of the airways.

What are you listening to these days?



May						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	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	30	31			

June						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				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	30	

- ◆ 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
- ◆ Louisiana Open Judo Tournament, Baton Rouge, LA, September 30th, 2006

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