

Pathways

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**“The more fully we
give our energy, the
more it returns to
us”**

Jack Kornfield

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My life as an electron

I'm not sure whether you lie awake at night pondering the sub-atomic world and wondering just what it might have to tell us about life skills.

Oddly enough, I do.

I was reading a book about the collapse of civilizations and the energy costs that preceded a crash, which in turn, got me to thinking about how things tend to end up at a resting state. This line of thought led me to some thoughts about our unwillingness to change the *status quo*, despite clear evidence that we might be on the less-than-ideal path, either individually or collectively.

So let's look at it like this:

Electrons whizz around the nucleus of an atom and have a certain amount of energy as they do so. Occasionally they may shift into higher or lower orbits according to the amount of energy that they possess at the time.

So what?

When I feel energized in my life I can achieve all manner of things in short order. When I am depleted in energy, I struggle just to meet my daily obligations. The thing of it is though, my energy levels fluctuate. Some of the fluctuation is a function of my interactions with the world around me and some of it is a function of my own internal world...all of it is an indicator of my life's trajectory at the moment. All of it can be seen as an indicator of personal health...in a way.

We have spoken about comfort zones before. We all know that we can remain in a so-called comfort zone for a long time, even when we know that we are neither happy nor moving ahead in our lives. We all know that

eventually, some catalyst will stimulate some action towards doing something new, or setting a higher set of personal goals. The result is almost always that we move up in our energy levels and out of our comfort zone. From the perspective of an electron we shift into a higher orbit. So long as we maintain the energy necessary to remain at that level, we do so, but once we allow the doubts and fears to seep in, they sap our energy and we lose our focus. We fall back to a lower orbit.

What are your energy sappers? What sucks the life out of you? What are you willing to do about it?

Sometimes, electrons move from one atom to another when chemical bonds are made, and, again, from the perspective of the electron, they orbit a whole new system. In similar fashion, we can take a risk and step out of our comfort zones, we do something new and we accomplish something that previously, we did not think of as possible. When we do that, our universe changes. As I watch people do exactly this, I watch their stresses fall away and they seem to get younger...they are vibrant, full of life and ready for the next adventure.

Life IS an adventure, if we allow to be so. When we are energized, we know this to be true. When we are weak, we scoff at the notion.

When you face challenges in your life, it is good to remember that you are an electron in the great cosmos and that your energy will fluctuate. The only question you need ask is: Where do I want to go and how much effort am I willing to invest in the process? ☯

Growth and Change

By way of continuation from, and expansion of, the last article, it is a curious thing to me how humans, as individuals and as a species, tend to both seek, and resist change.

Obviously, there is something very warm and comforting about keeping things the way they are, so it is understandable that we resist change. ...“Better the devil you know” and all that.

Also, there is something exciting about the unknown. As we all know, history is full of pioneers, who were willing to split infinitives and “Boldly go where no man has gone before.” Seriously though, history is replete with pioneers in every field of knowledge and all possible environments (including space). Pioneers shake us out of our complacency and provide new avenues of exploration and eventually, new paradigms of living.

It is the pioneers who forge the way ahead, and show us what is possible.

Perhaps more than at any other time since the collapse of the Roman Empire, humanity stands at the very edge of monumental changes. We are in the midst of huge changes in the way we use energy and the ways in which we communicate. We are clearly approaching the end of the hydrocarbon era, and if our societies are to move forward, it must be using some other energy source. Additionally, we now have social and commercial networks that span the globe at the speed of light through the Internet.

Already, the Internet and the networks it creates has affected the way in which I run my business. Indeed, they affect both wholesale and retail trade and also marketing and the exchange of information within my industry.

In the bricks and mortar world of the dojo, the way it normally works is that a client comes to me with a martial itch, and I provide a martial scratch...we are both happy. Such is

the way of a physical business transaction in my industry.

Now, admittedly, the martial arts world is a small service industry in the greater scheme of things, but as I have just said, I see changes in the world affecting my business. I cannot do business the way I did ten years ago. I do not find people with itches in the same ways that I did. I do not communicate with my clients using the same media that I used to use. I have had to adapt what I do and what I offer, in order to continue as a successful business offering a valuable service to my clients. I see in my business a microcosm of the larger world. If I want my business to be successful, then it must change. Stasis is not an option.

But change is uncomfortable, and change makes us nervous. After all, we don't know what will happen if we change things. Hence the old adage: “If it ain't broke, don't fix it.” But maybe, just maybe, the traditional ways of doing business are changing purely as a function of the changes that are occurring in society.

And here is the link in the chain at the personal level:

Since the martial arts is an information service, you can't 'buy' a martial art. You can only 'learn' a martial art. So in a very real sense, I supply information, and that information will change your life, if you let it.

No matter how 'traditional' (read: unchanging) we might think martial arts classes should (or should not) be, learning a martial arts is, first and foremost, about personal change.

I like to think that by bringing us face-to-face with personal change, martial arts also remakes us into personal pioneers, treading new roads and discovering new ways of doing things...at an individual level. And right now, the global society of humanity needs that ability...in a big way.

So, refocusing on the whole of society again, for a moment, I suspect that in the future, people will look back and see these decades at the opening of the twenty-first century as being almost Dickensian...“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair...”

Therefore, even at the societal level, it is all about energy...the true cost of the energy that powers our civilization. Actually, it is all about the true environmental cost of the energy and the true energetic cost of commerce. I firmly believe that our global society is poised at an economic, energetic, and environmental tipping point. Which way we go from here is open to conjecture.

So what does this have to do with my newsletter?

Change.

The dojo is about change. We have an undercurrent of information, which forms the reason for our being a business, but the ways in which we have offered that information have changed a lot since I first started teaching martial arts. Every few years, I have had to 'reinvent' myself as an instructor and become aware of what it is that my clients are seeking. The one thing that has never changed about what I do as a martial artist, however, is that insatiable thirst I have for understanding, insight and wisdom.

Humans seek to understand and to grow in knowledge. Martial arts training offers the same thing. Growth requires change, and a willingness to be wrong and to start again. Growth requires an ability to fall over and phoenix-like, to rebuild yourself.

So here it is: Stasis is not an option. The yin and yang of it are Change and Growth, they belong together.

And that, ladies and gentlemen is another reason why I put this little symbol at the end of our articles: ☯

Empathy and Sympathy

Someone has a tragic experience in their lives and we offer our sympathy. Those of us who can put ourselves in that person's shoes, can be empathic. There is a difference.

Sympathy in this sense, is a sense of shared sadness, a sense of compassion for the plight or experiences of those we meet on the journey of life.

Empathy is a visceral and heart-felt understanding of what someone else feels because we have been there. We have endured something very similar, and so at a very basic level, we know what they feel...insofar as such a thing is possible.

All of us can be sympathetic to the needs of those around us, however, not all of us can be empathic. I might even go so far as to argue that since humans are all individuals with very separate life experiences, not one of us can be empathic very often. At this stage in the development of human consciousness, sympathy is a universal ability, empathy is local and specific.

I want to focus on empathy for a moment here, because I think that one of the things that can come from training in a martial art is a heightened sense of personal awareness. Again, perhaps it is all about sensing someone's energy level.

In the world of combat, and specifically, in the stylized combat environments of a martial arts school, there is a very big difference between a real attack and all other forms of "attack." When we spar in karate, we are not even touching each other as we move about, and yet each of us, very quickly, learns what is a real attack,

and what is not. We learn when to block and when not to block. We learn when we are being lured into making a false move and when our opponent is waiting for us to attack them. How do we do that?

For sure, there is an element of simple (well, maybe not simple) physics about it. There are only so many places a human body can move to given the initial starting parameters of two people faced-off to fight each other. As we gain experience in combat 'the next move' that our opponent will make becomes intuitively obvious, so when an unskilled player makes an attack, we see it long before it happens.

(As an aside, in the world of martial arts competition, really good referees see the scoring actions in advance, simply because they can see what is about to happen. This is especially true if the referee is, or used to be, a competitor.)

Secondly, there are the 'out of awareness' non-verbal facial gestures that tell us when an attacker is about to launch a real attack and when the attack is merely a distraction or a feint. Again, with experience, we begin to respond to those 'out of awareness' gestures *without thinking about them*.

And that's the bit I want to deal with. By taking part in combat training, and by facing the competitive challenge, what we learn is a mimicking of sorts, a learning of emotional agitation, as it were. When someone gets ready to attack you, you learn to read a whole stack load of pre-incident indicators, some of which are obvious physical signs, some of which might be micro-

facial gestures, but all of which tell us that the opponent has changed energy states and is about to attack in earnest. In Judo, the same things apply, but because we are actually holding onto each other as we practice, we can physically feel the change in muscular tension that precedes an attack.

The mimicking part of the equation, is that we do the same things to our opponents when we attack them. It is very much a case of *quid pro quo* in the combat-learning environment.

Do you recall my first article about the electron?

Well, in a way, combat players are electrons that are continually changing their energy states up and down as they prepare for, execute, avoid and counter, the attacks that they deliver and receive. So in a sense then, combat becomes:

1. An awareness of the energetic state of your opponent.
2. An exchange of energy as you move up and down energy levels in accordance with your opponents actions, and
3. An ability to influence the energetic state of your opponent, because you have been there, done that.

Heightened awareness carries outward from the training hall into our daily lives, if we let it. I'm not saying that martial arts makes us empathic...far from it; I am, however, saying that in an ideal world, martial arts can allow us to be more aware of the energy states of those around us, which may, in turn allow us to offer a helping hand when needed. And that, might just be a good thing for all of us. ☺

"No matter how difficult the past, you can always begin again today"

Jack Kornfield

The New Book

You might be justified in asking why I have not written a newsletter since September. The answer is simple...I have spent a good chunk of this fall writing and publishing a book. The book!

To explain a little further, what follows is a rewrite of the preface and the conclusion:

I wrote the coaching book for only one reason: to help coaches coach! Regardless of a personal coaching mission, it counts for naught if we do not recruit and retain students. My goal was to provide coaches with the tools necessary to be an effective bridge between the students and the knowledge they seek. As instructors, we touch the lives of our students. By writing the book, I wanted to help other coaches perform that task in the most positive, effective and efficient fashion possible:

If you want to be a successful martial arts instructor you will need more than excellent technique and a desire to teach, although these are both indispensable. Being a successful instructor is as much about a desire for continuing education as it is about what you offer to your students. I discovered early in my life as a martial artist that even if I acquire technical excellence or a trunk full of competition honors, none of it means that I will be able to convey what I think I know to my students in an effective manner.

Consequently, if any of us wish to become truly successful instructors, it is important that we acquire the skills required of a successful teacher; so this is why I wrote the book.

I took forty years of my experience as a student, competitor, instructor, coach, and referee in several different martial arts at the club, regional, national and organizational levels, and more than a quarter of a century as a university professor as well as fifteen

years as an entrepreneur and distilled them into the new book.

In a very real way, teaching martial arts is no different to teaching any other subject. Achieving mastery in any subject requires that each student acquires a set of skills and takes ownership in a process of continual investigation, which together lead to higher levels of understanding. Unlike other subjects though, martial arts touches us at many levels. Other areas of teaching may be predominantly physical or mental, or perhaps applied or entirely theoretical; martial arts can be all these things and more. The martial arts teacher, therefore, has the potential to profoundly affect the student's mental awareness and control, physical abilities, emotional awareness, and social skills. When we work with our students we hold the potential to touch all aspects of the learning and growing process.

As a book, I'm sure that there are places where, in later times, I will wince when I read what I have written, but that is as it should be. I have not yet learned all that I need to know. Those of us who like to call ourselves martial arts instructors are probably called to that role because we have a burning desire to learn and want to pass on what we learn. That; and we get pleasure from seeing our students go on to their own successes. If we are honest, however, we know that the learning is a life-long journey and that every time that we step on the deck to teach, we step on as both teacher and student. It is yet another reason why we bow at the beginning of class.

My journey as a martial arts instructor, much like many I suspect, is one of learning and growing, falling and standing back up. Such is life.

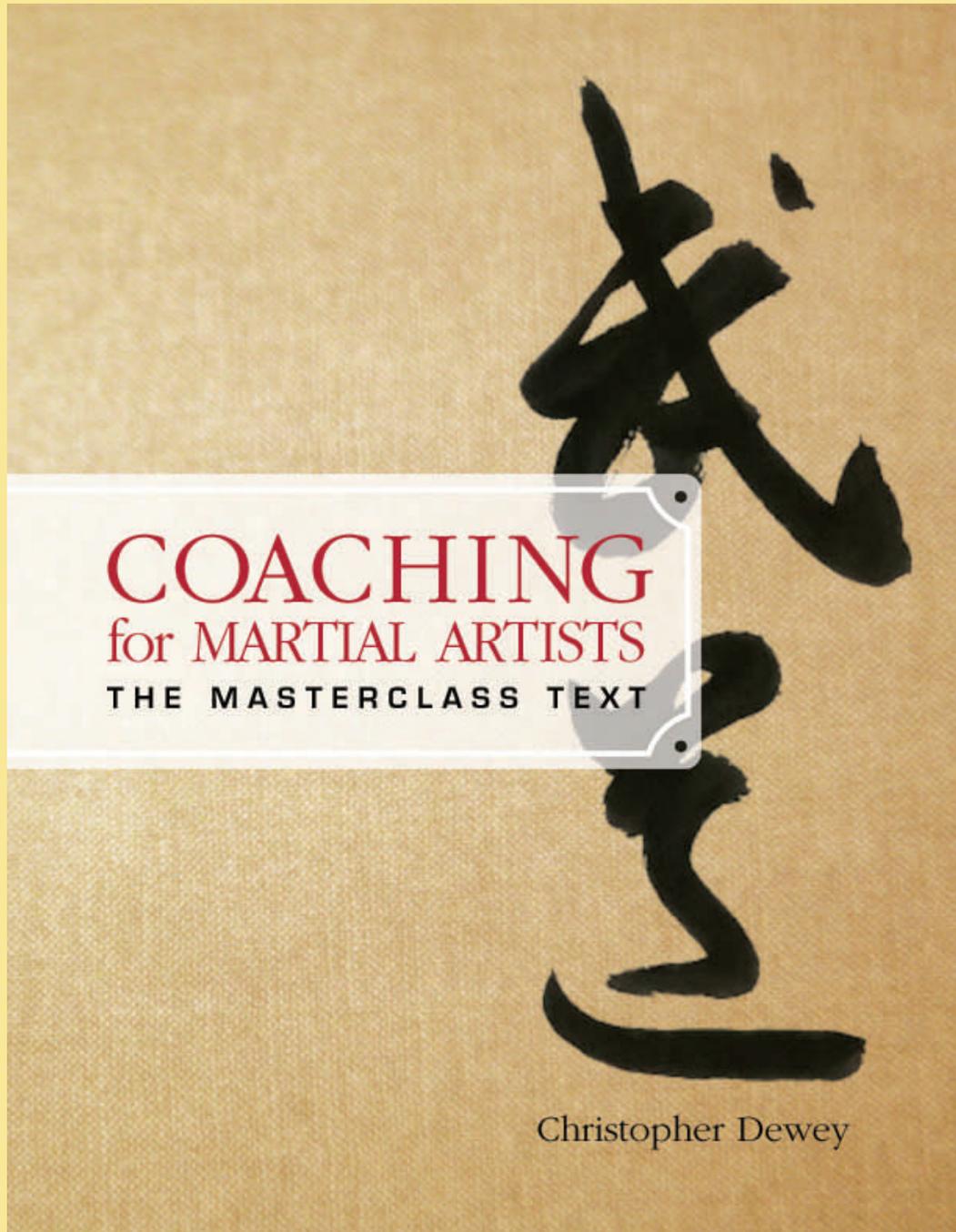
So, from a very real perspective, teaching and learning Judo and Ju Jitsu is both a metaphor and a way of life for me.

Finally, when I drew the book to a close I thought that perhaps I should attempt to come up with some suitably wise and useful things to say...but all I had to offer were my guiding thoughts, the thoughts that served as the undercurrent to the experience of writing...and if I am honest with myself, the undercurrents of running the business, being a university professor and being a martial arts student.

If I could summarize the undercurrents that have weaved their way through my life, they would probably be something like this:

- Know that you are a work in progress.
- Remember always, that you too, are the student.
- Remember always, that everyone you meet can easily be your teachers.
- Show up to class with an empty cup.
- Maintain an attitude of gratitude.
- Look for the opportunity and the lesson in all situations.
- Care for your students, each of them is a precious gift.
- Know what you want to achieve as a martial artist.
- Know what you want to achieve as a coach.
- And, for the Boy or Girl Scout in each of us...Be prepared.
- Be organized, and have a plan of where you are going.
- Lastly, remember that excellence is a habit.

So there is my reason for not writing the newsletter more frequently this fall. If you want to know more, read the book! A lot of what I might normally write is hidden between the covers.



Available at Amazon:

http://www.amazon.com/Coaching-Martial-Artists-Masterclass-Text/dp/1936533030/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1291386538&sr=1-3.

and Barnes and Noble at

<http://search.barnesandnoble.com/Coaching-for-Martial-Artists/Christopher-Dewey/e/9781936533039/?itm=1&USRI=coaching+for+martial+artists>

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