

Pathways

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“Unselfish and noble actions are the most radiant pages in the biography of the soul”

—David Thomas

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Green Elephants

I left a thread hanging last month that was partially deliberate and partly coincidental. I was writing about the idea that it is difficult to obtain a goal if you spend your time thinking about its opposite. Let's say you are unfit and that you want to get fit. Thinking about your lack of ability to climb a flight of stairs is not going to help you achieve your goal.

But....it's really not about opposites is it? It's actually about a taking a position and a creating a focus for the mind. We are raised to consider opposites in almost every aspect of life: Hot versus cold, right versus wrong, peace versus war...you get the idea. If you consider that according to physics, cold is merely the absence of heat you get a new perspective on things...by extension, hate and war could be seen to be the absence of love and the absence of peace respectively. So in our original example the lack of personal fitness is not really the presence of a series of conditions that we might associate with poor muscle tone or physical endurance, rather than the absence of vitality and higher levels of muscular functionality and efficiency. From this position of viewing the conditions necessary for personal health it becomes possible to focus on the things that you need to *acquire* to improve your health and indulge in activities that will promote health.

As a consequence you will begin notice and to attract into your life the opportunities for improving your health...eating more natural foods, avoiding fast food, soda and sweets, taking the stairs rather than the

ellevator, enrolling in a fitness program. All of these are positive steps *towards* personal health.

So much for taking a position.

Now let's look at this thing from the perspective of focus. At this point in this essay I do not want you to think about a **green elephant**. Don't do it! Now of course you all have an image of a green elephant in your minds.

This simple example illustrates that your mind focuses on its thoughts one at a time and creates images of whatever it is that you focus your attention upon...even a negative command. If you want to lose weight but spend your time thinking about not being fat (“I need to lose an extra twenty pounds”), your mind is unlikely to see images of a slim, healthy you. If you cannot see what you wish to create how will you know when you get there?

The message is very clear...be completely sure about where you place your attention..because where your mind goes, so your life goes. If you want to get fit, focus on getting fit, do not think about how “unfit” you are. If you want to lose weight, do not think about how much weight you have to lose.

So here is the essential element: Focus on the positive. Create in your mind images of what it is that you wish to manifest in your life, do not allow your mind to dwell on its supposed “opposite.” As you bring your attention to what you *do* want, rather than what you don't want, you will notice more opportunities occurring in your life that will help to bring you closer to your goals.☺

Desire and Hope

One of the main reasons...possibly the *only* reason people get involved in martial arts is to feel better about who they are. Some of us do it for fitness, some for security, some for weight loss, some for mental concentration and some for self esteem. Ultimately though, it all comes back to feeling better about who you are.

So obviously there is an innate desire. We want to be something different from who we are. We also believe that change is possible. We believe at some level that who we are is not our best self, that improvement is possible and that we have not yet reached our potential as people.

What is interesting about this, is that since each of us is exactly where we are in life, not one of us has any personal and direct proof that we can be better than we are right this minute...and yet we all believe we can achieve more or do more with what we have in life. Partly this belief is nested in the notion of past experiences...we have seen ourselves learn and grow and change in every waking moment, so we tend to believe that there is more for us to learn yet and that we are not done with learning and growing. We also see other people around us achieving more than we have

achieved, or achieving success in an area of their lives that we might like to emulate. This is why we have teachers and mentors....people who can show us the path to learning or to growth or to success in whatever endeavor it is that we have chosen to pursue.

So what drives it all? Desire on its own gets us nowhere. Obviously it takes committed action, but why do we sustain action in the face of obstructions and challenges that occur in the path? People who have strong internal belief systems, who believe in their abilities and their potential, who have positive self-expectancy will be more likely to achieve success in the face of inevitable set backs and challenges...but even that doesn't get it.

I believe that the thing that drives us on, that spurs us forward even in the deepest, darkest moments of our lives is....HOPE.

You can believe all you want, you can desire anything, but if you do not have any hope for positive change, I would argue that you are dead in the water.

It has been my experience over and over again in my own life and in the lives of the people I work with, both in university and in the martial arts, that people who hope for something better in their lives, have in their

hearts one of the most important keys to success.

Belief, desire, commitment, ability, potential...all of these are important, but if I do not have that initial spark of hope to get me out of the starting blocks and to keep me going when all around seems like it is falling apart on me, then I am going to be going nowhere.

So why do we get involved in martial arts? To feel better about ourselves? For sure. But we do it because we have hope and believe that we are not yet all that we could be. We hope for a higher, better self. We hope for opportunity to make the best of our potential. We hope for a path to be opened up to us, when we cannot see where to put our foot in the next step.

Hope kindles the flame of desire, self belief fans the flames and commitment keeps feeding the fire.

So whatever it is that you are facing in your life right now...look for the hope in your day and it will cause you to smile a little easier, walk a little lighter and achieve a little more...because each and every one of us can do more with what we have than what we have yet done. It is my hope that this resonates with meaning for you.



"One thing I know; the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve."

Albert Schweitzer,

Risk Taking

When my wife and I watch our students move and practice Judo we can frequently tell you a lot about their propensity for taking risks and their expectations of personal success. We can also tell you a lot about their inherent levels of personal doubt and fear.

Often the unwillingness to take a risk, and fear of the unknown consequences are related. Now, I wonder if we can use Judo as a metaphor for our lives?

Judo involves a lot of risk taking. Early on, you must learn to fall safely, which presupposes that at some point you have to be thrown to the ground by another person. At this point you must have trust in yourself to land properly and trust in your partner to take care of you during the throw. Throwing people involves a mutual bond of trust and where that bond of trust does not exist it is very difficult to learn Judo.

Sometimes we run into students who are unwilling to be thrown or unwilling to take a fall. Often they hide behind comments like: "My partner isn't doing the throw correctly." Often, the truth is somewhat different. When we stand back and watch the dynamic of the two students interacting, we will see that at a critical point in the technique the person about to get thrown makes a minor body adjustment that completely undermines the ability of the person attempting the throw to achieve success. The real reason for the failure of the throw in this case is an inherent fear of being

thrown...or, put another way, an inherent fear of giving your body to another person along with the tacit permission to pick you up and throw you onto the planet.

Trust is tricky stuff.

We find our trust being betrayed at all sorts of levels every day. Children find their innate trust in their playmates and their parents being betrayed unwittingly when their needs are not met. Adults believe their trust to be misplaced when a relationship falls apart or a business transaction goes wrong or a career expectation fails to pan out the way we thought it would. Frequently we become self-centered and adopt a "protect yourself first" attitude towards life. And in a lot of ways there is a degree of healthiness about doing so. If we don't look after our own needs and take responsibility for our own paths, then we are unlikely to get where we might want to go in life. On the other hand, unless we learn to trust other people and believe that a person's word has value and meaning, we will have a tough time achieving success. The fact of the matter is that Judo is synergetic. It takes partners to learn Judo. Successful Judo takes willing, trusting partners. Life is no different. We succeed in life because of the assistance that we receive from those around us....those we trust. Our marriages succeed because we trust our partners. No-one can succeed in a vacuum, no-one can truly say: "I did it all on my own." There is not a single one of us who can say that we achieved our suc-

cess without the help of others around us...our parents, our teachers, our friends, our 'enemies'....all of them have contributed in some way to our success.

So life is all about learning to trust yourself, learning to trust others, being willing to take a risk and believe in a positive outcome. If we allow them to, the negative influences in life can undermine our ability to trust and our ability to take risks. Ask any entrepreneur and they will tell you that going into business for yourself is a huge risk. It is also a reflection if an inherent trust that society wants what it is that you have to offer as a business. Take this one stage further...every couple that stands side by side and says: "I do" is affirming that quality of hope that exists in all of us and the quality of trust that is willing to take risks for the sake of synergy and personal or group success.

So after all of this...does anyone know why I do Judo? Does anyone know why I am willing to get thrown over and over and over again?

Every time someone throws me, I am affirming my trust in the process of living, my trust in myself and my trust in my partner. Every time I stand up again, I am affirming that the risk was worth taking, that I will not give in to my fears and that I believe in the inevitable success that awaits each and every one of us.

So the next time you feel yourself holding back in life, ask yourself why...and be honest! You might surprise yourself. ☺

**True enjoyment comes from activity of the mind and exercise of the body;
the two are united**

- Alexander Von Humboldt

Non-Belief

Do you recall the scene in the Star Wars movies where Luke Skywalker attempts to get his fighter out of the swamp using the force and fails? Yoda retrieves the craft for Luke and Luke says something like “I don’t believe it” and Yoda replies with something like “That, is why you failed.”

Leaving the force out of this equation for the moment, there is a very real lesson here.

Every once in a while I will be working in a martial arts class and a student will ask me to help them with a problem. Normally the request takes the form of: “Sensei, can you help me with this, I can’t throw _____.” So I demonstrate the move and explain the elements necessary for successful execution of the correct skill and you can see the disbelief in the student’s eyes. Normally the next question is: “How did you do that?” Of course, my students never finish that last question. What they are really thinking is: “How did you do that, when I’m bigger and stronger than you and I couldn’t do it?”

The answer is the same as Yoda’s. If you do not believe in your ability to move a 250 pound person, upend them and put them on their backs with a judo throw, then I can guarantee that you will not do it. Likewise, if you do not believe you can do calculus I can guarantee that you will not do it.

There is a quote that goes: “Whether you think you can or you think you can’t; you’re probably right”. I forget who first said it, but it rings so true throughout life.

Ultimately, that is what all this

comes down to. When a beginning student looks at me in disbelief, they stand at a threshold, whether they see it as such or not. When you stand at a similar threshold, understand that you have a choice. When you see someone do something that you cannot do you have a choice. You can either say: “I can’t do that” or you can say “I want to do that, teach me how to do it.” If your belief system is founded in positive self-expectancy, you will choose the second answer more often than not. You can become more than you were, or you can accept another limitation for your life.

In many ways running my business is no different. I place my own limitations on the success of my business when I look at others and say: “How did they do that?” For me, the thresholds are clear and the choices obvious. I can either become more than I was or I can accept a limitation. I choose to build my business in accord with my vision of what I want it to look like when it is finished. Anything that I can learn on the way to accomplishing my vision is of value to me and guess what? Frequently I see opportunities to learn something that was not part of my original vision and my vision changes a little bit.

All of us have areas in our lives where we say: “I don’t believe it.” What is important, however, is to recognize when we do it, realize that we are standing at a fork in the road and make a determined choice to choose the road that leads to growth, not the road that leads to stagnation. ☺

AUGUST						
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JULY						
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- ◆ USJI Junior Olympics, Atlanta, GA, July 23-24th, 2005
- ◆ International Martial Arts Symposium, Columbia, SC. October 1st & 2nd, 2005.
- ◆ Midoriyama Clinic, Huntsville, AL. October 29 & 30th, 2005
- ◆ Shinsei Clinic, West Virginia, November 4-6th, 2005.
- ◆ Melton’s Judo Tournament, Jackson, MS November 18th, 2005
- ◆ USJA Junior national s, Boca Raton, FL, 2006
- ◆ USJA Junior National s, Indianapolis, IN, 2007

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