

Pathways

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER PRODUCED BY CHRIS DEWEY MARTIAL ARTS, INC.

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 7

JULY 2006



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"Like water, which can only clearly mirror the sky and the trees so long as its surface is undisturbed, the mind can only reflect the true image of Self when it is tranquil and wholly relaxed."

Indra Devi

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Taking it seriously

A couple of months ago our program manager, Miss Becky, asked me to write an article about "taking training seriously" and I have had to think a little about this one.

At first you might think that an answer is simple enough...value what you have while you still have it. But that answer is not good enough, it is too trite.

We all go through peak experiences and at the other end of things experience the doldrums in our training. It is part of the ebb and flow of our moods and the energy of life. It is part of the group dynamic and it is part of our learning process. Having said that though, there are some students who never seem to take a *laissez faire* attitude to their training. When they are on the deck they appear take class seriously *regardless* of their apparent mood or any other mitigating factors.

For sure, we all have our favorite things to do and enjoy playing to our long suits. It is no surprise to anyone who has trained with me for any length of time to know that I love ground work Judo randori and the breadth of possibilities inherent in Ju Jitsu and its allied arts. I am less enamored of Tae Kwon Do or the striking arts...although give me a break-a-thon to attend and it's an absolute blast. We are all subject to idiosyncratic preferences. So why do I continue to train in Tae Kwon Do if I don't like it as much as Judo or Ju Jitsu?

Why do I eat chicken if I prefer beef? We need and thrive on variety. I look at the martial arts as a pie. Tae Kwon

Do is a piece of the pie. Judo is a piece of the pie, as is Ju Jitsu and all the other arts. They all have something to teach and to ignore any one of them or to denigrate any particular art is to be blind in some area of training. I hear too many people laugh at Tae Kwon Do or make fun of it, yet there is so much there to learn. True, the technical base is not as broad as perhaps Ju Jitsu or Hapkido, but that does not alter the fact that there is much to learn that can have a profound effect upon a person's abilities as a martial artist. It is the wise person who sees possibility and takes advantage of opportunity.

Now, how about taking it seriously? Taking class seriously is a value judgement. When I was in school I never took learning that seriously. Either it was too easy, I had other things I wanted to do or I didn't like the teacher, or it was too hard. In any event I didn't take learning very seriously. I always knew I'd get through. Looking back, I wonder how much knowledge and how many opportunities I lost because of my attitude. You see, one thing is certain...instructors will ALWAYS devote their efforts towards the students who take learning seriously. An instructor can only offer a bill of fare; the student is the one who decides to order from the menu and actually eat the meal! Taking the analogy a little further...if you don't like my cooking, I'll cook for those who do. But I AM gonna cook!

Amazingly enough, I can look back at my early education (all the way through my doctorate degree) and see

Taking it Seriously...contd.

a trail of lost opportunities and sporadic commitment.

Occasionally, I committed myself to the process of learning, but all too often I was looking elsewhere rather than at my textbooks or my lessons. In my defense, I would also tell you that I never doubted that I would reach my goals; I knew that I would succeed... Pretty darned arrogant for a kid with no worthwhile study habits. I did have a couple of wake-up calls along the way, but my responses were always short-lived. They were more like course corrections.

I don't think I really got truly serious about anything until after I became a college professor and started asking some of the more serious questions of life. My world changed again when I became an entrepreneur and yet again when I became a father. In each instance the responsibility that I acquired became greater and my obligation to rise to the requirements of the new responsibility was likewise increased.

I take what I do seriously and intend to have a lot of fun doing it. I have, however, become aware of the ripple effect in our lives. Let's go back to last month's newsletter (actually written yesterday). Students who do not work hard in class hurt their long term training. They lose the respect of their class mates and they throw away opportunities for growth. Students who work hard in class are never without training partners, bring high

levels of positive energy to class and have no time to criticise other people or complain about things. Students who take their training seriously don't deal in excuses, they deal with performance goals and commitment. Students who take their training seriously deal with the inevitable ups and downs of training with a greater degree of equanimity. Students who take learning seriously understand that, like Rubenstein, if they miss playing scales for one day, their performance suffers. It doesn't matter whether anyone else can see it, they can see it and that is all that counts.

Truly though, if there is one lesson that I have learned the hard way, it is that the ripple effects often do not reveal themselves until years after the fact. In our world of instant gratification, the ripple effect scenario is a tough pill to swallow. It is tough to tell a young student that not taking a particular course of action will cost in the long run. The student cannot see into the future and all you have to offer as an advisor is the experience of the years. I see students make choices that I know will cost them dearly. Sometimes I am able to give prior warning, sometimes the warnings would fall on deaf ears. The choices that I have made in my own life have given me an insight in some areas and left me blind in others.

I see training like a wedge. When people cease to take their training seriously it can easily become the thin

end of a wedge that leads to "I quit". Once we begin to make excuses for not working hard in class, or maybe skipping an occasional class, it gets easier to make that same excuse again....and again.

So what does it come to in the final analysis? Education in the dojo, in school, in life is the responsibility of each one of us. Take your opportunities seriously and gain from them as much knowledge and insight as you can. Every decision you make about what you choose to learn has ripple effects, which may not become obvious to you until much later in life. In similar fashion, every time you decide that something is not worth learning you will create ripple effects. The ripple effects not only affect your life, but they impinge upon the lives of others...maybe even the lives of your children (when/if that time comes in your life).

Lastly, let me say this. There will be ample opportunities in life for regret, for the decisions that we each make. Do not let the loss of learning opportunities be one of your regrets. If I have heard one thing over and over at the dojo during the ten years we have been in business, it is that our former students invariably tell me that they wish that they had taken things more seriously while they were here.

All we can do is offer opportunity. It is up to you to make the most of it.☺

The entire object of true education is to make people not merely do the right things, but to enjoy them; not merely industrious, but to love industry; not merely learned, but to love knowledge; not merely pure, but to love purity; not merely just, but to hunger and thirst after justice.

John Ruskin

Fear again....by Janet Dewey

For much of my life I harbored two irrational fears: math and spiders. When confronted with either of those, I would make an irrational decision because of my fear. There are two inescapable facts of life: (1) the only way to rid yourself of a fear is to face it, and (2) change will occur when the pain of change becomes less than the pain of staying the same. Let's take spiders for example. When I was an undergraduate geologist, I was standing on a ledge 15 feet off the ground looking at some rocks and suddenly realized that there was a humongous, enormous, spider in front of my face...actually there were dozens all over the outcrop. I did what any rational being would do...I screamed at the top of my lungs and jumped back. When I found myself scrambling for a toe- or a hand-hold to keep from falling, I decided it was time to re-evaluate my fear-related priorities.

Likewise for math. I had struggled through a couple of years in college taking math courses and getting C's by the skin of my teeth. Then I got to physics, which I needed for my major and actually found interesting. The problem was that it was intimately linked with math. I remember sitting in an exam one day, in tears because I was having a panic attack and couldn't think straight. I turned my test over and sat there trying to calm down. My professor asked me what was wrong, but I waived her off and told her I just needed a minute. I had a pretty stern conversation with myself in that minute when I asked myself "what is the problem?" Then I had an epiphany: "I have math phobia. I can't think straight because I am afraid." Two things happened: (1) I decided this was unacceptable, and (2) I had put a name on it, which meant I had taken ownership of the problem.

How did these irrational fears develop? It's amazing how much we allow little events to control our lives. When I was young and impressionable my mother told me the story of the time she had gotten bitten by a black widow spider while in the barn with a friend of hers from high school. She quickly started turning blue and would have died, except that her friend recognized what had happened, re-

mained calm and got her to the hospital. Now at the time I couldn't tell a black widow from a house spider and allowed my overactive imagination to run away with itself and equate spiders with death. I completely missed the point which was that even in a crisis situation, if you remain calm and cool you can avert disaster. Was my mother's friend afraid? You bet! Did he let his fear govern his actions? Probably. Did he let his fear prevent him from making a rational decision? Absolutely not.

Likewise for math. I remember vividly being humiliated by the teacher in my second grade math class, because I hadn't caught on to the concept being taught as quickly as my classmates (and probably never would as far as the teacher was concerned). As it turns out, it takes me longer because I often see too many possibilities and have trouble deciding which course of action to take. But I didn't know that at the time and I allowed myself to believe I couldn't do math and that I was slow at math. I fulfilled my teacher's prophecy by choice!

What did I do to alleviate these fears? Working in forestry cured me of my spider phobia. When I was working in the Mobile swamps, we had to walk through fields of 3-foot tall mosquito-infested grass in the wee hours of the morning when there was still dew on all of the webs. There were literally hundreds of webs we would have to walk through, each of which had an enormous golden orb or garden spider in the middle of it. I didn't like it but had to do it; it was my job...it was how I got paid. It paid the rent and put food on the table. The funny thing is, after walking through hundreds of webs and finding spiders on myself, I never got bitten once. I frequently get stung by wasps, but the spiders have never been a problem. So what was I afraid of? I still don't like them, but I can now watch a spider walk across the floor without the urge to kill it, and can even catch one in a glass and release it outside.

My undergraduate physics class cured me of my math phobia. No, I didn't do well on that test, but I used it as a learning experience. I recognized that I couldn't do

the math until I mastered the urge to panic. I couldn't suppress the urge to panic unless I felt I owned the material. So I began doing my homework two and three times...not rote practice mind you, but finding at least two ways to solve every problem. This had two benefits in a test situation: (1) if I forgot one way to solve the problem I would remember another and (2) I was no longer slowed down by indecision about which method to choose because it didn't matter whether I took the efficient answer or the cumbersome one...I would still arrive at the answer.

I'm sure you get tired of reading about our son, but he's such an educational experience for us. It would be *so easy* to push our fears off onto him! When he was two, he tried to grab hold of an orb spider and both Chris and I shouted at him in referee voice. We froze him in his tracks and he wouldn't go near the spider for weeks. Happily, he has forgotten that incident and we are much more careful about our reactions to his curiosity. He loves spiders and catches daddy longlegs and reads books about spiders and we look at them together and talk about how fascinating they can be.

Will I pass my past fears on to him? I certainly hope not, but it requires extreme diligence. Curing ourselves of our fears, making ourselves stronger...requires diligence. Be careful what you say to yourself and your children.

Put a name on the problem and take ownership! I now know I can do math quite well or I wouldn't have made it through a graduate degree (although I still don't enjoy it) and I can now sit and study a spider for a long time and even share a bench with one!

What's on your list? ☺

Beginnings

At the beginning of *Dune*, the narrator, Princess Irulan, tells us that a beginning is a very difficult time. And so it is. We, as a dojo community stand at a new beginning, because it is a certainty that businesses and people must continually reinvent themselves or stagnate. If we look back at the past few months and ahead to the near future, we can see a series of landmarks in the life of our community:

- In April we had the largest Black belt rank promotion ever in Judo.
- In May the first two of our very own Black belts graduated from High School.
- In July we moved to a new, larger facility.
- In October, the dojo will cross the ten-year threshold.

It is a time of change and therefore also one of crisis, which means that it is time to take advantage of opportunity and at the same time, take a risk. Any time that we step out boldly into the unknown there is a risk, but there is also the joy of pushing our limits, gaining truer insights into our own potential. So as we meet each of these landmark events, it is a time of questions, of recommitment, of setting new goals for ourselves as individuals and for our community as a whole. It is a time to ask if we are settling for “good enough”, when excellence is within our reach?

Our April Judo rank test was a first in the history of the dojo. We promoted eight Shodans and one Nidan in a single night. Some of you were no doubt pleased; some of you may have questioned our judgment; and some of you may have been a tad confused. Understand this at the outset: First Degree Black Belt (Shodan) is the *beginning* of the student ranks, all the ranks to that point are preparation.

As we progress through our ranks, we each discover that there are pivotal points in our growth at which we discover a need to recalibrate. Perhaps it is time for some explanations. The April rank test was a threshold event that I have seen coming for about two years.

After the rank test, Janet and I asked ourselves why, with each rank test, we had increasingly difficult decisions to make regarding Shodan. We came to the realiza-

tion that we have come so far from our own Shodan ranks that it is getting tougher to recognize what Shodan should look like! If I had a videotape and could look back at my own Shodan rank, I would have to say that I’m not sure I was as good as many of those who tested in April. *A number of you are better than both Janet and I were at the same rank.* We certainly knew our syllabus better than most of you but you are probably technically more proficient than we were. The main thing that has been lacking is belief in yourselves as black belts, which comes from only one place. Both Janet and I competed our way to Shodan (and beyond); many of you have not. When you stand on a line and say to someone else “throw your best at me” it makes a difference to your confidence level. Many of you have simply not stood on that line. You have not taken what you know and put it on the line. You have never truly tested yourselves. The adrenaline and unpredictability factor of tournaments goes a *long* way to mitigating the sense of “too many minds”. Tournament isn’t about fighting the other guy; it is about knowing yourself. It takes courage and commitment.

Where does this leave us now? We know that some of you don’t quite feel up to your rank, but we also use rank tests as a wake up call. It is time to get serious. We believe in your potential, now it is up to you to prove it to yourselves and the community of which you are a part.

Janet and I are challenging you to work as a black belt team, to help one another build on your strengths and improve on your weaknesses, to grow together for the common good. For all of you it is a call to action. Good enough simply isn’t. Black belts should inspire the lower ranking students. Ask yourself: Do I inspire my classmates?

For all of us, the new dojo is a beginning, an opportunity. Take it seriously and let’s make this place an environment of such quality that we need a waiting list to get in!! ☺

July						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
30	31					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

August						
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			

- ◆ Akayama Summer Clinic, Jacksonville, AL, July 15-16th, 2006
- ◆ Louisiana Open Judo Tournament, Baton Rouge, LA, September 30th, 2006

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