

Pathways

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**The glory is not in never failing,
but in rising every time you fail**
Chinese proverb

Knowing

After thirty-five years of training in martial arts I know “about” martial arts but I do not know martial arts. I am not martial arts. What I know is a biased perception of what I think I have experienced. The curious thing about it is that when I am a witness to my training, I learn so much more as compared to times when I am training.

Say what??

Years ago I had an instructor who told me that one of the most useful things I could ever do was stand at the side of the mat and watch myself do Judo, rather than be so wrapped up in the “doing” of Judo that there was no room left for the “experience.” He was right. Since then, there have been many times when I have been a dispassionate observer of myself learning and doing Judo, but in all that time there have only been very fleeting moments when I was Judo.

Let me see if I can explain it a little more clearly. When I am wrapped up in doing Judo, I can do some technically nice moves. When I stand at the side and observe myself “doing” Judo, I get out of my own way

and Judo flows naturally, without effort. But it is still me “doing” it. Then there have been exquisite moments in the thirty some years in which I was merely a conduit for the art. *I* was irrelevant, like a canvas for a painting. Who cares about the canvas? All we see is the painting. These exceptionally rare moments left me with profound insights into Judo. In those moments I was Judo, and although they leave a trace of their passing, they do not remain. Such moments are elusive, transient but carry with them deep instruction.

Consequently, most of the time I am “doing” martial arts, and I know “about” martial arts. Rarely, I see myself from outside in moments of flow and even more rarely I am merely a canvas upon which Judo paints itself.

So how does this impact our lives? Actually it fits at a very basic level. We spend the bulk of our lives filling our time with the myriad activities that constitute our daily lives, thinking that we know what we are doing. Most of the time, if we are honest, we are deluding ourselves. We know about our

jobs, our families, our world, but most of the time we do not truly “know” these people and things. In our eagerness to fill our time, we lose the bonds of connection between each other and our world. If this were not the case, parents would not be shocked by the behavior of their adolescent children, spouses devastated by the actions of their mates, and employees disappointed by their employers and vice versa. It is curious to me how much of our time we spend living in a fog of partial data, making assumptions about the people, places and events around us.

There are for all of us, moments when we flow with life and we are at our best, seeing more clearly than usual and being efficient, effective, more compassionate and caring. Life seems effortless. These are the moments of flow in our daily lives and we are energized and rejuvenated by them.

Obviously then, I strive to bring those moments of flow into my life at all levels, because it is only then that I stand any chance at all of finding much harmony.

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Moving

Babies are such infinitely cool teachers. Give a baby your finger to hold and it is as though you are in a vice. Babies do not have a sense of separation of self and other and therefore when they grip, they do so in a complete and totally relaxed fashion. We forget how to do this when we discover “self” and “other.”

Unfortunately when we lose the ability to grasp, we begin to acquire movement skills that are also less natural. We learn how to move in a world in which there is distinct separation between self and the rest of the world. As the years go by, what we do feels more and more natural until all our actions seem so natural to us that anything else feels “awkward.”

So at some point, some of us start learning martial arts and it feels “odd”, “different”, “unnatural”. As one of my students recently said.... we have to unlearn some stuff in order to learn how to move. It is true, there is a sort of letting go of cherished ways of moving, an opening up to new possibilities. With that unlearning and new learning comes a deeper, more profound sense of balance and we begin to rediscover what the human body is truly capable of doing.

I have a picture of my son, just barely three, kneeling in front of a window watching the rain. He is kneeling with his little toes crossed,

his back absolutely straight and relaxed and his hands folded in his lap. He remained motionless in this position for almost half an hour, watching. No-one told him to do this, no-one told him how to sit. He just did it. He had just turned three.

In time we forget, we learn how to slouch, shuffle, round our backs and shoulders, carry stress and over time our bodies begin to feel heavy and tired. We forget how to sit, stand, walk and move with grace. It takes effort to remember what our bodies did when we were very young and it is difficult to let go of our unconscious habits. Part of the difficulty is that we each have to see what it is that we are doing before we can correct it. It is difficult to change something you cannot see.

Look around you at people walking down the street or sitting in a restaurant. With a little bit of practice you will be able to recognize people who have bad posture and how they carry their stress. When you start to study the people with whom you deal every day, you will begin to notice when they are stressed before they have even spoken to you. If you make a habit of becoming aware of your own posture, you will start to make changes in your self and slowly over time people will wonder where you acquired the ability to tell when they are stressed and when they are relaxed....and yet their bodies are shouting at you in every

movement they make.

Martial arts work the way they do because they tap into both the mental and physical aspects of movement. As we learn the moves and acquire more elegant and relaxed ways of moving we begin to become aware of our posture. What used to be habitual ways of movement that we did not even notice in our daily lives, become uncomfortable and we begin to see trickle down changes in posture.

Several years ago, one of my Judo instructors was teaching a class on form at a week long camp in Colorado Springs and he said something that has stuck with me ever since. He said that as we develop our habits of movement we can become incredibly good at doing the wrong thing, until we are so good at doing it, it feels right and what are actually better ways of moving, feel awkward and wrong. It took a while for this to sink in.

Proper motion also promotes health. When we hold our bodies correctly we align our skeletal structure, we allow our internal organs room to work and massage them as we move. We breathe more deeply and get better oxygen uptake for every breath, simply because we exchange more stagnant air with each filling of the lungs. Better oxygen uptake means more efficient digestion, nutrient uptake and muscle activity.

So straighten up, let the stress go. Learn how to move.

Parting the Clouds, Seeking the Way

Gichin Funikoshi

Founder of Shotokan Karate

Magic

I was at the United State Judo Association Coaching Symposium last month and we had a truly talented instructor there who is also a stand up comedian and a magician. So between laughing myself senseless and being amazed by his conjuring abilities, I was touched by some pretty profound messages.

Hidden within the comedy and the magic were some rather deep lessons about compassion, connection and giving. Now, to be honest, I have no idea whether these messages were intentional or not, but they were present in my perception of what I saw.

Before I get too deeply into this article, it is probably best that I define how I will use the word magic here. I am not talking about some supernatural non-explainable phenomenon. I am talking about our inability to see what is right before us.

We only ever see what we want to see, which is the essence of magic tricks. Our eyes delude us and magic happens. Understand the trick and it is easy to “perform”, but it doesn’t happen until I believe it can. Interesting point.

Much is the same with martial arts: It does not happen until I believe it can. I like to use Judo as an example because it is so deep in me. I watch beginners struggle with Judo, trying to make it happen and they force weak positions, create rigid actions and generally lack anything that might be described as grace or elegance. That’s not to say I am any

different. But occasionally, we let go and the Judo happens....as if by magic. When I see it for what it is, as opposed to what I think I want to see, something novel happens.

Something unexpected, something Judo. The same is true of teaching or any other endeavor for that matter. Until I believe in something, there is nothing out there that can happen for me. Life can come and go, flowers can open and close, but there will be no magic in it.

It so happens that Mark (our comedian), is also a children’s teacher. He teaches science and he teaches martial arts (Judo and Ju Jitsu specifically), and I have to tell you, I have watched his classes almost spellbound. What he does, people call “gifted” or “talented”, and I find myself in the same vein as I watch and wonder: “How does he do that?”

But then as the tears are rolling down my face and my sides are aching from his comedy act I am suddenly hit by his sense of caring. He does what he does: Teach kids science, teach kids martial arts, teach adults to take themselves less seriously, shows kids of all ages the magic of life...because he cares. It’s that simple, that profound and that easy. Because he cares, he creates bonds of connection around him and those bonds of connection allow the magic to happen.

The magic always happens right in front of our eyes and yet we don’t see it. Martial arts changes our lives right in front of us, and yet we don’t

see it until years later. Martial arts works its magic in little ways that we don’t see on a daily basis, but if we believe in the process of change we look back in wonder, years later and are grateful for the gift of learning and the gift of understanding and the gift of change.

When a child does something and you can see in her eyes that she didn’t think that it was possible until it happened, you know that the magic is happening. When a young man lays to rest a ghost because he see in himself something better than he was, you know the magic is happening. Martial arts is a physical journey, a mental journey and a magical journey. Because it works at so many levels at the same time, the opening of a “physical” window is often associated with opening a window in the heart. When a student lets go of the strength he has relied upon to make his techniques work, he may, in the same moment let go of years of stress. When a young lady lets go of self-doubt and throws a man much bigger than herself in a seemingly effortless move, it is possible in that same moment to see that her limitations in life are only the ones that she has placed there. These, for me, are moments of magic. These are the moments I live for.

I can show you the tricks. I can perform the trick, but until you believe in the magic it cannot happen. For your gift this past month Mark, I cannot thank you enough.

The magic cannot happen until you believe it can.

Mark Tripp

Calendar of Events:

- ◆ SMAA In House Junior Judo Tournament, August 21st, 2004
- ◆ USJI Ladder and Fall Classic, Northglenn CO, Sept 3-5th, 2004
- ◆ Bokken seminar, SMAA, Van Bushnell clinician. September 17 & 18th, 2004
- ◆ Gentle Wind Judo Tournament, Baton Rouge, LA, September 25th, 2004
- ◆ International martial Arts Symposium, Columbia South Carolina. October 1st – 3rd, 2004
- ◆ Akayama Winter Camp, Gulf Shores, MLK Weekend, January 2005
- ◆ USJA Junior Nationals, Toledo, OH, July 1-2nd, 2005
- ◆ USJA Junior nationals, Boca Raton, FL, 2006
- ◆ USJA Junior Nationals, Indianapolis, IN, 2007

Opinions

Opinions, we all have them...about everything, but they are almost always built upon incomplete information and are often wrong. One of the things about opinions is that we let them influence our reality and by doing so often bring unnecessary conflict and confrontation into our lives.

Look at it from this perspective for a moment: I filter what I think I am experiencing of the world through my senses and build a perception of what I call reality. Because I am flawed in my perspective abilities, I do not hear all the nuances of the words of the people around me, or understand fully the meaning behind their actions. My brain filters everything through a data storage system of all previous experiences, attempting to find some frame of reference, some correlation with my past history. Then I create a judgment or an opinion about what is happening in my world and act on the basis of my opinions.

It is a broader view of the world, which accepts that people do not share my perception of reality. I do not have a corner on the market value of truth. I am capable of error...all the time. It is probably fair to say that I don't truly "know" anything. All that I think I know are the assumptions, opinions and judgments that I have made about the life and experience that I believe I have lived. Of course the same is true about each of us. And when you look at people around you from

that perspective it is remarkably liberating. When I see that the people around me are also working with partial information making the best sense of it all that they can, I am more capable of understanding and acting in a more compassionate and caring fashion.

When my judgments and opinions are rigid, the resulting actions of my life are less caring. When I act on my assumptions, without considering the possibility that there is error within them or that I may not even see an assumption that I have made, I am much more likely to make false steps and injudicious choices.

When I open my mind to see other people's opinions and truly work at listening to and feeling what they are attempting to convey to me in their words and their actions, I am much more likely to act in harmony with the world around me.

But saying it and doing it are two entirely different things. I have to make a habit of stopping myself and checking my assumptions or acting on my opinions without considering other perspectives. There is a level of mindfulness at work here also. When I act on impulse rather than upon reflection I am more prone to error. When I am fully present in the moment and not concerned with the outcome I want, I am much more likely to obtain the goals that I seek. There is a huge difference between forcing your way through and flowing through.

It is one of the lessons of the martial arts.

Enthusiasm is one of the most powerful engines
of success

Ralph Waldo Emerson

SMAA
In-House Junior Judo Tournament
August 21st, 2004

***A chance for all our Juniors (under 16)
to come out and play with some other
clubs from the area.***

***If you would like to save both trees and
time while at the same time helping to
reduce our overhead by receiving this
newsletter via e-mail, please give us a
call at 662 323 5522 and ask to speak
with either myself or Miss Becky.***