

Pathways

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"Good people are good because they've come to wisdom through failure."

[William Saroyan](#)

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Intention and Desire

In our newsletter it might seem that we talk about desire, intent, goal setting and similar topics A LOT.

I wonder why that is. Could it be that almost everything that we do as humans has something to do with personal learning and that personal growth deals with understanding of where we are and knowing where we want to go?

Last month we spoke about practicing martial arts with intent and I had more than a couple of conversations about exactly what that means.

According to the dictionary, intention is to have one's mind fixed upon a definite purpose, to have a plan for achieving a specific result. Desire, on the other hand, is defined as a feeling of pleasure or satisfaction that a person would get from achieving, obtaining or possessing something.

Do you see the distinction here? Intent involves a very clear visualization of a plan that leads to the achievement of a goal. Desire is merely a projection of the feelings that would be associated with achievement of the goal...there is no implied plan of action.

Don't get me wrong here, desire is important. If you are going to achieve anything in life, you have to see value in the achievement of the goal and the perceived value has to bring something of benefit into your world. In coaching terms, we talk about meaning, value and benefit. Without a projection of how good it will feel to achieve something, you will experience difficulty maintaining the necessary drive to see things through.

What I want to focus upon is the no-

tion of intent. What does it mean to intend something? Do we merely have to create an intent in the mind and then let it be? What does it mean to practice with intent?

Whenever we do something with intent, we do it in a purposeful manner. There is no random process here, there is a very specific, focused set of steps that will be accomplished on your way to the result.

When you practice martial arts with intent, you do it with complete focus and attention. The point that I am trying to get to is that if we do not practice in a meaningful way, whatever we are *intended* to learn will be diminished and will not reveal for us its true value. If I practice with intent then I make sure that every action has purpose and that no action is wasted. My actions become precise and efficient, so that no energy is wasted. If I practice with intent, then my mind is focused solely on the matter at hand and I miss none of the body language cues that my partner is sending to me. I am more able to pick up subtle nuances of action and adjust my responses accordingly.

In its most sublime state, intention brings a level of congruence in both thought and action for which there are very few parallels. There are no physical or mental distractions, there is only the plan of action and the goal upon which that plan is predicated. If you are in any doubt about what I mean here, then look at two people who are truly, deeply in love with each other sitting across from each other in a restaurant, sharing a meal.

'Nuff said. ☺

Pride, Self Esteem and Knowledge

I got into a discussion the other day concerning the varying definitions of the words 'humility', 'pride', and 'arrogance' and the terms 'self-image', 'self-worth' and 'self-esteem.'

In our society we run into a lot of conflicting information and advice about what they mean and how they apply.

Let me start here: I am often referred to as a 'sensei', which is simply the Japanese word for teacher. Unfortunately, in the West we have given it an unfounded, lofty meaning that is out of all proportion to the real intent. As far as I see things, there are no teachers, there are only students who are just beginning and students who have more experience and are willing to share their knowledge.

All of which brings me to this: When we place ourselves either above others or place others above us, we run into a very real risk of creating a false hierarchy of personal worth. If I have learnt anything from teaching martial arts for some thirty years, it is that I can learn as much from beginners as I can from those who have more rank or deeper experience. It all comes down to personal perspective and perhaps to the story of the Zen monk, the tea cup and the pupil.

The story goes that a pupil asked a Zen monk to be his teacher so the monk invited him to have a cup of tea. As they sat to drink, the pupil would not be quiet and listen. The

Zen monk poured a cup of tea and allowed it to overflow. The pupil told the monk that he was spilling the tea and the monk explained that you cannot put anything into a cup that is already full.

When we think of ourselves as having learned it all and begin to be proud of our achievements, we lose the ability to be humble in the face of all that there is that we could know. Life is an ongoing educational process, at all times and in all environments. All you have to do is maintain a sense of proportion and perhaps a child-like wonder.

When we think of ourselves as accomplished or skilled it is easy to become prideful and arrogant. Yes, I am proud of some of the things that I have done in my life, but they are not what you might imagine. When I think about what I supposedly 'know' about (for instance) geology or martial arts, I am only too aware of just exactly how small is my depth of knowledge.

My perspective gives me a sense of humility before the sheer magnitude of universal knowledge...but equally there is a sense of self-worth here.

I have spent a life searching for knowledge of one sort or another, I seek understanding, higher levels of awareness. So, when I look at my self-image I see a life-long student, and a sometime teacher. The intersection point between the two roles is the pinnacle of my knowledge at any given moment. I see myself as no more special or unique than any

other 'thing' in the universe, no more or less special, but equally, no less valuable.

My life has both potential and value and it is my responsibility to discover exactly what those words mean. Once I begin to move towards reaching my potential, my value as a human is revealed to me through experience. As I move forward, then I build self-esteem, being cognizant of activities that build my self-worth. Self-esteem, at its root, seems to begin the moment that you are willing to take personal responsibility for your life in its entirety.

There is a critical point here. I do not create my self-worth at the expense of someone else. My self-worth is not governed by the fact that I know more, or am more able, than someone else in a particular area of knowledge or skill. My self-worth is predicated upon personal growth and discovery.

I suspect that this is, perhaps, why I teach. From my perspective, the gift of learning is, one the greatest gifts that I can offer another human.

As we discussed recently, I suppose that at some level I believe that humans are on a collective search for understanding and higher levels of consciousness. If such is the case, then I am simply a bearer of small segments of that collective knowledge base and it is my responsibility to share that which I learn, and seek that which I do not know.

☺

The wise person possesses humility. He knows that his small island of knowledge is surrounded by a vast sea of the unknown.

Harold C. Chase

Chronic Stress and Awareness

One of the things that has come home to roost recently, is the effect of chronic stress. Actually, insofar as I am concerned, for this article, chronic stress, grief, sadness or pain will all work here, so go ahead and choose your own personal poison.

Now there's an interesting word. Poison. Could it be that stress, grief, sadness and pain are all varieties of poisons to us at some level?

One of the things about chronic stress and pain particularly, is that they can pile up in small, almost unnoticeable amounts. Often, we don't notice what it is until it is gone.

I remember years ago, when I had a torn cartilage in my knee from an old hiking injury, I walked around with my knee partly locked up for about two days before I finally went to the emergency room. My orthopedist adjusted my knee and the cartilage popped back into position. A wave of intense relaxation washed through my entire body. He wrote in my chart "patient displayed exquisite pain." Exquisite was not a word that came to mind at the moment, but it was incredibly accurate. The thing was, I hadn't realized how much I had adapted to the constant pain. Yes, I knew I was in pain, but I didn't realize how much I had tuned the bulk of it out of my conscious mind...until it was released by my doctor.

The most interesting aspect in all of this is our ability to absorb and adapt to all manner of stress. We can adapt to low level stress, continually applied and not even notice it is there. We can adapt to short, intense, stressful events that are repeated periodically, so that each one has less of an effect than the last. We

can adapt to continuously high levels of stress by simply blocking it out and focusing upon work.

So what are the effects of the stresses to which we adapt over long periods of time and never release?

For the time being, we'll leave aside the negative effects on the immune system, repair and regeneration, blood pressure, digestion, and heart health. What I want to focus upon, are some of the mental aspects.

We are probably all aware that emotions are affected by our hormones and that the continuous secretion of stress-related hormones is like being on an adrenaline overload. Stress hormones are normally associated with our sudden fight or flight responses, so the application of stress over long periods of time is bound to take a toll, sooner or later.

Stress anything for long enough and it fails from fatigue. The system simply wears out and breaks down. Humans are no different.

How about other effects that impact those around us....Are you more irritable and shorter tempered than usual? Do you find that it is a little harder to concentrate and that you are forgetting little details of things? Do you find yourself losing focus, while you are in the middle of a task? Do you find yourself drifting or zoning out?

A lot of the time we ignore the tell-tale signs. We simply put it all down to a heightened pace of living...which is of course, its own form of low level stress.

What can we do about it?

Well, my first answer is to get a good, high energy, sweat-producing, smile producing martial arts workout...but you might see that as a

marketing ploy. Which, at one level it is. At another level I cannot tell you how many times people have come to the dojo all stressed up with nowhere to go, had a really good workout and left feeling better. I see it myself and I see it in our clients. So why does a high energy workout and a good laugh help to reduce stress?

Most importantly, the physical exertion and mood change causes a completely new cocktail of hormones to wash through our systems. It's like taking a refreshing chemical bath. Additionally, our minds are diverted from the problems we face and focused in a new direction.

Secondly, I also recommend meditation. No, not brooding. Meditation. Don't focus on the problems, focus away from the problems and quieten the mind. Concentrate on something else, breathing for instance. Your own personal meditative practice is what is of importance here, however you perceive the word to apply in your life.

When we engage in intense physical activity or meditation, or both, we are able to access higher brain functions. We are more likely to enter the zone of peak performance, and under those conditions the mind, body and spirit are working in harmony with each other. We are able to relax, unwind and let things go without even realizing we are doing it...until afterwards, when we recognize that we don't feel as stressed.

I do not believe that we are intended to live with stress as a constant companion. There are better ways to live...what do you think? ☺

The cat and the boy

Odd thing synchronicity is. I've been talking about intent in the last couple of newsletters and my son just provided an excellent example of exactly what it is and how it works.

My son was being a thoughtful, considerate son a few day ago and had decided to let the cat out during a mealtime. He came running back in and announced that the cat was very strong.

As we discussed the event that led to his statement, he pointed out that using nothing other than her head, our cat was able to push the door out of his hand and leave the house. Leaving aside what was clear to his mother and I, (that he had decided to play a game with the cat, and the cat had won); we discussed how it was possible for a ten-pound cat to have more strength than a sixty-pound boy.

Our son had created a situation in which he was about to underestimate his opponent and overestimate his own position and strengths, having decided to tease the cat by opening the door a little but not enough for her to get out.

The outcome was inevitable.

Let's leave the nature of the situation aside for the moment. Instead, let's look at this from the perspective of intent.

The cat had only one intent: Leave the house. The cat put her entire mental process and her entire physical being into opening the door. She aligned her weapon platform, used all available resources for a single purpose and pushed.

Cats are Zen masters, we know this. Cats never waste energy. Everything that they do, they do with total commitment and focus. It doesn't matter whether it's sleeping or toying with a mouse. Cats are never distracted.

Cats don't do ADD!

More to the point, cats do not waste energy by fighting themselves. When they do something, cats use all the necessary muscles and do not recruit the non-involved muscles to do antagonistic work. In this way, cats have a natural poise, grace and elegance. Even when kittens are being silly and chasing their tails, they do it with intent.

You can learn so much from watching a cat move...or not move for that matter.

My son, on the other hand may have thought that he had one intent: Tease the cat a little bit, but he was also distracted and unfocused. His intent was not pure, it was contaminated with uncertain expectations and unknown outcomes. He was doing an experiment with the cat and wanted to know how it would come out. He knew the cat could have turned on him and scratched him. He therefore knew doubt. He also knew that if mom or dad had come out to see him, they would have known what he was doing and he would get the sharp edge of the tongue. So at some level he knew he was doing something that was, in his mind 'wrong'. He had, to borrow the line from the movie *The Last Samurai*, "too many minds".

The cat had only one mind, one focus...leave the house.

So, in this event a sixty-pound boy is defeated by a ten-pound cat, purely and simply because she had intent and she acted with decision (kime). Remember that word from last month?

All of which brings us to *Star Wars*...riiiight.

No, seriously.

There was a line in the *Empire Strikes Back* in which Yoda provides us with an incredible quote:

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- ◆ PEACHTREE JUDO TOURNAMENT, NOV. 1ST, ATLANTA, GA

"Judge me by my size do you? Well you should not."

His words speak volumes.

Intent is about focus, belief, using all the available resources for a single purpose, elimination of even the slightest doubt about the outcome, not involving the uninvolved muscles, and using exactly the energy that is needed to do the job (no more, no less).

Intent, therefore, is as much physical as it is mental and spiritual. The degree that you can bring these aspects of your being into harmony with each other is the degree to which you can develop intent in your actions.

We can apply this example and explanation to all areas of our lives.

So let's do that....let's even go so far as asking about your intent when you submit a job application, or go to an interview, or seek a promotion, or take a test in school....what is the level of your intent?

Do you trust yourself? Do you trust the universe?

I think that this should about cover intent for a while...or at least that's my intent...I think. No... wait....really....! ☺



All stressed up
with nowhere to go?
Give us a call!

Looking to change the same
old routine?
Call us now!



*For enrollment information contact us at 323 5522 or
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