

Pathways

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

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“the ultimate triumph of mind over matter [is] the victory of spirit over the shadows lurking in the world.”

—Martin Browning

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Freedom

There are two types of freedom, the Freedom of Naïveté and the Freedom of Experience. In between lies the intellectual battleground of confusion and effort.

When we begin something, we have no idea how ignorant we are about the subject matter. We call this “Uninformed incompetence.” Once we have gained mastery over a subject things seem effortless and we have moved into the realm of “Unconscious competence”. At both levels we work on instinct and are free of the constraints of intellectualization. When we know nothing, we do things simply because they seem natural. When we have gained true mastery over something, we do only those things that are natural. The two can look very similar, but you always know when you are in the presence of a master of a subject.

Mastery confers freedom and prior to the acquisition of mastery we spend our time “trying” and “doing”, rather than simply “being.” True masters of a subject tend to be very humble about their achievement, and indeed many of them do not even accept that it is “their” achievement in the sense that it is something that they own. Mastery comes from dedication and untold years of giving yourself to the process of discovery and learning. Mastery is liberating, as though there is some sort of dawning in the mind that we had not previously seen.

It is precisely for these reasons that the true master has, what is often called in the Eastern Philosophies, the “beginner’s mind”. The beginner’s mind is open to possibility; it is not

constrained by form, function or process. The beginner’s mind is not trapped by what something is supposed to be like, or how something is supposed to work. Unfortunately, the mind of the beginner, unlike that of the master, is prone to the frustrations of failure, simply because it lacks experience. It is the acquisition of experience that constrains the mind during the learning journey: This works, that doesn’t. Do this, don’t do that.

From the perspective of the beginner, therefore, the prospect of mastery is daunting and unobtainable. Since we were children we have looked at people who we consider to be masters of a subject with a certain degree of awe and if we are honest, often envy. Certainly, when we are on the road of learning in any subject we admire and wish to emulate those masters whom we encounter along the road.

We’ve all been kids; remember back to an earlier time in your life and you will recall what the Freedom of Naïveté feels like. I watch my son get frustrated by things that are not possible in the physical world in which he lives. He tries to do things with his toys that are physically impossible and gets fussy when they don’t work out the way he envisioned. He is on the road of learning. But he’s also four, so it is all a natural part of the process of discovery for him.

Learning is an important part of acquiring true freedom in life. It is an aspect of everything that we do, from learning a new subject to nurturing our relationships. The Freedom of Experience only comes after much learning. ☺

Reality Check

There is a phrase that has been wandering around in my mind for several months now, which I would like to discuss with you: "Everything is erroneous at a higher state of awareness".

The crux of the statement hinges on the notion that many of our treasured beliefs and assumptions are not as iron clad as we might like to pretend they are.

We can illustrate this very simply from the historical record. At an earlier stage of awareness in the discovery of our world, we absolutely knew for a fact that the world was flat and that it was the center of the universe. Magellan proved to us that the world was round and Copernicus gave us the view of a heliocentric solar system, forever changing our view and proving our previous assumptions to be invalid. In another illustration we knew for a fact that atoms were the fundamental particle of matter, then Rutherford and Bohr gave us a view inside the atom and then we knew for a fact that electrons, neutrons and protons were the fundamental particles of matter and could not be broken. Then quantum physics changed all of that as we discovered quarks and a whole array of particles that operate below the level of sub-atomic particles. Yet again, our reality is changing because, in the new physics we are beginning to see things differently, and a new concept called "String Theory," which is challenging what we thought previously about the quantum world.

You can do this exercise for any field of inquiry. As mankind makes new discoveries, old assumptions are proven inadequate or invalid.

Now let's bring it to a simpler experience. You stand in front of what appears to be a large two dimensional wooden wall, equal on all four sides. Without approaching the wall or touching it, you move to one side a little and you can see that it is in fact

three dimensional and therefore possibly a cube with a lid. Move further to one side and you discover that the new dimension is larger than the original and that the object appears to be a long crate. Then you move to the other side and discover that the crate is hollow and has a lion inside it. Next you notice that there is no front to the crate at all, so the lion is free to enter or leave the crate at will! At each stage of investigation or awareness, previous assumptions were radically altered by further observations and advances in awareness.

So long as we remain wedded to our fixed interpretations of reality as we think that we have experienced it, we are trapped and unable to see the world from another perspective... sometimes with dire consequences.

A couple of months ago I wrote about becoming very good at doing the wrong thing until doing it felt natural and comfortable, so much so that it no longer felt wrong. Let's take the example of tension and body stiffness. Many people walk around in denial of tension and stress and yet their bodies move with a rigidity and inflexibility that decries anything other than huge amounts of tension in their lives. They do not feel the tension, because it has been added in tiny increments and simply become a part of the movement patterns over time. You hear people tell you that they *are* relaxed and that there is no physical tension in their bodies...simply because they are unaware of it.

Once you can demonstrate to a person that he or she is, in fact "stiff" and inflexible, you can open an opportunity to become aware that he or she is not relaxed...which opens a pathway to finding a way of resolving the tension and learning to relax. This is not mere semantics. Being aware of one thing does not necessarily mean being aware of its opposite. So long as a person believes that he or she is re-

laxed, then all the training in the world will do nothing to change the situation until the person moves to a higher state of personal awareness.

Once the physical boundary is crossed, it becomes possible to get to the root of the issue, which in this case becomes the way in which we each translate psychological stress into our bodies. Once we learn how to relax, we can become aware of when we are not relaxed, which then has the trickle down effect of raising the question of "why am I not relaxed now and I was earlier?" At this level of awareness we begin to see the things that get to us in our daily lives and which rob us of the energy to flow through life.

Tension is energy being used to keep our muscles stiff. Relaxation frees that energy to do other things. At this level of awareness we become more patient, are less tired at the end of the day, can achieve more in less time, and lead healthier, more balanced lives.

The example I just gave can then become a catalyst for change, personal growth and an increase in personal health on a level that was previously unimaginable, because it was not necessary at an earlier level of awareness....

All because we challenged a previously accepted notion of what was true. ☺

"Hope is not the closing of your eyes to difficulty, the risk or the failure."

Anonymous

Metamorphosis

Meta: Change, Morphos: Shape. Metamorphosis involves a change from what was, to something new, quite frequently radically different and often surprising. What child ever expects the butterfly to emerge from the caterpillar in the jar?

Unintentionally this month I seem to be on a learning theme in this newsletter. I can tell you that these articles have been prompted by four students in the dojo, each of whom is on a very different path of self-discovery, and yet there seems to be a commonality or confluence to each of their journeys.

As I have said many times, learning martial arts is about change. It is about finding your potential, overcoming challenges and obstacles and finding out what is possible. It is also about letting go of who you are in favor of who you might become. In so far as martial arts is about learning and change there is a sense in which the person who puts on a black belt for the first time is not the person who put on a white belt at the beginning of the journey.

The process of learning changes each of us. In fact, the longer I stay in the arts, the more I become convinced that a lifetime in the martial arts necessarily involves complete metamorphosis of the whole person. This can be at times frightening, daunting, overwhelming. At other times it is enriching, empowering, ennobling and wonderful. What emerges results in beauty and grace and a surrendering of ego. Everything else is journeying.

As I write this article, we are about to enter the month of our black belt testing cycle. Most of the black belt candidates will be testing in only one of the arts that we offer and it is a time of putting forth extra effort, polishing the moves, and making sure that all the pieces are in place. For some, coming up to black belt candidacy, there are rank tests in more than

one of the arts and the idea of preparing for three major rank tests in Taekwondo, Judo and Ju Jitsu, all in the same month can seem just a bit too much to handle. Yet, in these moments is an amazing gift. When we put ourselves in that pressure cooker after preparing ourselves for several years, we know we are capable of the work, we know the foundations are strong and the basics are part of us. Here is an opportunity to do something special and to cross an invisible barrier.

As the chief instructor of the school, it would be wrong of me to put someone up for promotion if I did not believe that he or she was ready. So to my view of things, the rank promotions are more like a victory celebration. Our black belt events are a big deal for the entire dojo, which is why I run them the way that I do. I want them to be high energy events that bring the members of the dojo together in a special way. I want everyone who ranks or participates to feel as though what just transpired was an affirmation of common purpose.

What emerges is a different person. To a casual observer there may not appear to be any major transformation, but from the inside looking out, we know that we are different. When I put on the red and white belt of sixth degree black belt for the first time I felt not at all ready. The rank was so far beyond any goal I had ever set for myself in the martial arts. As the years have clicked by after earning the rank, I have learned so much that I never suspected was possible. I now feel more like a beginner than I have done in years. I also see in myself the obstacles that I face and that I must overcome in order to grow. I see my responsibility to the dojo, the martial arts I practice and the community at large. The ranks I earn are no longer about me, they're about my obligations as a martial artist and what I

have to learn and to offer. This may sound trite, but it is the only way I currently have of expressing this stage of my journey.

I am not the twelve year-old school boy who was bullied on an almost daily basis; who was afraid of recess and who was ostracized in sports. That was the boy who put on a white belt and started Judo.

From another perspective I am not who I will one day become, I am still learning. But I do see my obligations and my responsibilities, not as things that are required of me, but as things that are now part of me. I am learning. I am still figuring it out. I am still metamorphosing. This is the man who dresses for class five days a week. This is the caterpillar.

So to each of you who are about to test I would say this: Embrace the opportunity and allow it to change you. There is potential within each of you that you might be dimly aware of at the moment. Rank is just a step on the journey of discovery, a pebble cast into the pool of learning.

Don't focus on the pebble, feel the ripples and understand their meaning. It's not about the pebble, or even the pond, it's about the effect of the ripples.

"Very few beings really seek knowledge in this world... On the contrary, they try to wring from the unknown the answers they have already shaped in their own minds - justifications, confirmations, forms of consolation without which they can't go on. To really ask is to open the door to a whirlwind. The answer may annihilate the question and the questioner."

Anne Rice

Working With Steel

There are two ways to work with metal. You can beat it with a hammer and anvil or you can smelt it in a furnace. We could argue the merits of either, but for now I would like to use the use of a hammer and an anvil as an analogue in martial arts training.

For some of us, learning martial arts can be a sort of physical discipline wherein we attempt to push ourselves to limits of performance without adequate preparation. We use our bodies as the metal we wish to remake, our minds as the hammer and the martial arts as the anvil. There is a sense in which we believe that we can force our way forward, that by enduring physical discomfort we will in some way purify ourselves and forge ourselves into something new and better. Unfortunately, the result is often not what we had hoped it would be. In the short term all we do is beat up our bodies and acquire a bunch of acute injuries, which if left unattended become chronic injuries that affect us for months or even years. Consequently this approach does not tend to work well in the long term. Intense training can work if our bodies and minds have been brought to a high level of readiness, but to leap in with both feet without being prepared mentally for the discipline necessary or the physical fitness necessary to endure sustained hard work, is to court failure.

I think that part of it comes from how we enter the martial arts. In almost all cases we enter the martial arts so that we can feel better about who we are. For some, we want to get fit, lose weight or regain some lost youth. Others seek to resolve mental concerns or engage in emotional growth. For some, entering the martial arts is part of a journey of spiritual growth. For yet others, there is simply some combination of factors. For many of us, the reasons for staying the course are not the same ones that brought us to the journey initially.

So let's go back to the mentality, which assumes that the body can endure any amount of training. The key word here is patience. Walking the martial way takes a form of commitment that cannot be rushed. It takes a long-term perspective, rather like the gardener who nurtures growth, rather than continuously digging up the plant to see how the roots are growing.

In the last few months I have been stressing the mind-body-spirit connections that exist in our lives in general and in martial arts training specifically. The interdependency of mind-body-spirit well being is well known to medical science, and in a lot of ways the connections presuppose that you cannot "force" growth to occur.

Our bodies take time to become healthy and fit. A toned, healthy body is a work of careful attention. Developing higher levels of self esteem and self confidence is not an overnight event, but takes patience and internal work. Understanding and blending the techniques of the martial arts into a graceful work of art that is both effective and efficient, is the work of time. As we mature in the arts there is a sense in which the hard is covered by the soft. There is no denying that effective martial arts skills employed in defense can be devastating, and yet the true warrior seeks peace, not conflict, either internally or externally.

You cannot hurry development. Something forced is weaker than something nurtured. People who are starving are not helped by sitting them down to a massive meal, but by giving them small amounts of food until they can eat a normal meal.

I sometimes think that some people come to the martial arts with an attitude of starvation. The awareness of something missing hits so hard, that they want it all as soon as possible.

Little bites, in easy stages is the best answer. Patience and dedication.



OCTOBER						
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UPCOMING EVENTS

- ◆ Black Belt rank Demonstrations in Taekwondo, SMAA, October 25, 2004
- ◆ Black belt rank Demonstrations in Judo, SMAA, October 28, 2004.
- ◆ Ju Jitsu rank Demonstrations, SMAA, November 2nd, 2004
- ◆ Bokken seminar, SMAA, November 5 & 6th 2004
- ◆ Mel ton's Judo Tournament, Jackson, MS. November 20th, 2004
- ◆ Akayama Winter Camp, Gulf Shores, MLK Weekend, January 2005
- ◆ Gulf Coast Judo Tournament, January 25th, 2005
- ◆ Wakamusha Judo Tournament, Atlanta, GA. February 12th, 2005.
- ◆ Clarksville Judo Tournament, TN. February 26th, 2005
- ◆ USJA Junior National s, Toledo, OH, July 1-2nd, 2005
- ◆ USJA Junior national s, Boca Raton, FL, 2006
- ◆ USJA Junior National s, Indianapolis, IN, 2007

It's finally been published and is now available in paperback:

The Paradox of Being.

Collected Poems

By

Chris Dewey

Don't miss this event!

Project Action Kick-a-Thon

October 16th. We have 7 students on scholarship, and we need to continue to support them.

This is one of the most important events in the our dojo calendar

See Miss Becky or Dr Dewey for details and sponsorship forms.