

Pathways

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CONTENTS

Conflict Resolution.....	1
The Inner Witness	2
Positive and Negative.....	3
The Inner Critic	4

*"Those who are awake,
live in a constant state of
amazement"*

Jack Kornfield

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Conflict Resolution

This month I have literally written the newsletter in reverse. The last article was written first and you are now reading the last thoughts of the night, as dawn creeps over the edge of the lake outside my window.

In the next article, you will read that martial arts training deals with conflict resolution and that this, in turn, involves three areas of knowledge: Self, Other and Setting. You must know yourself, you must know your opponent and you must know the nature of the conflict.

Curiously, this is also true of almost any interaction. Knowledge in these three areas is the basis of all communication, and I don't just mean communication between humans.

Knowing the Self, Other and Setting is the fundamanetal truth of all relationships, inner communication, person-to-person communication, person-to-nature communication, even invention and discovery in both arts and sciences. I cannot think of a sitiaution in which Self, Other and Setting do not apply.

I might be tempted to argue then, that conflict resolution begins at home, in our own hearts. Show me a person who does not have some degree of inner turmoil and I'll show you either a truly enlightened soul or a massively delusional one. We could probably all do with a little conflict resolution at home.

So first, know yourself. Who are you? In a lot of ways this entire newsletter is written around the topic of knowing yourself.

Next, with whom do you contend? Who is your opponent? With whom

do you fight? Who is this self with whom you do battle?

Thirdly... Why? Over what do you fight? From whence did the conflict arise within you? What is the purpose of the conflict? What is your goal?

One of the things that I like about martial arts training is that as we train, we are pulled out of ourselves and we can do some inner work, without actually paying a lot of attention to it at the moment. It is as the changes occur that we can look back and say "Oh yes, I see how it was, then."

The physical actions of martial arts training necessarily involve mental and spiritual activity as well. Martial arts training is a full mind-body-spirit activity. When you show up for class...show up for class...bring all of you. There's no room for being only partially present. Be fully present and stay present. Be mindful of the actions; observe and witness them, rather than getting frustrated that they're not good enough. Relax. Let go of the mental grip a little bit. Feel, sense, communicate with yourself.

As you work through your classes and become a part of the process of learning, you become aware of changes. The first changes that we notice are the physical things, but later other changes appear and we notice that we stress less easily, handle our challenges with more grace, vent less often, anger blows over more quickly and doesn't simmer into rage.

Slowly, little by little, the inner turmoil is addressed, not by doing battle with self, but by integrating self and accepting self. Then...who is left to fight? It is an ideal, is it not? ☺

The Inner Witness

I'm sure that I have spoken about this before, but I was chatting with one of my beginning students the other day before class and the notion of awareness came up.

We were talking about being tense and discussing the fact that before you can relax when you move, you must first acquire the awareness of tension in your body.

Most of us carry muscular tensions that have been with us for so long that we are totally blind to them. When we learn martial arts, we often learn to move in new ways and we learn to loosen the grip that we have on our physical selves.

Here's an interesting thing. Martial arts, by its very definition, is about conflict resolution. Before you resolve a conflict, however, you must know three things: Yourself, your opponent and the nature of the situation. There's an entire book or two in that sentence alone, but we'll leave that aside for the moment.

Let's just look at the first part: Know Yourself.

Knowing yourself isn't about complaining, criticizing and condemning yourself for all your failings, weaknesses and lack of ability. Knowing yourself is seeing yourself for who you really are...all of it...even the bits you'd rather not see or acknowledge. Knowing yourself is being aware of your strengths, skills and abilities without becoming prideful.

Do you see what is happening here? When we truly meet ourselves, face to face, we do not do it as a judge or

a critic, a marketing agent or a promoter...we do it as an impartial witness. When we truly see ourselves as we really are, we do it without the blinders in place and we do it through the ability of discernment.

So, through the eye of discernment we learn that we not an angry person (a judged response to a set of feelings); rather we learn that we can become irritable if we are constantly interrupted and haven't had a lot of sleep (a witnessed response). We discern when the quality of anger appears in our lives and can act accordingly to mitigate the effect.

It is the same with being relaxed. First, I must see that I am tense, then I can let it go. Well, actually, no I can't. If I become aware that I am tense, I need to know why, then I can move to let it go. If I am tense when I do martial arts because I am stressed from some event happening in my life...like final exams, that's one thing. If I am tense because I am afraid of being hurt when I am thrown by my partner, that's something else. If I am afraid of being thrown because I will lose face when I am thrown by my partner, that's something else again.

You see, it's not about judging. It's about discovering the truth in yourself.

Simply observe, witness, watch...and learn.

When we judge ourselves we create a "should", "have to", "must" set of choices. When we watch ourselves and observe what is going on, we

create the potential for change.

As I told another student recently, what is, is. Deal with it. See it, witness it, know it for what it is. Don't judge, don't condemn, whine, complain, just watch.

When we watch ourselves we can see ourselves 'acting out' specific roles and only then can we stand aside from the acting out part of the show and discern whether or not the action is in our best interest. The first step, however, must be awareness. You become aware of something first, before you can act on it.

If there is one thing I would want my students to learn and that I wish I could convey in some way in every class I teach, it is this: Martial arts is a microcosm of the human condition. The martial arts training environment is a fractal of society. In martial arts training we rub shoulders with all sorts of different people and over time those relationships and interactions bring us face to face with who we are. Perhaps what is more important is that martial arts training does all of this in a nurturing environment, where, ideally, we are surrounded by others of like intent. Martial arts training allows us to see ourselves for who we are and if we so choose, act to grow.

This is never easy. It takes courage, commitment and dedication, and these are things that are learned slowly, one class at a time.

The first step, however, is to learn to become aware. Learn to see yourself as you are. ☺

Don't keep searching for the truth. Just let go of your opinions

Jack Kornfield

Positive and Negative

In our world of Political Correctness, it is easy to go too far. So we don't do lazy any more, we do energy efficient. We don't do obsessive-compulsive, we do super organized. We put a spin on everything and it is easy to get lost in the rhetoric of life.

Every one of us is a mix of what we call positive and negative traits. The problem, however, comes when we talk about Positive and Negative traits with an upper case P and N.

By way of example, we then say that people who have OCD tendencies are rigid, narrow-minded, often critical, structured people who can't deal with change, and all of that list is entirely negative. Not that I have any OCD tendencies or issues...really.

For those of you who know me...*Quit laughing.*

From another perspective I can use my OCD tendencies to build systems that allow my business to function, I can recognize when things are 'out of place' and have an eye for details. I can find the positive and act upon it, rather than dwell on the negative.

You see, it's not the label that we give something that is important, it's what we imply by the label and what we do with it, that matters.

So take a look at your character. What things do you like? What things about your character do you not like? What do you call 'positive'? What do you call 'negative'? When do either of these labels get in your way and blind you to the possibilities of your character?

If we choose to live in a world of dualistic opposites, we often fail to see

that which is latent within us.

I am reminded of the Yin-Yang symbol, which interestingly enough is at the end of each article as...well...a reminder.

At one level, the Yin-Yang symbol talks to us about opposites. Yin is female, Yang is male. Yin is earth, Yang is sky. Yin is dark, Yang is light. Yin is stasis, Yang is action...etc ., etc.

But...if you look at the Yin-Yang symbol, at the heart of Yin is a little piece of Yang and vice versa. Nothing can ever be fully Yin or fully Yang. So it is with our character states.

No character state exists without a piece of its supposed opposite being present also.

Let's take friendship as an example: How often does close friendship get replaced by bitter animosity on the basis of some (real or imagined) disagreement?

Think of all the things that represent a friendship....tolerance, trust, love, compassion, gratitude, communion, connection, harmony, support...I'm sure that you can make your own list. Now think of all the things that we associate with animosity...intolerance, anger, rigidity, disunion, betrayal, disharmony, turbulence, discomfort, non-communication...you get the idea.

We all know this. Any of us who has lived for more than a few years has been embattled with our friends. We learned about it in the schoolyard, and with our siblings. The emotions that we associated with the friendship are replaced by the emotions we associate with animosity. Oddly enough, until

the falling-out occurs, we were ruled by one set of emotions and after the falling-out occurs, we are ruled by a different set of emotions. If (for example), we feel that we have been 'wronged' in some way, then we feel that our emotions are 'right', just as they were 'right' when we felt that sense of friendship and connection. Odd that, isn't it?

What is even more interesting is the nature of enduring friendship. Enduring friendships go through periods of harmony and disharmony, yet they ride those waves on the strength of some deep undercurrent of understanding and acceptance that has stood the test of time.

There are people in my life for whom this is true. No matter what they say or do in their lives, they will always be counted amongst those people most precious to me. Their friendship has been a constant that has spanned the years and events we have faced both together and as individuals.

I cannot think of a single friend, however, who at some time has not raised feelings of anger in me...and vice versa. The point here is that the friendship endures precisely because there is a balance-point and an awareness that within every Yin element of a friendship is a small piece of the Yang and vice versa.

Now, before you go to the next article, think about this: How often do we judge parts of our own characters as being 'good' or 'bad' *and then judge others by our own standards?*

When we create rigid opposites, we set traps for ourselves. ☹

To meditate is to listen with a receptive heart

Jack Kornfield

The Inner Critic

As a follow-on from last month's article on the Inner Voice, I want to talk about one aspect of the Inner Voice...our Inner Critic.

As humans we live in a body, the boundary of which defines who we are....this is me, that is you. Within the body resides the command and control center...the mind, and it is generally the mind that tells us constantly who we are. Moment by moment the inner dialog is providing us feedback about our character state, our actions, thoughts, emotions and the nature of our interactions with the world around us and within us.

For some of us the interplay of thought, emotion and action is an amazing sort of dance that changes according to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. For others the interplay can become a rigid taskmaster, defining strict limits. For all of us, there is a part of the Inner Voice that at its best plays the role of advocate, or at its worst, your harshest critic.

Our Inner Advocate allows us to discern when we are acting from the motivations of our highest self. Notice something here: The Advocate discerns, it does not judge or condemn. The Inner Critic, on the other hand, holds up an impossible standard and lets you know everytime you fall short...as we all do, frequently. The Inner Critic reminds us of every failure, every mistep, every time our abilities do not match our desires and every time our actions do not match our personal standards of performance.

The Inner Critic will let me know that no matter what I do, it's not good enough; no matter how good something might be, there's a way in which it could have been better and therefore, by extension, whatever I

do is simply not acceptable.

Wow! That's really tough. Trust me I've been there.

I can't speak for the rest of you, but my Inner Critic is not exactly my greatest ally. More often than not, my Inner Critic undermines any good that I might achieve.

I remember once at a Judo tournament, I was fighting against a white belt who was entering his first tournament. I was a black belt with years of tournament experience by this point. I won the match handily in less than a minute. As I stood across the mat from my opponent, and the referee awarded the match, my Inner Critic started in on me. So then I beat *myself* up after the match because... I hadn't given the guy a chance, my throw was sloppy, I should have used a different technique. My Inner Critic just tore into me. Judo Tournaments are double elimination events, so I ended up fighting the man again. This time, I played for longer, I gave my opponent more chances to attack, and I still won. My Inner Critic then attacked me for 'playing' and not 'fighting', for the type of technique I used to win, and so on. The point I am making to you here is that I had allowed my Inner Critic to create a lose/lose situation for me. It didn't matter what I did, I was going to be wrong. If I won it was wrong. If I lost it was wrong! After sitting in the bleachers for a few minutes doing these mental gymnastics I laughed at myself, because I could see how often I had done this to myself in so many places in my life.

I had allowed my Inner Critic to take any joy or value out of the event.

Oddly enough, I have a photograph of my winning throw from the second match, taken by a friend. It

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- ◆ **AKAYAMA WINTER CAMP, ORANGE BEACH, AL, JANUARY 16-18TH, 2009**

reminds me of how much our level of self awareness can alter our perception of reality. I learned a lot on that day from a white belt who had just started Judo. On that day, the white belt was my teacher and I was his student.

From a very real perspective, that tournament taught me to loosen the grip that my Inner Critic held over my mind.

I tend to believe that in general, humans would rather seek discernment than judgement, and affirmation rather than condemnation. The Inner Critic is a harsh judge and is only interested in pointing out failure, condemning effort and criticizing performance in any area of our lives.

The Advocate conversely, is interested in discernment and affirmation. Your Inner Advocate is an ally who calls you to your higher self, without condemning you for your failings. Your Inner Advocate reminds you of your positive attributes and abilities.

The Inner Advocate smiles with you as you grow and learn, rather than frown down upon you. The Inner Advocate enjoys the beauty of the dance of life. ☺



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