

Pathways

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

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 11

NOVEMBER 2004



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“If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am for myself alone, then what am I? And if not now, then when?”

—Hillel: Ethics of our fathers

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Purpose

I am sure that many of you are familiar with Victor Frankl’s book, “Man’s Search for Meaning”. The basic thesis of his book is that we derive meaning in life by providing a service. My sense of things is that most of us spend our lives looking for that bond of connection, which brings us peace, happiness and a sense of fulfillment. We can find that connection in many places. Some find the connection in their families, others in the contribution they make in their career, and yet others in volunteer work for their communities. It really doesn’t matter, if it is personally validating.

I was recently struck by a comment that I read, which mirrored something I had written in the introduction to my book of poems “The Paradox of Being.”

What I had written was as follows:

“I tend to be of the belief that we all walk our paths in life looking for meaning, for understanding and a chance to see life as it really is. Occasionally we get unpredictable flashes of insight, but mostly we travel around in a fog of activity and confusion, doing the myriad things that constitute our daily lives. Then just as suddenly as it began, it is over. For some of us death comes without warning, for some of us too soon, but for all of us, it is an inevitable consequence of living. And at its end, for the huge majority of us, the only really useful question remains either unasked or unanswered in any meaningful way: “Why and what is life?”

The comment that I read was by David Servan-Schrieber, a neurolo-

gist/psychiatrist at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center:

“We all float haphazardly through existence, bump into random people who are equally disoriented, do things that we don’t understand but that turn out to determine the course of our lives, and eventually die without having figured out what happened.”

I was amazed at how our thoughts ran along similar paths.

We live in a world that stresses individuality and personal freedom, yet at the same time we seek connection and a deep sense of belonging. We search for something to give meaning to our lives. At the same time, we live lives full of stress and anxiety concerning our own future and the future of our loved ones. We get divorced at ever increasing rates, suffer from depression, obesity and heart disease. We live in cities where we lose our connection to the ebb and flow of natural rhythms. Then we wonder why our lives don’t work.

Show me someone who knows his or her purpose and who truly lives that purpose with dignity, integrity and connection and I will show you a life that approaches a level of harmony about which most of us only dream.

Knowing that we are living in such a way as to provide a service to our fellow travelers in life provides a sense of connection with the community of mankind. I tend towards the belief that much of our stress in life can be alleviated by being aware of our “purpose.”

What is your purpose? ☺

Something Fishy

In recent years I have given a lot more thought to what and when we eat, but I don't talk much about nutrition in these newsletters because I am not a professional dietitian or nutritionist.

Specifically, I have been interested in foods that reinforce health and the immune system, foods that aid in tissue regeneration and that slow the aging process and foods that affect our moods, behavior and mental state.

If you have been reading these newsletters for more than a year or are training at the dojo, you know that I am a great believer in eating as close to nature as possible and avoiding processed foods as much as possible. I avoid salt, sugar and things that are "enriched" and "refined", because normally they are not!! I also believe in eating a diet with variety and eating little and often. I tend not to eat big meals, but rather I graze my way through the day.

In this article, I want to talk about a very specific brain and body food that enhances well being, health and has been seen to work in mitigating stress, anxiety and depression. You've probably heard of the food supplement before: **Omega-3 fatty acids**.

Diet fads come and go, yet we are consistently bombarded with the merits of a low fat diet. If you read Discover magazine you would have seen an article recently that discussed the very high fat content of the Eskimo diet. This article got me back on the track of the Omega-3's.

The problem is that in the West we eat a lot of animal fats and as a result our diets are some of the lowest in the world for unsaturated fatty acids, notably Omega-3 fatty acids. We eat fried foods with a passion and seem to be bent on becoming specialists in consuming as much saturated fat as possible. Conversely in many of the Asian diets and the Eskimo diet in particular, although they seem to con-

sume a lot of fat and not much red meat, they consume mostly unsaturated fats that contain a lot of Omega 3's.

Guess what?

Omega-3 fatty acids are **VERY** good for you.

Although the name might be a tad daunting, Omega-3's fulfill a very important role in our mental and physical well being. It turns out that Omega-3 fatty acids are used in the construction of every cell in the body and help to ensure that the cell membranes do their job properly. Cell membranes regulate the chemicals that can pass in and out of a cell and therefore have a lot to do with proper functioning of our minds and bodies.

When Omega-3 fatty acids are used in construction of brain cell membranes the result is a strong, flexible, non-leaky membrane that promotes good communication between other brain cells. When the diet lacks Omega-3 fatty acids the same cells have rigid and leaky membranes that do not promote good communication pathways in the brain.

In recent years post-partum depression in women has been linked to Omega-3 deficiencies, often because O-3's being transferred to the baby in breast feeding further lower the mother's levels of Omega-3's already lowered by a diet that lacks O-3's in the first place. Also, in laboratory experiments, decreased amounts of Omega-3 fatty acids lead to higher levels of anxiety, stress and panic amongst rats as well as difficulty learning new tasks.

As if this wasn't enough on benefits, the American Heart Association recommends Omega-3 fatty acids to help reduce the risk of heart disease (check out their website).

I also recently discovered that Omega-3 fatty acids can actually help protect against some forms of cancer. Notably prostate, breast and colon

cancer were mentioned in the articles I read.

Amazingly enough, recent work in the United Kingdom shows that Omega-3's also seem to have a role as anti-inflammatory agents and can help provide relief for sufferers of osteoarthritis.

And for those of us who want to age more slowly, Omega-3 fatty acids are natural skin conditioners, mostly because of their membrane building properties.

In fact, there are several articles in very accessible health and science magazines as well as entire websites that are dedicated to educating the public about the health benefits of these remarkable molecules.

So the point seems to be that Omega-3 fatty acids are important arbiters of physical and mental health as well as a feeling of positive well being.

O.K., where do you find Omega-3 fatty acids?

Well, mostly it is found in plankton and algae, but gets concentrated in fish and shellfish. So if you want to get some Omega-3's into your diet, increase the amount of seafood in your diet, especially ocean grown fish. If you don't like fish, another great source of Omega-3's is flax seed oil, which you can buy at most health food stores.

In all matters of personal health I urge you to seek the guidance of a professional health provider, but having read a lot about these fatty acids and having grown up at the end of the "cod-liver oil generation", I was significantly intrigued to know more, and the more I read, the more I felt I should share some of my findings with you. ☺

Dedication and Commitment

I like to think of our dojo as a family of sorts, in which we support and nurture each other. Supporting and nurturing each other requires dedication and commitment. There are four major events in the life of our dojo in which we can demonstrate our desire to support and nurture each other and demonstrate our dedication and commitment. The four events to which I refer are the two black belt rank tests and two fund raisers for our scholarship students that occur in the Spring and Fall every year.

In April and October we undertake a fund raiser for Project Action Foundation, which is a non-profit charity that escrows monies to scholarship At-Risk children in martial arts, gymnastics and dance. At our dojo we have six children on scholarship. Some of those children have graduated from our childrens class and are now in our adult class. One of them is now in our leadership training program.

Project Action Foundation changes lives, one child at a time. It provides an opportunity to families who do not have the resources to get their children involved in character building activities where they are surrounded by nurturing role models and given opportunities to grow and excel.

The term "At-Risk" could mean any one of a number of things including: economic hardship, risk of early academic failure, children of one-parent families, or children who live in neighborhoods that place them at risk.

"At risk" means that there is an opportunity; and that we can do something to make a difference.

I was listening to a talk at Toastmasters, before our Kick-A-Thon concerning fatherless children. I would like to share with you some statistics from that talk. Many of these statistics come from government

entities, they are all a sad testament to the need for programs like Project Action.

Nearly half of youth suicides involve children from one parent homes. Many runaways are from one parent homes. Almost three quarters of all high school drop outs are from single parent homes as are adolescent patients suffering from chemical abuse.

Given these, and other equally disturbing statistics, concerning "at risk" children from a variety of possible "at-risk" settings, it will not come as a surprise to you to know that I take our scholarship program **VERY** seriously. Consequently, I expect all of the dojo members to do their part in helping maintain the scholarship program. Look at it from this perspective:

If every person who reads this newsletter gave just \$10 to PAF we could fund all of our scholarships for an entire year. Will You help?

It is not just the children who benefit from the PAF scholarships, but also their families and their communities. When one of our scholarship children has success, we all have been a part of that success. If we provide an opportunity for these children then we are providing something that will echo well beyond the life of the child. This is the sort of connection and purpose to which I referred in my first article.

At our recent fund raiser we had people who went out of their way to be there to help. We had students who altered their plans or made special arrangements so that they could be there to support the effort to raise money for our scholarship program.

The students who came out to support the event kicked with all their heart. We ended up kicking more than 80,000 times in one hour at a rate of more than 3,600 kicks per person. This was our very best performance

yet. Unfortunately, we did not raise as much money for the scholarships as we would like to have raised.

So there is an opportunity for you to do something to help...**now**.

In our second event this month, we have just completed a cycle of black belt tests in Taekwondo, Judo and Ju Jitsu. As most of you know, the tests are for everyone who is in the middle ranks of their respective arts, all the way up through our black belt candidates. I expect all the black belts to be there to support the event regardless of whether or not they are going up in rank because it shows support for everyone else in the dojo, raises the overall standard of performance on the day and creates a sense of community and caring. This is to say nothing of the opportunity to hone skills and make strides in personal improvement. Miss Janet says that they are just a total blast.

The fact that not all the dojo black belts were present is a source of some concern to me. It implies that I have failed to demonstrate to the black belts who train here, that we carry the highest levels of responsibility to those below us in rank. Given that the members of the dojo have plenty of advanced warning of when the tests are being held, there should be no reasons for non-attendance except where unavoidable time conflicts or events occur.

It bothers me when I see students working so very hard to improve themselves and give their time to help others and at the same time, see others who cannot show the support, dedication and commitment to their comrades that their rank would imply.

We exist as a synergetic entity and the degree to which we build synergy is the degree to which we commit to each other. ☺

Stress Check

We talk about martial arts as a stress relief mechanism, but how often do we explain how it occurs?

I think that martial arts allows us to manage stress in a variety of ways:

It gives us an endorphin rush that improves our sense of well being. The endorphins released during physical activity provide a natural high.

Feeling good during exercise makes us smile and laugh, which further helps us to release the tension in our bodies.

As the physical activity stimulates the pleasure centers of the brain through endorphin release, the result strengthens our immune systems by promoting the formation of the bodily defense cells and causes them to be more aggressive in their protective role.

Martial arts activity causes us to focus upon our breathing and heart rate, bringing us closer to meditative states of action, similar to those experienced by people having what we refer to as "flow experiences." More than that, martial arts teaches us to control our breathing.

Because martial arts training is a full body experience, we open up the circulatory pathways, throughout the body and massage our internal organs as we move.

As we get better at the physical moves of the martial arts, we change our postures, straighten our backs, relax our shoulders and improve the overall carriage of the body.

In the concentrated focus of learning complex movement skills involving activity with other people, we set aside our thoughts and concerns of the day for the requirements of the moment. During class we can leave the stress at the door.

The nature of martial arts training keeps us in the here and now, and tends not to allow us to drift away, especially if your partner is throwing you onto the planet or aiming a high

speed foot at you.

For people who are susceptible to depression, martial arts activity severs the cyclic nature of negative thought patterns, at least for the duration of the class, by bringing a person's focus to the immediate needs of the learning environment. It is the very act of breaking the cycle of negative self-speak that allows people to embrace positive thoughts. Once a person has seen the cycle break during class and allowed positive thoughts to enter, breaking the negative cycle is something that can become an act of will.

Training in martial arts is rarely repetitive in the sense that jogging and bike riding might become, consequently our bodies and minds are being constantly challenged to grow and adapt to new stimuli and challenges

As we train we begin to realize that the fuels we ingest have a big influence on the performance of the human machine and prolonged exposure to martial arts activities will often bring about a change in diet and nutrition.

Letting the stress go, allows us to sleep more soundly and awake refreshed.

In simple terms when we train in the martial arts we feed our pleasure-seeking needs, reinforce our immune systems, strengthen our bodies, change our diets and habits, our thought processes and even our breathing and heart activity.

Now my question becomes this: What do you think the results would be if you did this two or three times a week for fifty years? Do you think you might see some benefits in your life?

All you have to do is take the first step and then the next one....You will not be alone, you will find a community of like-minded, supportive individuals who want to live healthy lives for a very long time. And that can't be bad!! ☺

NOVEMBER						
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UPCOMING EVENTS

- ◆ Mel ton's Judo Tournament, Jackson, MS. November 20th, 2004
- ◆ Akayama Winter Camp, Gulf Shores, MLK Weekend, January 15 & 16th, 2005
- ◆ Gulf Coast Judo Tournament, January 25th, 2005
- ◆ Wakamusha Judo Tournament, Atlanta, GA. February 12th, 2005.
- ◆ Clarksville Judo Tournament, TN. February 26th, 2005
- ◆ SMAA Open Judo Tournament, September, 2005
- ◆ USJA Junior Nationals, Toledo, OH, July 1-2nd, 2005
- ◆ USJA Junior national s, Boca Raton, FL, 2006
- ◆ USJA Junior National s, Indianapolis, IN, 2007

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By

Chris Dewey

Starkville Christmas
parade.

November 29th, 2004

Followed by the annual dojo social.

Call Miss Becky for details

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