

# Pathways

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*What good does it do a man  
if he is well known by  
others, but unknown by  
himself?*

Francis Bacon

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## Perfection

It is in the nature of being human that we seek challenges.

Let's start with the premise that although perfection is not an option, excellence is, however, a renewable resource. As a follow-on from last month (which was only a day or two ago, as I write), I'd like to pick up the thread of expectation that we are given as we go through school. Success in school is measured by grades, which are, in turn, defined by the value of an 'A'. Nothing else is good enough. But, if everyone got A's we'd all be, by definition, 'excellent' and therefore also, by default...average! In and of itself this is not a bad thing, IF it raises the bar of 'average' and the system recalibrates accordingly.

Anyway, let's explore perfection as an option. I know many people who beat themselves up regularly because they are not achieving perfection in their chosen field of performance. At the other end of the scale, I also meet lost souls who gave up the struggle and simply do not put forth any effort because they know that they can't be perfect. They burned themselves out trying.

Judo has taught me that we can never be perfect, we can merely strive for performance excellence. That alone is a weighty enough assignment and can lead to plenty of stress on its own, without even attempting to reach perfection.

To seek to be perfect is a dysfunctional approach to living. If perfection is out of reach, we are straining after the impossible, which itself is a waste of time. If we see ourselves falling short of perfection time after time, it

builds frustration and internal stress, until we give up.

Make no mistake, I believe that excellence is within reach, it is perfection alone that is unattainable.

Perhaps you might think that the difference between excellence and perfection is a semantic argument. I can tell you though, it is not; it is very real and can create very real performance stress. I have only to consider the fact that I have had students in tears in my office because they got a 95% on a test and had never scored less than a hundred before. The point here is that the student who cannot accept that a 95 is as good as a 100 as far as the grade goes (will the transcript look any different?), is striving after perfection, not excellence.

All of which brings me back to the performance bar. Elite performers know that there is a point of diminishing returns, when the levels of personal performance have been pushed towards their upper limits and that personal improvement thereafter, only occurs in very small increments.

The search for excellence is therefore a deeply personal journey and although all too often we measure ourselves (erroneously) against the performance of others, never lose sight of the fact that you can always reach excellence for your own abilities. So long as 'excellence' has real meaning then, when we meet the criteria for excellence, we are thrilled, and we continue to strive to find our personal limits. You'll never be perfect, so quit beating yourself up. Strive after, and achieve personal excellence in what you do. Accept nothing less.

## Personal Power

If you know me at all, you know where I'm going to go next....

If perfection is not an option and excellence is a renewable resource then it follows that there is something more to the notion of excellence. If there were not something more, then we'd all quit striving and challenging ourselves and sooner or later, we'd all settle for 'good enough'.

Recall in the last article that I talked about elite performers who push the upper limits of their abilities and reach the point of getting diminishing returns for the levels of effort expended.

Why do they do that?

Personal power and elite performance lies in the ability to keep an open mind, to be willing to see new and novel way of doing things and to be willing to embrace change. Frequently you can perform at what you think is your personal best, but then a paradigm shift in the way you do something leads to the ability to tap into resources that you didn't know existed within you.

Perhaps it even goes back to going back to basics....again.

Sometimes insight in one area of your life can have a massive pay-off in another, totally unrelated area of activity.

And there's more to it than that. Excellence in one area of performance does not equate to excellence in all.

We can be pretty darned excellent at one thing and a total disaster at something else. Does that mean we are incapable? Does it mean that we can take lessons learned from one area of performance and apply them elsewhere in our lives?

So what does this mean?

In the wonderful tapestry of living, excellence is a moving target, a chimeric of sorts; it shifts, it moves, it becomes something different. You think you have it and then something changes and you are back to striving after excellence all over again.

Looked at from the perspective of being a total person complete with flaws and failings, excellence is about doing the most you can with what you've got and never settling for 'O.K.', no matter how many times you fall over.

Excellence is a hard task master. It demands effort, it accepts nothing less than the best you have within you, no matter whether you can see it or not. Excellence is an ongoing journey of discovery. Excellence is one of the potential offspring of living with intent (Kime). Excellence is a possible outcome of those constructive stresses that appear when we live at the edges of our comfort zones, rather than dwelling within them.

The search for excellence is one of

those niggling itches that you can never quite scratch to satisfaction.

The search for excellence, no matter how you define it in your own realm of performance is a key to your personal power. It is one of the foundation stones of self-confidence and self-awareness. It is through striving after excellence and failing our way to success that we can become self-aware.

There will be moments when we step outside of ourselves and see ourselves performing at a higher level than we had ever suspected was possible and we can call those moment peak experiences or moments of flow, as we discussed last month. But peak experiences are not long lasting; rather they are transient indicators of what is possible. Peak experiences call us to return to the world of effort.

So it seems to me that it comes back to the essence of last month's newsletter: Don't try too hard (don't be rigid), let the experiences teach you, relax your mind as you put forth effort. Embrace flow when it comes, but be willing to return to the world of learning over and over again. Seek lessons and keep an open flexible mind.

I think that if we can do these things, then excellence becomes a very real possibility for each of us in our chosen areas of performance. ☺

**And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years.**

**Abraham Lincoln**

## How to Train

One of the things that is particularly difficult about partner-based training is the effort required to put ego aside for the benefit of our training partners. I'm not saying that ego is a malicious sort of thing, most of the time it really isn't, but if we are governed by the principle of synergy then mutual benefit will almost guarantee a better result from the learning process.

So let's take this apart a little bit.

Let us begin with a drill from the class instructor. We are given a set of instructions about what we are to do and what the goal of the drill is intended to achieve. We break up into partner groups....and have at it.

The first principle of partner training is that success is critical. In the first series of repetitions it is absolutely critical that both members of the training team achieve success with the drill. If it is throw, then the thrower must achieve success without being thwarted by his or her training partner, if it is a hold down or an escape then equally, the person doing the technique has got to know what it feels like to get the thing right. The learning goal is to drive the successful repetitions into the muscles, so that the body becomes kinesthetically aware of what success entails.

Sometimes we get too eager to move on to the resistance side of the equation and stop our partner's attempts "to see if it still works." Well, of course it won't work! We haven't trained anywhere nearly enough for our partner to understand the subtleties of body position and action to control a non-structured or resistant environment.

So here is the first clue to training: When you are given a drill make sure that your partner is successful, time and time again. Give your partner exactly the level of cooperation that will ensure success, no more, no less. The key term here is reciprocity and

that good old latin quote: *quid pro quo*.

Moving on to the second phase of training. We are moving up the ranks a bit and have seen the drill before, we know what we are doing and our partner is likewise skilled. Under these training circumstances it is possible to indulge in some mutual experimentation. We start looking for the holes in the technique and helping our partner to fill those holes. We start working on the nuances of the technique: foot position just so, playing with grips to find the optimum playing position, timing...that sort of thing.

Eventually we get an opportunity for free practice, either in sparring or in randori. Again, here is not a time for resistance and fighting, it is a time for discovery. It is perhaps unfortunate that we sometimes call sparring and randori 'free fighting.' Randori is a time to find out what we know, to find out whether the drills we have been practicing have application in an uncontrolled, free-flowing environment, where the variables are not so controlled.

Randori is a place where we take a technique that we have been practicing and turn it into a skill that may be applied in a real environment on the street or in competition.

Randori is not a substitute for fighting. It is a time to work with our partners offering guidance and finding ways to help each other turn our techniques into skills. It will take thousands upon thousands of repetitions of doing the drill and thousands upon thousands of attempts in randori. Randori teaches us patience, persistence, endurance and understanding.

Finally, we get to either the real world of the street or the competition arena. If we have trained properly, then here too is no place for ego or for fighting. It is simply a time for the appropriate

application of a skill in its intended theater of operations. Unfortunately in competition we see fighting all too often, we very rarely see people using the fruits of well-structured training.

Remember that habits are a function of training. If all we have learned is how to train with our egos then when we meet situations that require the application of the skills we have acquired, it is a fair bet that ego will be coming along for the ride.

Unfortunately, we rarely take the time to put in the right sorts of effort to train. It is hard work, very hard work. It takes time to do thousands of repetitions correctly with the correct mind set, and you know what? It can be mind numbing...and that's not necessarily a bad thing. When repetition is mind numbing and we get past the moment in which we declare the thing to be 'boring' we open up vistas of real opportunity. Our minds step aside, our ego grip loosens a little bit and amazingly, our bodies know what to do.

No matter how much you resist it, sooner or later, if you can stay the course, the process of learning martial arts will teach you about harmony of mind, body and purpose.

It is not an easy road, it is not intended to be so. The road can be as hard or as bumpy as you choose. But again, that's not such a bad thing. We all have lessons to learn, and as we move along the lessons get harder. For some of us some lessons will be easy while for others, the same lesson will be inordinately difficult.

So finally, in the last lines we come back to the real message behind training: The search for harmony. To fight without fighting, to do without doing, and to step out of our own way to let the process work in our favor for the benefit of someone other than who we think might be the recipient.



## Filling a Day

I was thinking about a day's worth of living last night and came to the following conclusion: In every day there should be time for doing, being, learning, and inspiration.

1. **Doing:** In every day there is stuff to be done. There are chores, tasks, schedules, deadlines, timelines, goals, responsibilities and obligations to be dealt with. Frequently, those things require that we necessarily bump into those same things in so far as they affect other people and the dynamic tensions of the workplace or the home intrude themselves into our lives. We do not live in a societal or communal vacuum. We are therefore required to discharge our responsibilities with at least some level of understanding of how our actions impact those around us. When we do not stop to consider the implications of our actions upon the lives of others, stress is the inevitable result.

Doing involves the minutiae of everyday life: Mowing the yard, finishing the report, making the sales call, changing the diaper. Doing, however, opens a door to being if we allow it to do so. It has long been a monastic tradition that every task, when done with real intent contains a meditative component.

Too often when we are doing, we are not being. Being present as we eat, for instance, takes effort, it takes reminding ourselves to actually taste the food rather than read the book or watch the television. In this moment, will I take the time to *really* eat my lunch, or continue typing, while I ingest food?

2. **Being:** In every day there should be time to just be. Whether you take time in the early morning, or before you go to bed, or whether you take some moments during

your work day, it is important. Take time to be. Take time to reflect. Take time to meditate. Take time to commune with the universe. Take time to consider God, whatever you take that word to mean. Take time to drop your ego and step outside of the barrage of thoughts that assaults you in every moment.

It doesn't matter what you call it, the aroma won't change...simply smell the roses. It's worth the effort. Trust me on this.

3. **Learning:** In every day, learn something new. It really doesn't matter whether you learn something academic or something practical about your job, or something emotional about the people with whom you rub shoulders. Learn something.

I like to read. I read a lot, and I read to learn and to understand the universe in which I live and breathe and move.

I also like photography and this is one of the ways in which I learn about the world. I study the details, like the stripes on a butterfly antenna or the color of a fall leaf. Every photograph has the potential to show me something I did not know about the world. While I may truly worry about six and a half billion people living on planet that can no longer support them, I am amazed by individuals. I watch and learn from the people around me. Hardly a day goes by, when I do not learn something about someone in my life. Hardly a day goes by in which I do not meet someone who has a new gift of learning for me.

Sometimes the gifts of learning are larger than others, sometimes the gift can have life-changing significance, but if I am not willing to see the opportunity to learn, then it will pass me by.

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

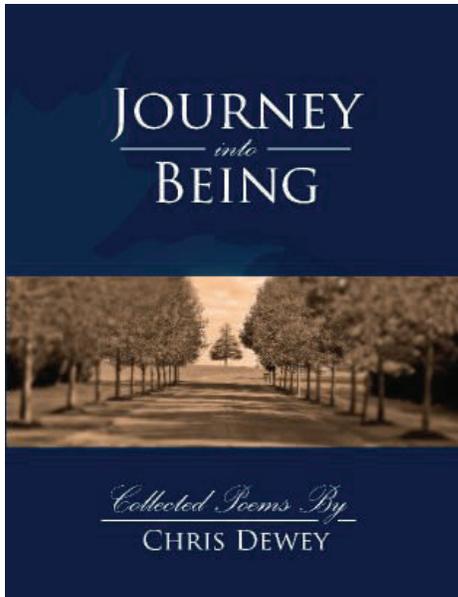
◆ **AKAYAMA WINTER CAMP, ORANGE BEACH, AL, JANUARY 19-20TH, 2008**

4. **Inspiration:** Perhaps this is the hardest of all. How many of are willing to say that our lives are inspiring? How many of us live lives of struggle and quiet desperation? How many of us live with sickness, depression, addiction or any other kind of challenge? How many of us take the time to be inspired by the mere gift of being alive? The simple act of being awed by the fact that you live, can, (if we allow it to), sweep away the mundane moment, suck the breath right out of our chests and leave us ready to be inspired. How do you take time each day to be inspired? What takes your breath away? What leaves you breathless and able to be in-spired?

If we allow ourselves to see, there are many things around us that can inspire us. In the martial arts we are fortunate to have people who train alongside us and they can inspire us in so many ways. If we take time to be in nature we can be inspired by what we see. If we take time to be with our families and friends we can be inspired by watching our children learn and grow.

What inspires you? What makes your day into something unique?





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