

Pathways

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“It’s not our abilities that define us, it’s our choices”

—J.K. Rowling

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Subjects of Fear, Inheritors of Ignorance

It is probably fair to say that we are all subject to fears of some kind. Some of our fears are rational, some are irrational. We acquired some of our fears from direct personal experience, whereas others come from our family background. A child who has a near-drowning experience may develop an unnatural fear of water and swimming. A woman who is afraid of success may have been told by her parents that she was worthless as a child and would never amount to much. One fear may cause a panic attack, the other may cause a lifelong inability to achieve a sense of personal and/or career success.

From the perspective I wish to take today, the origin of our fear does not matter that much. What is more important to me (for this article at least) is that fear robs us of power by keeping us blind. No matter what it is that we fear, there is a blindness associated with the fear that prevents us from seeing any outcome other than the one we fear. Several years ago I wrote about fear and used a line from one of my mentors when I opened my business: Fear is nothing more than False Expectation Appearing Real. Let’s deconstruct this for a moment. *False Expectations*.... to me this implies the alternate possibility that there are other potential outcomes, which might be true. *Appearing Real*....to me this implies that our fears make our expectations loom so large that they blot out any other possible reality. Fear makes us blind. A lack of vision leaves us ignorant to the possibility inherent in any situation we face in

our lives. Fear, therefore, colors our perceptions and alters our reality to such an extent that we can become paralyzed into inaction. From this perspective it follows that what we fear becomes our reality because we dwell on it to the exclusion of all else. Let’s take the little girl with the near-drowning experience: That same girl could easily panic as an adult (if ever she got close enough to the ocean to get wet) if she was bowled over by a wave. Her panic might easily cause her death. The inability to see anything other than her greatest fear at that moment could easily be the difference between life and death. By facing the fear and learning how to swim the woman could meet the same event without panicking.

So what’s this all about? Actually, it’s about two things: One, being ruled by your past and two, letting the child in you control the choices of the adult.

Many of us as adults still have a child in us somewhere who affects some of our decision making processes. We are after all, a collage of our experiences. The point here, is to acquire an awareness of when our decisions are being derailed by our fears. When fear hijacks our minds we will be unable to see much more viable and useful choices, which could be made. The greatest weapon of fear is, therefore, its ability to keep us ignorant of choice. The greatest joy of overcoming your fears is the realization of the freedom of choice that is your right. But that too is a choice....fears only control us with our permission, either overtly or covertly. ☺

Fractals

Have you ever considered your role as a fractal of society? Fractals are those interesting objects that look like larger versions of themselves. Take the all-time vegetable fractals: Broccoli and Cauliflower. Broccoli and cauliflower florets look just like a head of broccoli or cauliflower, only smaller. Streams are fractals of the river with which they merge. A lot of coastlines are fractals. Small sections of coastlines can look exactly like bigger sections of the same piece of coastline. Fractal objects are all around us, we just don't see them.

I have been giving thought to the idea that in a developmental sense each human is a fractal component of society.....A small mirror to a larger whole.

I see in myself many of the conflicts and paradoxes with which we wrestle as a society. Society is a mix of what we term good and bad, knowledge and ignorance, compassion for others and gratuitous self-interest. Each of us has our own insights as to the nature of society, so you can go on and add more to the list from your own perspective. So I ask myself whether, as individuals are we really much different from the society that we have created though our interactions?

Each of us is on a journey of personal discovery, whether we recognize it as such or not. During that journey we will each meet with personal challenges, demons and fears. We will also meet with great joys, successes and victories. Consequently, I tend to be of the belief that as we grow as individuals and reach higher levels of understanding and awareness of our own condition, we help society to develop as well....one person at a time.

As many of you know, I am fond of Brian Tracy's line: "Everything counts, nothing is neutral." The point to be made here however, is that every step we each take to improve our own

lives, affects the quality of the relationships we have with the people around us. We create ripples in the fabric of society, albeit (for the vast majority of us) little ripples. Sometimes those ripples reinforce one another, other times they interfere and cancel each other out. When the ripples reinforce each other and acquire enough of a harmonic, a force for societal change can be created.

Being truly engaged in the process of personal growth can sometimes be difficult, traumatic and painful. It is not always "rainbows and butterflies"; there is often very hard internal work to be done if each of us is to reach our potential. Much the same is true of society. The growth of society has at times been difficult, traumatic and painful, and will no doubt be so again.

Society has evolved dramatically in the last few thousand years and as we negotiate our way through the challenges of the Information Age, society is poised to make significant steps forwards. As we become more interconnected as nations, individuals and common shareholders in the global resources there is a heightened need for understanding, compassion and awareness.

From this it will become apparent to you that I have a sense of personal responsibility for the future of our planet and the society in which I live. It is my hope to make a better world for my son and those that follow him. The only way I can do this is to fix those parts of me that don't work as well as they should. My perspective has grown partly from being a geologist and being acutely aware of our finite resources, partly from being a business owner who sees that businesses behave much like ecosystems and partly from being a martial artist where I see the martial path as a metaphor for our daily lives. All the lessons are connected, I cannot, at this point in my life, separate one role

from another, each affects the other. Much of what I have written over the last eight years in this newsletter has been part of the process of discovery.

So my view of things is that we are each fractals of a larger whole and that as we grow, society grows along with us. This is a source of great encouragement to me, because there are times when I look at the world and can only see the death, greed, hatred and chaos...especially when I watch the news! In each of us are great and noble things. In Pandora's box was Hope. In each of us is the possibility of personal growth. In each of us lies the seed of societal change.

Take a simple thing: If each of us takes the time to think about our interactions with those around us and we each choose our response rather than reacting, the quality of human interactions would improve dramatically. ☺

"That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons history has to teach"

—
Aldous Huxley

Something Different

I want to share with you an unusual event that happened to me the other night. I was doing Judo Randori (free practice) with one of my orange belt students when I suddenly became aware that she intended to attack. Actually, that's not exactly what happened. The only way I can explain this to you is to say that I felt her *think* about attacking. There was nothing physical that betrayed her intention to attack. I felt no need to move myself out of the way of the attack, but I "felt" her thought just as strongly as if it were a physical action. I was actually surprised when she did not attack, so I asked her why she didn't attack. She said that she didn't think it was going to work. What is really weird about it is that I knew beyond any shadow of doubt what my student intended to do and where she planned to launch her attack. I was surprised when it did not materialize. As I continued to chat with her about what had just happened, my student confirmed what she was thinking about doing, but that she had chosen not to follow through.

I have read about things like this and mostly dismissed them. Call it intuition if you want. I don't really care how you define it or what label you put on it. That's not the larger picture.

What intrigued me about this event is that I was aware of the thought of an impending action before it became a physical reality. I felt the threat of attack, not the actualized attack.

Most of the time when I am doing Randori, it is a game of chess. Some of the time I have a preset game plan of how I wish the engagement to play out, other times I want to find out what my students have learned and leave myself open to attack. Sometimes I have a lesson to share. Sometimes I am taken completely off guard. Sometimes I react, sometimes I respond (see the next article). At this stage in my learning, Judo is mostly about technical purity rather than forcing my way through to a position from which I can throw my partner. As I have said before, I do get rare flashes of Judo as it should really be done. In those moments Judo happens through me and I am not *doing* Judo in that sense. In the process of learning the martial way, I see such moments as moments of grace.

Being aware of a threat before it becomes something tangible was an altogether novel experience. Or was it? I believe that we do this sort of thing all the time but are, for the most part, blissfully unaware of it. The novel part to this whole episode for me was that I was *aware* of what was happening as it happened, possibly for the first time. It was almost like I was observing my mind receive my partner's thought intimating her intention to attack. The experience was so strong that the feeling stayed with me into the following day.

If you get down to basics, I will tell you that learning true mastery in any field of endeavor is about becoming

more aware. We get flashes of insight of something outside of the mundane range of our experiences and our level of awareness takes a step forward. Each time this happens we are irrevocably changed. Every time we become aware of something that was hitherto hidden from us, we are altered by the awareness. There is no going back to a previous state of being. By way of example, the very first time you do Judo as a totally effortless dance and you feel yourself to be merely a vessel through which Judo happens, the practice of Judo will change for you. It will never be the same again.

It is my belief that the purpose of any learning is to reach higher levels of personal development. I'm not just talking about higher levels of knowledge, skill or ability, I am talking about higher levels of *awareness*. I would further argue that the only path to such levels of mastery involves an uncompromising dedication of self to the process of learning.

Moments of awareness burn themselves deeply into our being and create openings for further change. I guess that this is why I am so dedicated to the notion of education in all its facets. Learning is a lifelong process that serves as the crucible for growth. Learning reveals mysteries to us and has insights for us about which we can scarcely dream. The only requirement is that we be open to the process. ☺

We can make our minds so like still water the beings gather about us
that they may see,
may it be, their own images, and so live for a moment with a clearer,
perhaps with even
a fiercer life because of our quiet

-W. B. Yeats, The Celtic Twilight

Reaction and Response

So what's the difference between a reaction and a response? I was doing free practice in Judo with my beginning class the other night and it crossed my mind that as beginners we react and as evolved players we respond. Is this a semantic statement? I don't think so. Let's look at it from this perspective:

When we react to something we follow a path automatically, when we respond to something we *choose* to follow a path. In Judo there is a constant transfer of energy back and forth between the players as each one looks for an opportunity to unbalance and throw the other. When your partner attacks you, you have two possible pathways: You can either react defensively or you can respond with avoidance and counter move.

In the early stages of learning Judo we tend to be reactive. When our partners push, we stiffen and resist, we push back. When our partners pull on us, we try to jerk away. At higher levels of play when we are pushed we respond with a non-defensive blending with the push. The result is that our partner becomes the one who is off balanced and an opportunity to counter attack has been created if we choose to take advantage of it. Notice two things about the previous statement. Firstly we engaged in a non-defensive response to the attack and secondly we have the opportunity but not the obligation to counter attack if we so choose.

Just for the fun of it, let's add another wrinkle. The consequence of being thrown is that you will hit the planet and many of us begin Judo with a fear of falling. As beginners we simply fear the physical act of falling and the implied loss of personal control that is implied in the act of being propelled to the planet surface by someone else's volition. As we acquire more rank, being thrown becomes a threat to the ego. Being thrown im-

plies that we are not very "good" at Judo yet...whatever that means. As we progress in our learning, we exchange one potential trap for another.

Now put the reaction versus response notion back into the equation. Do we react to an attack out of fear of the consequence of being thrown or do we react because we have not learned any better strategies for coping? Or is it both?

I am sure that by now you can see where I am headed with this one. How much does the give and take of our daily interactions with our family members or colleagues at work really differ from the pull and push of a Judo match? For those of you already in the martial arts, try this the other way around: How much of our daily "reactiveness" do we bring to our martial arts classes?

I would contend that if we allow it to do so, Judo allows us to learn to do two things really well: Come to terms with our overwhelming fear of loss and then find non-defensive mechanisms of responding to situations we face on a daily basis.

My little boy is a wonderful object lesson here. Any parent knows that there are times that our children push us the very edge of patience and then just a little beyond. At those moments we face moments of decision, we can either react and lash out against our young children or we can respond to the situation and choose another path that is better for everyone concerned.

This all takes me back to my first article. Fear blinds us to choice. Reaction guarantees that we will repeat our past actions, hence the word: reaction. Taken together, fear and reaction can be debilitating. Overcoming fear gives us freedom to see possibility. Learning to become responsive gives us freedom of choice to act on those possibilities. ☺

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UPCOMING EVENTS

- ◆ Akayama Winter Camp, Gulf Shores, MLK Weekend, January 15 & 16th, 2005
- ◆ Gulf Coast Judo Tournament, January 22nd, 2005
- ◆ SMAA In House Judo Tournament. February 5th, 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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Chris Dewey*

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