

Pathways

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"There are three mysteries in life: Air to the birds, water to the fish and humanity to itself."

Unknown

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Breathing

Last month I wrote a little about stress release and this month I'd like to pull on that thread some more as we head into the Holidays....and hopefully a little R&R.

Anyone who has been in my classes for any length of time has heard me tell them to relax and breathe in through the nose, out through the mouth, and to breathe from the belly rather than the chest.

I watch my students bleed energy as they move with tense, tight bodies, while feeding their bodies with shallow breathing that stops the blood from getting much needed oxygen. Martial arts get so much easier when we relax the muscles and actually allow the blood to get through to the muscle fibres, deliver work performing oxygen and remove waste products. More than that, breathing deeply brings you more oxygen per unit breath, which means that you can last longer in a training environment.

I want to share with you some ideas on how we breathe in the martial arts and how it might help us in every day life.

First, it is important to simply be aware of your breathing. Of course the instant you become aware of breathing, you will try to control it and then it gets ragged and irregular as you take an automatic function and try to make it a controlled action. Don't do that! Just watch how you breathe. Close your eyes and feel how your body breathes. Does your chest rise and fall? Does your belly inflate with each breathe? Are you breathing deeply or from the top of your lungs? Are your breaths deep and slow or

shallow and quick?

Now I would ask you to bring your attention to your breathing at various moments during your work day. Is your breathing different at different times of the day or under different circumstances?

The second step is to simply create the intention to breathe more deeply, more slowly, softly enough that you would not disturb the air around you and with a more even rhythm.

After almost four decades of martial arts training, I can tell you without a shadow of doubt, that bringing your attention to your breathing works. Whether you are feeling stressed or at peace, when you bring your attention to your breathing, make it richer, fuller, deeper, slower, quieter and more even. You will find some really wonderful things happen. You will get more oxygen through your body and that will give you better fuel efficiency. Moreover you will notice an improved clarity of thinking and also notice that some of those nagging body aches and pains pass off more easily because you will not be keeping your body so tight.

By simply setting the intent to breathe more richly, more fully, more deeply, slowly, quietly and with a profound rhythm, you will create a very powerful positive biofeedback loop that will help you handle your stress more easily and bring you a deeper sense of calm and a sense of well being...even when the world seems to falling apart around you. Give it a shot, and keep at it, it works. ☺

Beginning and ending

I was recently reminded of a training line that I used to use when I was teaching forms in Tae Kwon Do: "If you know where you are supposed to start a move, and know where you are supposed to end, and you practice for long enough, your body will fill in the middle part".

What I am attempting to convey here is the notion that there exists a "most efficient and most effective" pathway between the beginning and ending points of any suite of actions. There is what we can call the most "parsimonious" solution... the solution with the fewest number of steps. I am also trying to convey the point that each of us knows intuitively how to move (and we each have an inner intelligence that can guide us from point a to point b).

So let's take a couple of examples: You start in a front stance with a down block and you have to end facing the same direction with a lunge punch and another front stance but on the opposite side of the body.

This is a pretty easy example if you have done any traditional karate style...but even if you haven't it doesn't matter, the point will come out with the next example:

You start with a ready stance and end back in the same place with another ready stance but have fifty eight moves between them.

Do you see the difference? In the first example we have a very precise beginning point and a very precise ending point with only one major move between the two. In the latter example we have an entire form to squeeze in between the beginning and ending positions.

Before I tie all this together, there are a couple more things to consider that we will need to keep in mind: Firstly, the body can learn by feeling its way through. Muscle memory can provide a guide for the most economic and functional ways in

which to use the muscles, joints and limbs in any given action. Secondly, there are mental and kinesthetic intuitions at work that can provide clues about where to move next and how best to get there.

My little training line works for small bites of action, like getting from one starting position to a throwing solution in the least number of hand and foot actions. It does not work if you want to get from bowing in at the beginning of a tournament and end up with a trophy. Well, actually, that's not entirely true....it works if you use the learning tool thousands of times, in every action you undertake in the pathways of training *before* the tournament.

So where does this get us in the greater scheme of things?

Let's look at goal setting as a life skill. Many people will tell you that they have goals, but sometimes the end point is so far removed from the start point that any number of pathways become possible and it is difficult to tell whether or not you are on the right path.

For instance: I am in a job I do not like and want to become a millionaire. We know the starting position and we know the end position, but how many different pathways can you imagine between these two positions?

O.K., so let's make it a little smaller: I am in a job I do not like and want to earn more money. What are the chances that my lack of enthusiasm is obvious to my colleagues and my boss? What are the implications for getting any kind of advancement or salary increase? So what if I change my original starting statement... would that help?

Let's change the start position to something like: "I have lost the enthusiasm I once had for my job." That's better. I can do something about that, which can positively affect the outcome paths available to me. I can do a job skills inventory and

find out what it is that attracted me to that particular job in the first place and find enthusiasm in those things again. Alternatively, I can find another job that gives me more of those things, especially if I have moved away from those skills in my current job. Yet again, I could choose to find some way of enjoying what it is that I am now expected to do, if it is not what I began with.

These are the first steps. They are also steps that could lead me towards an increase in earning potential.

Now let's look at our original end point: Become a millionaire!

That's too broad. First I need to either decrease my current expenditures or increase my current earnings, or both. It's the basic economics of financial peace. Spend less than you earn, invest before you spend and be patient.

How are we doing here? Need to recap for a moment?

1. Know where you are beginning
2. Know *exactly* where you want to end up
3. Have a small number of steps between the two end points.
4. Set an intent and take an action towards the goal.
5. Are you closer or further away? Refine and continue to practice.
6. Go back to step one and repeat.

It's pretty much that simple, the problems come when we get impatient, when we put the end point too far from our starting point, when we fail to intuit what is the best path to take and when we fail to listen to the promptings given by the results that we are getting.

The rest is up to you....are you willing to move beyond where you are? Do you really know where you want to go, or are your plans really just nebulous ideas without any real substance? Do you trust yourself? Do you have real intent? ☺

We don't have memorable days, just memorable moments.

Anonymous

Integrity and action

Integrity is a big part of our culture these days. We tend to expect it, but do we really know what it means?

Integrity means: honesty, incorruptible, to be complete, without division or contradiction.

We tend to interpret the notion of living with integrity as living a life with high ethical and moral standards, a life of honor and a life wherein word and action are the same. People of integrity don't say one thing and do another.

I can see where the latter view has come out of the definition, but it is not the definition, it is an interpretation of the definition...not quite the same thing.

Sometimes, I think that this view of integrity leaves us somewhat adrift in the real world. We see this in the way in which society is all too eager to topple its icons as soon as a chink can be found in the armor. When I see things like this in the media I think that we as a society expect perfection, not integrity. We hold our leaders to standards that we could not fulfill ourselves.

So what then is integrity?

A punch or kick has integrity if it is delivered with precision to a specific target with the real intent of hitting the target with an exact amount of force.

So what does that tell me?

It tells me that when our actions are built upon a deliberate search for truth, they can have integrity. Does this mean that they are always "good" actions? Probably not.

Let's take the example of a habitually

negative behavior in a person's life. It really doesn't matter what the habit is. It could be a major addiction or something as "simple" as "inflating" the truth about your accomplishments. Let us say further, that we are aware of the behavior and have set the intent of changing the life we live. We see the negative effects, we want to improve our lives and we recognize that changes need to be made.

We start the road to what we see as a "better life."

An observer could say that we have started to live with integrity. But let's suppose that the journey out of our own particular challenge is not consistently uphill. Let's suppose that we slide backward every once in a while on our journey "upward and outward." Does that mean that we no longer have integrity?

I would argue that personal growth is rarely, nor consistently a one way journey when viewed on a daily basis. It is only when viewed over the long haul that the true nature of the journey becomes apparent. I would also argue that we have integrity so long as we have set the real intention of permanent change. Sometimes we descend again to learn a deeper lesson and the next rise takes us further.

The message here is very clear: There must be real intent. Kime. We have spoken about this so many times before. Kime is to act with decision.

A real punch has kime and anyone can tell the difference between a real punch and someone who is either putting on a show or not really attempting to punch.

In this instance, kime and integrity are two sides of the same coin. Without kime, integrity is not possible and without integrity, kime is not possible.

So when we reduce this down to living in our everyday lives in a world of personal compromise and look through the lens of reality, we can see people attempting to live with integrity all around us.

Moment by moment the world is full of courageous people all around us attempting to live with integrity.

We all fall short of our own standards and we all get back up again and go at it again, slowly overcoming ourselves and growing in the process of learning.

Perhaps I see this as the quintessential purpose of life. We overcome our weaknesses on a daily basis, sometimes even a momentary basis if that is all that we can manage. We seek to become better than we were and we fail miserably time and time again. But we keep going and here is where kime and integrity join hands to ensure the ultimate success of the process. We set firm intent, we act with integrity, we fall over...again. We get back up, we do it all over again and little by little we stumble our way into the light of an enlightened life.

So are enlightened people really any different to the rest of us? Or are they simply sages who have seen life for what it is and have embraced their true humanity with a degree of equanimity, purpose and resolve that escapes the rest of us?

Living with integrity is perhaps one of the easiest and yet one of the hardest things to do. See it for what it is and living with integrity becomes easy. Make it into something that it is not and living with integrity becomes an impossible task in which the slightest personal flaw can be seen as a total failure that we use to destroy our personal sense of self worth.

Integrity and kime call for right intent, right action, and dedication, not perfection. ☺

WHEN IS "NOW" A GOOD TIME?

TOM SHIELDS

What are you worth?

Do you ever get **smacked** between the eyes by some event or by something someone says?

It is a maxim of coaching and teaching that learning occurs whenever the window of opportunity opens. We generally don't learn things unless we are ready to accept the lesson.

Take both of those statements and rub them together and you will have some idea of why I am writing this article.

I was listening to a CD series recently, concerning self worth and I got smacked between the eyes by one of the comments that the author made. Before introducing his section on self worth, the author said that deep change can occur with a single word...if we are open to opportunity. For some reason it hit like a freight train. I'm not sure why, but it rippled through my entire day and on into the night. I could even see myself fighting the unassailable logic of his statement. It was even amusing at some level watching myself trying to deny his logic.

Self worth is a vulnerable spot for most of us and most of the time we don't like to admit our vulnerability. It is much easier to push off our lack of success in any area of our lives onto the things that we cannot control.

Before getting into this, let's make sure that we understand that self worth is not the same thing as self esteem. Self worth is the value we place upon our own existence. Think about it this way: Self esteem is something about which you can have a fairly clear moment to moment appreciation.

Self worth on the other hand is what acts at a subconscious level to affect our daily choices. For instance, how many times do you think about something and come to the conclusion that "I'm not worth it or I don't deserve it." Whenever that happens, it is your sense of self worth speaking through your life.

Self worth is what leads us to sabotage our own successes...we can read all the self help books, take the seminars, listen to the CD's but until we do something about our self worth it will not make a difference to the actual outcome of our lives on a daily basis. Take finances as a very practical example. How much are you worth? How much is too much? What do you deserve

as a salary? Each of us has an internal sense of exactly what we are worth given the jobs that we do.

So what is that sense of worth based upon? For a long time I have harbored the notion that it is based upon our own internal sense of how "good" we think we are. We learn very early on in life that rewards and affirmation come from doing "good", and that punishment and isolation come from doing "bad." Each one of us has kept an internal diary of "good" versus "bad" and has a tally sheet of where we stand. We then translate that tally sheet into a value for self worth. The direct application of this becomes the world in which we live and the things that we attract into it.

This is a hard pill to swallow. For instance: If I find myself getting into relationships that go awry...how much of it is a function of the fact that I do not believe that I deserve to have happy relationships? Taking a radical position for a moment might just cast reality into a different light. Suppose just for an instant that I am a courageous soul with inherent worth and a unique gift to give to humanity. Would that change my sense of self worth? The simple answer is that it will only change my self worth when I deeply, truly believe that I do have a unique gift to offer and that I truly do have innate value.

So where does this leave us? I believe it leaves us with several inescapable thoughts:

1. We each keep track of our actions and choices on some kind of internal score sheet
2. We translate the score chart into a self worth score
3. We match our external world with our self worth score
4. We will be unable to escape that particular programming until we accept that our self worth is based upon an innate value that transcends our individual perception.
5. True change will only occur when we are willing to let it occur and are open to the possibility that we might actually be worth more than we think.

In the paraphrased words of Zig Ziglar: "I was designed for accomplishment. I'm engineered for success. I'm endowed with the seeds of greatness." **SMACK!** ☺

December						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
31					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

January						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

- ◆ Akayama Winter Camp, Orange Beach, AL, MLK weekend, January, 2007
- ◆ Columbus Judo Tournament, Columbus, MS, January 20th, 2007
- ◆ Tai Chi Clinic, Tupelo, MS, February 2nd-4th, 2007
- ◆ Wakamusha Judo Tournament, Atlanta, GA February 7th, 2007.

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