



**THE INSTITUTE FOR
JEDI REALIST STUDIES**

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Personal 101

Step one on the journey of self awareness and personal change for Jedi Realists

A course developed for use by the Jedi Academy, an affiliate training program of
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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Expectations for this course.....	4
Lesson 1 – Telling Your Story.....	5
Lesson 2 – Strengths.....	6
Lesson 3 – Greatness.....	7
Lesson 4 – Weaknesses.....	9
Lesson 5 - Excuses.....	10
“Overcoming Barriers to Training” by Joe Cavazos.....	10
Lesson 6 – The Will to Change.....	13
Lesson 7 – Finding Your Purpose.....	15
Lesson 8 – Responsible Selfishness.....	17
The Little Soul and the Sun Part 1.....	18
The Little Soul and the Sun Part 2.....	19
Lesson 9 – Emotions.....	22
The Second Mind.....	23
Emotions as a Scale.....	24
Lesson 10 – Living in the Present.....	27
Lesson 11 – You Are Not Your Past.....	28
Lesson 12 – Telling Your Story.....	30

Introduction

by Jax

"You must unlearn what you have learned." Yoda told this to Luke in Empire Strikes Back, as he shared a concept common to all paths of self development. In the Jedi path you will be unlearning more than you can probably imagine at this point. Before you can unlearn, however, you need to become conscious of just what it is that you know.

This is not the only reason for undergoing self awareness and personal development training. When we become aware of our weaknesses we can work to strengthen them. When we become aware of our strengths we can share them with others. As we begin to understand our self we can understand others. Understanding others allows us to help others with their own personal journey through life. The Jedi path includes that of aiding others, which we can't do effectively until we are helping our self. Personal 101 is the first step in that process.

In general, we categorize the path of self improvement through four areas: mind, body, spirit and emotion. Realistically, none of these areas are independent of the other, as most aspects of life fit into more than one category, but this gives us a place to begin. As a Jedi we train each area to find balance between them all. When we are in balance we are at our most 'in tune' with the Force, and that is when we are most effective as Jedi. We all have our natural tendency toward one area, or we tend to avoid the area that is most difficult for us. Over time, you will work on these areas of difficulty with the help of the faculty and staff of the Institute. Through the course of this class, if you have any concerns that you wish to discuss with the faculty outside of your homework, feel free to contact them privately. We are here to help you.

This course is setup on a weekly schedule where you will be given journal prompts or other short assignments to aid you in your search for self awareness. It naturally falls into two parts - initial understanding of who you are, and then focusing on those areas of our self that can form a barrier to our growth as Jedi and people. If at any point you are unsure about the purpose of an assignment, ask for clarification. Keep in mind that you get out of this course what you put into it. Therefore, the deeper you can dig through these assignments, the better. This is a safe place, and the only person reading your assignment will be the instructor. You are welcome to share as much as you'd like with others, of course, but it is understandable that some things should be kept private.

You have probably heard the phrase "there are many paths up the mountain". In the journey to self awareness this is especially true. This course is not the only way to learn about your self, it is just one way. My hope is that this course gives you a good place to start in your personal explorations and you continue learning more about yourself throughout your training, not just during your classes.

Before we begin I'd like to leave you with one final thought. While this course is setup with questions for you to answer each lesson, not all questions will have simple answers. You will also find yourself asking questions that you can't answer about yourself at this time. When that occurs, keep this quote in mind from Rainer Maria Rilke in Letters to a Young Poet.

"You are so young, so before all beginning, and I want to beg you, as much as I can, dear sir, to be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer."

The Jedi path is all about questions and the journey to the answer. A good question is worth its weight in gold, propelling you on a journey unimagined before the question.

Expectations for this course

Each lesson has an assignment. You need to do these assignments and submit them to me for grading. Submit each assignment as you complete them, either through email or the assignment submission form in the Personal 101 course area. This is my preferred method, as I can then give you feedback as you go. If you are doing this workbook with sporadic internet access, you can submit a few assignments at one time. Please stick to common formats - .txt or .doc or .rtf. If you have Office 2007, please save your document in Office 2003 format (.doc). Thank you.

If you have any questions at any point in the course, please ask. I can be contacted on the forums, as well as by email, Jackie.meyer@gmail.com. Then go ahead with the first lesson. I look forward to working with you!

Lesson 1 – Telling Your Story

Before undergoing a journey, it can be useful to take note of where you are in order to see how far you progress in a period of time. This week we will be marking the beginning of our journey within this class. For some of you, this will be the first time you've examined yourself for an extended period of time. For others, you may be very aware of your thoughts, your behaviors, and how you change through life. No matter where you are on the self awareness spectrum, it is my goal that this course offers you a chance for greater awareness as well as tools for change. I believe that most people do wish to change and improve their life, but don't have the tools to do so. Throughout the personal courses you will find a myriad of tools to use in your life.

But enough about tools, let's get started. Your first assignment is to tell me your story. Think of it as a mini biography. If it helps, focus on what you would tell me, a mentor on your Jedi path, so you don't have to worry about censoring some areas of your life that others may believe a bit crazy. ;-) I'd like this to be a few paragraphs at the least, covering aspects such as your interests mentally (what do you like to study), physically, and spiritually, but keep it under a few pages so I have time to read it. :-)

If you didn't include it in your narrative, please remind me what brought you to the Jedi path and what you hope to get from this course. If you have any questions, please ask. I look forward to reading your stories!

Lesson 2 – Strengths

The role of the Jedi in our society is not often clearly defined. Often each Jedi finds an area of interest that they focus on which they then use to help those around them. In order to do this, it helps to know just what your strengths and interests are.

For some, this activity will be easier than others. I would like you to look at all areas of your life, as best you can. Below are some suggestions, feel free to go beyond this if you wish.

Hobbies

What did you enjoy doing as a child? What do you enjoy doing now in your free time? If money and time were no object, what would spend your time doing?

Career

As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up? What would be your ideal career now? Again, don't limit yourself to money requirements, locations, or even your education at this time. The job doesn't even have to exist; this is just a way to get to know yourself at a deeper level. Dream for a bit, see what happens!

Education

If time and money were not issue, what would you want to learn more about? This includes your Jedi path - if we had our ideal situation of an offline Academy or Temple, what would you hope to learn and focus on? Be as specific as possible.

Personality

What do you consider to be your strengths? For instance, are you good at making decisions? Are you creative? This is a very general question to get you to think in general about your strengths. No strength is too 'small' or insignificant, so share whatever you come up with.

Remember, the deeper you can go with this, the better. As you initially think about these questions, how do you feel? Please note this in your assignment. I would like to challenge you to come up with a list of at least 10 strengths (total, not 10 for each section). If you find this difficult, please contact me so we can get you back on track.

Finally, I'd like you to share your dream for the future of your path and that of the Jedi community. Where do your strengths fit into this picture? This should be a fun exercise and does not have to be very grounded in reality so you are inspired and motivated to train. :-). There is great power in our thoughts, and we create most effectively when we feel strongly about something. We create what we desire when we feel joy towards our thoughts, so let's see what we can create for the future!

Lesson 3 – Greatness

Be honest, did you struggle in finding your strengths? You are not alone. As a society we are trained to notice our faults before our strengths. While this is well meaning at times, allowing us to continually improve on our weaknesses, it is often taken too far, keeping us from realizing our full potential as human beings. I'd like you to read the quote below (often mis-attributed to Nelson Mandela) and reflect on it.

Our Greatest Fear —Marianne Williamson

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Last week's assignment has two purposes. The first is to help you see your own greatness and begin to confront your own fear of greatness. And second, to help you see that you already have experience in many areas. While the Academy is setup so there are teachers and students, that doesn't mean that the teachers are always the most knowledgeable person in every area. There are times when you have spent a large amount of time studying something, making you a subject matter expert. There are other times when you are on even par with others. Don't be afraid to speak up and share your knowledge just because you're a student. We are all students and teachers on this Jedi path. Sharing our knowledge helps everyone grow.

Admiration

All of us have strengths that we aren't aware of yet. One way we can determine these potential strengths is through observation of who we admire. This week we're going to discuss another quote, from a book called *The Energy of Money* by Maria Nemeth, Ph.D.

Your Standards of Integrity

Your heart recognizes and is drawn to people who possess qualities you admire. You cherish or delight in these attributes because you know what they are. They reflect your own potential. When you see these qualities in others, you experience joy, inspiration, and gratitude. That's the signal that your heart is responding to them.

Take a moment and think about someone whom you admire. What qualities do you prize in them? Below the surface of physical attributes or possessions, which traits reflect their basic goodness? Do you admire their courage, loyalty, or creativity? Do you honor their love, compassion, or truthfulness? Even as you are thinking about the person, do you notice a certain warmth in your heart?

Your heart warms in response to these qualities because they are inside you. You can't appreciate a trait unless you've experienced it - whether or not you are currently experiencing it. In order to value loyalty, for example, you must know what loyalty is. You must sense what it means to be dependable, steady, faithful, and dedicated - and you must also know the pain of disloyalty. This is true for any other attribute to which your heart responds. To use a physiological metaphor, if you respond to the trait you must have a receptor site for it, a location in your heart that recognizes and reacts to the quality when you see it in others. To be moved by a trait in another person, you must have that quality inside yourself as a possibility.

Remember the old saying that you don't like certain people because they have some traits that you dislike in yourself? What if the opposite were true as well, that you value traits in others that you also possess? It always interests me when we discuss this in the You and Money Course, because I see how quick we are to admit the first saying, and how reluctant we are to own up to the second.

You possess the possibility for a host of attributes or characteristics that you consider to be special and admirable. When you see them in others, your heart lights. When you, yourself, act in accordance with these qualities, you feel a sense of well-being, wholeness and completeness. You are acting with integrity. The qualities that you are demonstrating are the standards that are most important to you; the standards that, finally, express who you are.

Assignment: I'd like you to take some time with this idea. Think of at least two people you admire. List what it is you admire about them. Can you see the potential for that same greatness within you? Think about the Marianne Williamson quote - are you afraid that you could have this greatness within you? What would it mean if you had the qualities within yourself that you admire in others? Would you need to change your life, or lose your excuses? For fun, you can also apply this activity to your favorite Jedi - why do they inspire you, what qualities do you admire, etc.

Note: As with every assignment, these questions cannot be answered in a single sentence. Don't worry about brevity, the deeper your thoughts on this the more useful it is to your life and development as a Jedi.

Lesson 4 – Weaknesses

Now that you have an idea of the greatness and potential greatness within you, let's look at weaknesses. While we can train our strengths and reach greatness in a narrow area, a Jedi needs to have skills in many areas. This requires that we are aware of our weaknesses and strive to strengthen them.

I'd like to go a little deeper than just listing whatever weaknesses come to mind. This week we'll try to narrow our weaknesses down to four categories: mind (the mental, scholarly side of the self), body (the physical, health side of the self), spirit (the part of the self larger than the physical, connected to the Force and our heart), and emotion. Of these four areas, where do you feel the weakest? Which do you spend the least amount of focus on? Said another way, look back at your life. In times of difficulty, which areas have contributed to that difficulty? Did your emotions create volatile situations? Has your health hindered you from success? Have you struggled with academics?

Focus on what you consider your greatest weakness. Do you feel this is an area you can strengthen? I'm not asking if you know how to strengthen it, but whether you believe it is possible to improve. If you don't believe change is possible, it won't be. Belief may not be all that you need, but it is the foundation of change which helps all other tools work better.

No matter what your weaknesses, they are almost never an area you can improve overnight. It can take years to overcome a weaknesses, and some are never overcome, just continually improved over a lifetime. This is ok. Life, and the Jedi path, is not a sprint but a marathon. Do not become discouraged when the same weakness creates complications in your life. Throughout your Jedi training, you will acquire tools and knowledge which aid your growth and understanding. So don't worry if you don't have a single idea how to improve your weaknesses, they will come (some through your classes at the Academy). However, I'd like to challenge your imagination if nothing else to come up with a possible method to strengthen your primary area of weakness during the coming week.

For your assignment: Answer the questions asked in the lesson. If you are struggling, send me a message to clarify the lesson for you.

Lesson 5 - Excuses

Part 2 - Overcoming Barriers to Training

There are an infinite number of ways to get to know yourself. At this point you've thought about why you're here, along with your strengths and weaknesses. The second part of this class is setup to help you overcome barriers to training and address the most common weaknesses of new (and old) Jedi. It is my hope you will find it easier to stick with the Jedi path and continue with your training to not only finish this course but continue training for years to come.

This week is going to be primarily a reading assignment. The first article is a blog post discussing barriers to training in aikido, though you don't need any knowledge of aikido to understand the article. I'd like to you to read the article and respond to these questions.

1. How does this article apply to the Jedi path?
2. Do you feel you find excuses to avoid training? (This is rarely something we are aware of in the moment, so think back.) Why or why not?

“Overcoming Barriers to Training” by Joe Cavazos

“Don’t let the things you can’t do prevent you from doing the things you can do.” – John Wooden

John Wooden was one of the top college basketball coaches of all time. He coached the mighty UCLA Bruins and almost every year that he was coaching his basketball team won the NCAA championship. Most of the basketball players on his college teams went on to play at the game highest level – the NBA.

My high school basketball coach used to tell me, “Stop making excuses!” John Wooden’s quote is more eloquently expressed, but both men were sending the same message. My high school basketball coach, Roy Garcia, was one of the most influential people, outside of my parents, that helped to shape the person that I am today. Of course, it is my decisions and actions that have and continue to determine my life’s path and consequences.

What does this analogy have to do with aikido? Mainichi no keiko – and all of the excuses that I have heard over my years in aikido as to why my fellow aikidoka and my aikido students cannot make it to training! They have used the excuse of things they can’t do prevent them from going to train. When I would see my sensei, the late Bill Sosa, at seminars that he was conducting, the first thing he would ask me was how often I was training.

When I first began aikido, the instructor used to teach that aikido is a “way of life.” I have heard many students recite this mantra when asked in their first ever kyu test, “What is aikido to you?” Then I never saw them again in the dojo, some of them ever! In 2007 I celebrated 10 years of having opened my own dojo. Any aikido teacher that has been in business for over 10 years will have seen hundreds, if not thousands of potential aikido students walk through their door, stay a while, then leave. Almost every one of those students enjoyed the benefits of aikido but every one of them found a reason to prevent the continued study of the art. It may be that aikido was too hard, their progress was too slow, training was interfering with another area of their lives, they got hurt, the cost was too high, they found that aikido didn’t work for them in an altercation, etc

The martial arts are not for everyone. If it were easy every student who walked through the door would still be in aikido today and would be instant black belt candidates. I don’t expect aikido to be for everyone. I expect a certain number of beginning students to not last a year. I honestly

thank every one of those ex-students that have come and gone. Thanks to them, the serious students have the opportunity to continue training. Those students helped pay the rent and utilities for the extreme few that have continued to train over the years. They have provided us the opportunity to work with ukes of different heights, weights, body structures, attacks and attitudes. It has helped us to forge our aikido into what it is today.

The ones that really bother me are those students that have been aikido for many years, have some rank (nidan or above), then mysteriously leave the art. They found something else in their lives that filled the space that aikido used to fill or they found a reason to stop training. It has led me to a theory: I think that most aikido students are trying to find a reason to quit. They look for excuses not to come to class: it was raining, it was cold, my back hurts (substitute any other part of the body), my hakama was torn, my uniform wasn't washed, etc. As an aikido teacher, it is my job to nullify the reason for a student to quit or, rather, create a reason for the student to continue coming to class. Maybe this is the real job of any martial arts instructor, making a reason to come to training. Maybe it isn't enough to have impeccable waza or technique, if we don't have the students there to hand this down to.

Returning to the idea of excuses for not coming to class, learning to train with pain or minor injuries is part of the martial arts training. If your fingers are hurt, learn how to continue training with the pain. If your shoulder hurts, learn how to roll in that situation. If your back hurts, learn how to move with your stiff back. You just might learn something about yourself when you work through the pain. "Don't allow the things that you can't do prevent you from doing the things that you can do." It's more than just trying to find an excuse not to come to class, it's trying to find a solution to train daily – mainichi no keiko. Part of the training is self improvement and finding out the body's limitations – physically and mentally. When you know what your limitations are, the next step is to overcome those limitations. You can only find this through daily training.

The highest level shihans today trained through pain, trained long hours, overcame all of their limitations to become who they are today. I am pretty sure that many of today's "warriors" would have never made it through O'Sensei's "hell dojo" days like our shihans did. Our current aikidokas would have found an excuse to not be there. I would like to thank those shihans alive today that continued training so that they would have something to hand down to us. I will be there – no excuses!

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Acceptable Excuses

Before we leave this week's reading, we should discuss excuses. Excuses are often a way for us to hide the truth from our self. I could say I'm too tired to do something, and that may be true, but it may also be true that I'm being lazy and need to just exercise my will. Only I would know, and when I'm paying enough attention to myself I can tell the difference. I may still decide not to do something, but I can make that decision with honesty and say "I'm choosing not to do this" rather than making an excuse. Then I am fully in control of my life rather than allowing external events control me. I have taken responsibility, which is key if you are to be successful as a

Jedi. However it can take time to understand your reasons, so don't be discouraged if you can't figure it out.

For now, focus on looking at the reasons for missing training. Sometimes the reasons are valid and appropriate - if you are sick, if your internet is down, there are many short term problems that can interfere. There are also poor reasons - forgetting, laziness - that are signs of other issues, like prioritization. No individual activity always takes priority over all over, thus there will be times when other things take priority over physical or classroom training, but the difficulty comes in maintaining your perspective. It is easy to completely forget about some activities once we allow other aspects of life to have a higher priority. Take the time to look at your priorities. Make a list and compare that list to how much time and energy you actually put forth. Are you spending a lot of time on things that are low priorities? If so, adjust your life so it is in greater alignment with your priorities.

Excuses can also be a sign of self-sabotage. Does something always seem to come up to keep you from your training? You may be subconsciously sabotaging your training and growth as a person. There are many reasons for this, including fear of who you could become. Becoming self aware of your actions is useful in all areas of life. If you find you are having problems with priorities, just let me know. We'll discuss your circumstances to attempt to solve your problems and clear the way for your training.

Keep in mind if you do have a temporary roadblock, like becoming sick, just send an email. Maintaining open communication is useful. It's also a chance for you to do a gut check. If your reason for missing a deadline is embarrassing and you don't want to say it, that's a sign that it might not have been the best decision. However, by discussing that you can learn from the experience and make a better decision in the future.

For your assignment, respond to the questions above regarding the article, and also spend time journaling about your own excuses when it comes to Jedi training. What patterns do you see? Don't judge, just try to see something new.

Lesson 6 – The Will to Change

When we take the time to look at our pattern of excuses we will often find we simply lack the will to change. If change and the Jedi path were easy, we wouldn't need much will to accomplish what we desire. But things of value are rarely easy to attain, so we have to exercise and strengthen our will like a muscle. This week we'll discuss a few strategies to strengthen your will.

In our increasingly busy lives we find less energy available to strengthen our will, even when our desire for change is strong. Just as our physical body needs energy to build strength, so does our spirit need energy to strengthen the will. So first, look at your life. Are you expending energy in every direction and not leaving enough for what you actually want to do? Are you getting enough sleep and eating quality food at regular intervals? If you aren't, you are making it more difficult for you to do what you wish and creating a much larger mountain to climb with your will.

Another way to look at your will is to understand the three selves, as Dan Millman (and others) describe. The Basic Self is responsible for the body and provides instinctual wisdom and energy, including the idea of the inner child. The Conscious Self is often our dominant method of interacting with the world, gathering and interpreting information as well as educating and guiding the Basic Self. The Higher Self is the part of us that is connected directly to the Force and watches over the Conscious Self without judgment, inspiring us while providing intuitions and feelings that we experience in our body. When these three aspects are in balance, our will is strong and change comes relatively easy. When they are out of balance, our Conscious Self acts as an overbearing and controlling parent, using logic to dominate the Basic Self and while ignoring the wisdom of the Higher Self. Taking care of our Basic Self provides the energy we need to create change and keep our will strong.

The Basic Self holds the Keys to Transformation, as Dan Millman describes them. This is an excerpt from his book, *No Ordinary Moments*.

Keys to Transformation

Since it holds the keys to a vast storehouse of transformative energy, let's review what we know about the Basic Self.

1. The Basic Self is responsible for, and controls, the body.
2. It gives us our vital energy for life.
3. Its qualities, drives, motives, logic, interests, and values most closely resemble those of a young child.
4. It only gives energy to activities it values or feels excited about.
 - Like most young children, it gets excited by new toys, fun, surprises, recognition, attention, and appreciation.
 - Like most young children, it likes excitement; it likes to acquire new things, see new places, feel safe, and feel pleasure.
5. The Basic Self is responsible for survival and security, sexual/creative energy, personal power, and discipline. It is concerned with success in the material world.
6. Like most young children, the Basic Self fears the unknown and tends to resist any change unless that change appeals to it enough to overcome its resistance. Promising and delivering additional, pleasurable compensation enjoyed by our particular Basic Self can make the difference. (For example, "I'll stop smoking, and I'll get a massage every week.")

Most often, when we make a change in our life, we focus on what we have to give up: We "lose" weight; we "give up" smoking, alcohol, or another drug; we "end" a relationship. But the mo-

ment we end one thing, we begin another: In losing weight, we gain lightness; in giving up smoking or other drugs, we enhance our health and vitality and form a new relationship with ourselves and with reality; in ending a relationship, we may open the space for a more fulfilling one. Choice involves giving up something we want for something we want more. Usually, a part of us wants to change, and another part doesn't. No change is all good or all bad. Whether change feels easy or difficult depends upon where we put our focus and energy. Contemplating what we "have to give up," then, puts our Basic Self into strong resistance. Focusing on the benefits will gain the cooperation and energy and support of our Basic Self - if it finds these benefits appealing."

What that means for you is to not fight your Basic Self, but work with it. Make things fun, add variety to your training to keep things interesting, and don't be afraid to take a little time for pure enjoyment, such as listening to music, playing a video game, or hanging out with friends. Reward yourself for accomplishments and simply take care of yourself. You'll find change easier to accomplish.

This lesson does not include every strategy to strengthen your will. If you find your circumstances are not addressed by these ideas, let me know either privately or through the discussions so we can discuss other ideas.

Even when we work in harmony with our Basic and Higher Selves, sometimes we just need to 'just do it.' The will is strengthened by using it, just as a muscle. Begin with small, easy to attain goals. For instance, when you are sitting around not feeling as if you want to do anything, force yourself to get up and do something. Perhaps a small chore, a few pushups, or go for a walk. Doing something when you want to do nothing gives you the chance to exercise your will without too many consequences if for failure - it's just practice. In time, your will becomes easier to call upon for larger tasks so that you can accomplish your desires even without your basic self on board.

Assignments

Pros and Cons with the Basic Self

1. Write down the biggest thing you want to change about yourself.
2. Make a list of the main things you will lose when you make this change.
3. Make a list of the main things you will gain when you make this change.
4. Compare the lists and decide - is it worth it? If you are struggling with this activity, ask the class or instructor for some other perspectives.
5. What ideas do you have to excite the Basic Self to support you in this change?

During the next week (and beyond) take advantage of small opportunities to strengthen your will. Do you want to eat something sweet? Eat only one piece of candy instead of half a bag. Are you feeling tired? Get yourself up and do a little cleaning, or some pushups and sit-ups. Do the things you don't feel like doing and take note of them each day. Submit this list at the end of the week, as well as your reflections on the activity. Did you find it easier to use your will the more you did it? What is still difficult? Note this in your assignment.

Above all, remember to be kind to yourself. If this were easy we wouldn't have a lesson devoted to it. :-)

Lesson 7 – Finding Your Purpose

A key element in maintaining motivation is to have a purpose for what you are doing. This is true in everything you do, but especially true for a longer journey such as the Jedi path. Last week we discussed our Basic Self and its impact on having the energy to do what we needed to do. Finding your purpose involves your Higher Self and its big picture perspective. It includes not just goals but the reason for those goals.

I'll use myself as an example. My primary role is as a teacher and mentor to people. My purpose is to help others build a strong foundation so they can find the greatness within themselves. My own training then has two motivations: first to improve in the areas that will enhance my life, and second to enhance my ability to guide others. Sometimes I study a topic simply because it will help others, without actually needing it in my own life - and my purpose as a teacher motivates me to do that. In addition I am always aware that someday I will raise children and then all of my Jedi training will be tested in ways I can't imagine yet I'm sure. So I learn about things that apply to that future day as well, knowing it will take some time to understand all that I learn.

Having a primary purpose that serves as a thread through all your training is important for the long term. However, short term motivation is needed as well. Over the years I've picked up bits and pieces about healing because it was necessary. My wife has weak joints that easily dislocated, providing me the chance to practice different types of energy healing. In the past few years she's developed seizures which provide me many opportunities to practice and learn as I go. Without this need I wouldn't have focused on healing as I did because it didn't have much application. Now I wish I had more time to study because it quickly becomes a critical situation in my life. Thus, my purpose as a healer comes up very often and motivates me to take care of myself and learn as much as I can in the time available. Needing to apply your training is a strong motivator!

I want to be careful not to point you in the wrong direction here. While I have plenty of outside motivation, I also have an internal drive that is based entirely on my own spiritual growth. Many of the books I read are for my own understanding about just what is reality in the Universe. In life my purpose is to grow as much as I can as a human being which is primarily focused on the spiritual, since that is the least understood. Even without the other purposes in my life, this inner drive would keep me learning and growing. It is the other areas that provide greater breadth however.

This week we'll go easy on outside reading and spend time discussing our purpose. If you feel you have a mission or purpose in life, what is it? If you don't know, spend some time in reflection and try to come up with something. Think back to Lesson 3 where you looked at people you admire. That assignment can give you some good clues to find your purpose. In fact, I used that exact book excerpt to make a critical decision in my life, as it triggered an "Aha!" moment.

Your purpose can change, so don't feel like what you come up with is something you stick with forever. You just want something to focus on to keep your motivation up in the coming years. In addition, come up with some shorter term motivational purposes. If you get stuck, ask

for help. You should feel excited after this exercise! :-) Write up your answers to submit for homework.

Lesson 8 – Responsible Selfishness

Selfishness has rather negative connotations in society. As children we're taught to share and that wanting something for yourself is bad. This has a purpose for children as they learn to think of the group as well as themselves. Societies flourish when the group works together instead of as individuals. However, like anything, when taken too far everyone suffers.

As we discussed previously, in order to make changes in our life we need to have the energy available to make those changes. Many Jedi do not have trouble with selfishness, helping anyone who they feel needs help. Instead they need to learn how to say no and not overextend themselves. Even those that are able to say no often find it difficult and struggle with guilt when they do make the responsible choice. These are the ideas we'll address this week so you can free up the energy that is being spent.

First, think about your life. Have you ever found yourself being pulled in every direction at once? Do you spend your time wishing you could do what you want to do, but are always doing something for someone else? Are your responsibilities keeping you from your deepest desires? Why do you think this is?

How do you feel when you tell someone no? Does it feel different when they are asking for some minor help rather than major help?

There are many reasons why a person feels they can't say no when someone asks for help. Perhaps they fear the negative reaction that may come, such as the other person getting mad when you say no. Perhaps they feel it is their responsibility to help everyone who asks. Why you may feel as if you can't say no is worth exploring. If you need help, just ask.

There are a few things I had to learn in order to know when to help others, and when to focus on myself. First, I had to become aware of my energy levels and their relation to my mood and health. Have you noticed that low energy levels precede illness? Having low energy doesn't mean you will get sick, but the probabilities are much higher if you are not taking care of yourself. Also, how energy levels tend to produce poor moods, making it harder to be patient and kind, and more easily angered or frustrated. When we are in a poor mood, we make life more difficult for ourselves and those around us. That reduces the effectiveness of any help we can provide, and can in fact make things worse. We shouldn't be afraid to say 'not right now' when someone asks for help and we are low on energy or in a poor mood. Even if we just take 30 minutes to take a nap, a bath, or a walk, it can make an immense difference and allow us to be much more helpful.

Now, I am all too familiar with needing to help when it isn't the best time for you. My wife has a fairly severe seizure disorder which requires I help her at all times of day, whether I'm sick or not. I balance this by taking care of what is necessary at the time, and then making sure I take care of myself after. This often involves a cleansing bath, which includes lavender bath salts that further cleanse my energy field, helping me stay healthy. I also make sure I enjoy the short walks I take from the parking lot to my building at work, and between buildings. I make sure to take a deep breathe and release tension that is accumulating. I also try to step outside onto our porch to breathe in the fresh air. All of this helps reduce my stress and gives me more energy to

use taking care of her.

Another thing I had to work on was communication. When someone asks us to do something, it's very easy to think they mean they want it right now. If we're in the middle of something, we can get annoyed because we are being interrupted from something important to us (such as eating or training). Learning to ask when something is needed, or asking if they can wait a few minutes helps you understand how important it is. This allows you to prioritize your life. Also, by communicating your needs (I'm in the middle of eating, or I'll be free in 15 minutes) gives them the chance to understand your needs and take them into account. Most people aren't so selfish that they wouldn't allow you to take care of important tasks first, they just aren't aware of your needs.

Another aspect of communication occurs inside your mind. It's crucial to pay attention to any negative, self defeating thoughts. While helping someone, you cannot play the victim. To do so only reduces your energy and effectiveness. Always help willingly. If you are reluctant or resentful, take the time to either tell them no or get into a mindset where you are willingly helping. People do pick up on your mood, and your help won't be as effective when it's coming from a negative mindset.

The other biggest thing I had to learn is a big one, spiritually. It may be difficult to believe or understand, but I'll do my best. I summarize it like this: Nothing can happen in a person's life without their soul giving permission for it to occur. All the good, all the bad, it all has a purpose in life. The best way of explaining this, in my opinion, comes from Neale Donald Walsch. I'd like to you read these two excerpts before reading further in this lesson.

The Little Soul and the Sun Part 1

There once was a soul who knew itself to be the light. This was a new soul, and so, anxious for experience. "I am the light," it said. "I am the light." Yet all the knowing of it and all the saying of it could not substitute for the experience of it. And in the realm from which this soul emerged, there was nothing but the light. Every soul was grand, every soul was magnificent, and every soul shone with the brilliance of My awesome light. And so the little soul in question was as a candle in the sun. In the midst of the grandest light - of which it was a part - it could not see itself, nor experience itself as Who and What it Really Is.

Now it came to pass that this soul yearned and yearned to know itself. And so great was its yearning that I one day said, "Do you know, Little One, what you must do to satisfy this yearning of yours?"

"Oh, what, God? What? I'll do anything!" the little soul said.

"You must separate yourself from the rest of us," I answered, "and then you must call upon yourself the darkness."

"What is the darkness, o Holy One?" the little soul asked.

"That which you are not," I replied, and the soul understood.

And so this the soul did, removing itself from the All, yea, going even unto another realm. And in this realm the soul had the power to call into its experience all sorts of darkness. And this it did.

Yet in the midst of all the darkness did it cry out, "Father, Father why hast Thou forsaken me?" Even as have you in your blackest times. Yet I have never forsaken you, but stand by you always, ready to remind you of Who You Really Are; ready, always ready, to call you home. Therefore, be a light unto the darkness, and curse it not. And forget not Who You Are in the moment of your encirclement by that which you are not. But do you praise to the creation, even as you seek to change it. And know that what you do in the time of your greatest trial can be your greatest triumph. For the experience you create is a statement of Who You Are - and Who You Want to Be. I (God) have told you this story - the parable of the little soul and the sun - so that you might better understand why the world is the way it is - and how it can change in an instant the moment everyone remembers the divine truth of their highest reality.

from

Conversations with God book 1 by Neale Donald Walsch, p 33-34 first hardcover edition

The Little Soul and the Sun Part 2

There is a second half to the parable. Here it is:

"You may choose to be any Part of God you wish to be," I said to the Little Soul. "You are Absolute Divinity, experiencing Itself. What Aspect of Divinity do you now wish to experience as You?"

"You mean I have a choice?" asked the Little Soul. And I answered, "Yes. You may choose to experience any Aspect of Divinity in, as, and through you."

"Okay," said the Little Soul, "then I choose Forgiveness. I want to experience my Self as that Aspect of God called Complete Forgiveness."

Well, this created a little challenge as you can imagine.

There was no one to forgive. All I have created is Perfection and Love.

"No one to forgive?" asked the Little Soul, somewhat incredulously.

"No one," I repeated. "Look around you. Do you see any souls less perfect, less wonderful than you?"

At this the Little Soul twirled around, and was surprised to see himself surrounded by all the souls in heaven. They had come from far and wide throughout the Kingdom, because they heard that the Little Soul was having an extraordinary conversation with God.

"I see none less perfect than I!" the Little Soul exclaimed. "Who, then, shall I have to forgive?"

Just then, another soul stepped forward from the crowd. "You may forgive me," said this Friendly Soul.

"For what?" the Little Soul asked.

"I will come into your next physical lifetime and do something for you to forgive," replied the Friendly Soul.

"But what? What could you, a being of such Perfect Light, do to make me want to forgive you?" the Little Soul wanted to know.

"Oh," smiled the Friendly Soul, "I'm sure we can think of something."

"But why would you want to do this?" The Little Soul could not figure out why a being of such perfection would want to slow down its vibration so much that it could actually do something "bad."

"Simple," the Friendly Soul explained, "I would do it because I love you. You want to experience your Self as Forgiving, don't you? Besides, you've done the same for me?"

"I have?" asked the Little Soul.

“Of course. Don’t you remember? We’ve been All Of It, you and I. We’ve been the Up and the Down of it, and the Left and the Right of it. We’ve been the Here and the There of it, and the Now and the Then of it. We’ve been the Big and the Small of it, the Male and the Female of it, the Good and the Bad of it. We’ve all been the All of It.

“And we’ve done it by agreement, so that each of us might experience ourselves as The Grandest Part of God. For we have understood that...

“In the absence of that which You Are Not, that Which You ARE, is NOT.”

“In the absence of ‘cold,’ you cannot be ‘warm.’ In the absence of ‘sad,’ you cannot be ‘happy,’ without a thing called ‘evil,’ the experience you call ‘good’ cannot exist.

If you choose to be a thing, something or someone opposite to that has to show up somewhere in your universe to make that possible.”

The Friendly Soul then explained that those people are God’s Special Angles, and these are the conditions of God’s Gifts.

“I ask only one thing in return,” the Friendly Soul declared.

“Anything! Anything!” the Little Soul cried. He was excited now to know that he could experience every Divine Aspect of God. He understood, now, The Plan.

“In the moment that I strick you and smite you,” said the Friendly Sould, “in the moment that I do the worst to you that you could ever imagine - in that self-same moment...remember Who I Really Am.”

“Oh, I won’t forget!” promised the Little Soul. “I will see you in the perfection with which I hold you now, and I will remember Who You Are, always.”

That is...that is an extraordinary story, and incredible parable.

And the promise of the Little Soul is the promise I make to you. That is what is unchanging. Yet have you, My Little Soul, kept this promise to others?

No. I’m sad to say I have not.

Do not be sad. Be happy to notice what is true, and be joyous in your decision to live a new truth. For god is a work in progress, and so are you. And remember this always: If you saw you as God sees you, you would smile a lot.

So go now and see each other as Who You Really Are.

Observe. Observe. Observe.

I have told you - the major difference between you and highly evolved beings is that highly evolved beings observe more.

If you wish to increase the speed with which you are evolving, seek to observe more.

From Conversations with God book 3 by Neale Donald Walsch, page 347 paperback edition

This can help you in understanding that each of us plays a role in each others' life. Sometimes it is most important to be there to aid another. Yet other times, if we aren't careful, we can hinder a person's growth by robbing them of an experience. We have all heard of enablers - those people who think they are helping but are really just allowing a person to not face the consequences of their actions, and thus don't learn from their mistakes. This is why cultivating our connection to the Force is so important. The Force speaks to us through our souls, our divinity, which receives messages that come from a higher perspective. From the human perspective, it can be very difficult to see whether a person is using us as a crutch, or if they truly need our help to lift them

up. The Force doesn't have this problem. Thus, when we learn to listen to our intuition, to clear our minds and not allow our emotions to blind us, we can hear the Force nudge us in the right direction. In this way, it is easy to be responsibly selfish, so to speak, and take care of ourselves and others.

What does all of this have to do with your Jedi training? When we overextend ourselves, we cannot focus on our own training. By this point in the term, many students have fallen behind due to offline commitments. In light of this lesson, how much of this is due to not taking time for yourself? I have found Jedi training to be a lifesaver in many ways, literally and figuratively. If I hadn't made this a priority to work on at least a little every day or two, reading books and discussing with other Jedi, I wouldn't be able to handle the challenges of my life currently. I made this a priority, and it has paid me back in uncountable ways.

I realize this is a lot to take in, especially while discussing it in general. Each individual situation will be a little different. Therefore, to get the most from this, you will need to take the time to explore the questions mentioned at the beginning of the lecture. Answer these in your journal, as well as anything you can figure out through your own self exploration. We will then discuss your own circumstances together. In addition to those questions, I'd like to you look at your life and see if not being selfish enough has contributed to your lack of training, if this is a problem for you.

In addition, I'd like to know your thoughts on these parables. Were they new concepts for you? How did you feel as you read them? These are spiritual ideas that will speak to your soul more than your logical, conscious brain, so your feelings will tell you more than anything else.

Lesson 9 – Emotions

It's my experience that emotions, by far, are the most difficult for Jedi to understand and use effectively. This week's lesson isn't going to make much of a dent in this topic, but we will attempt to address the largest misunderstandings and begin to point you toward the purpose of emotions. We want to improve your relationship with your own emotions so they are a tool instead of a weakness. Future classes will delve into this more deeply, but if you would like to do some self study first, I would recommend a few books that discuss emotions positively. These include, but are not limited to:

Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman

Blink by Malcolm Gladwell

The Amazing Power of Deliberate Intent by Esther and Jerry Hicks

This week everything we discuss will help combat the misconception that emotions are a weakness with no purpose in our life except to lead us to the darkside. This belief starts very early in life. Very few of us were taught to handle emotions well as children, often because our parents didn't know how to do so themselves. Even if parents encouraged emotional intelligence, society places great pressure on people, especially boys, to stifle their emotions in order to be 'real men' as they mature. However, while girls are often allowed to be more emotional, they aren't necessarily taught to be any more mature with their emotions. Instead they often end up exaggerating their emotions because they get attention for being 'drama queens'. Of course there is an entire spectrum experience, including boys who learn to be drama queens, girls who learn to stifle their emotions, and everything in between. One thing is true however - when our emotions are out of balance, we experience illness, degraded relationships with our self and others, and find growth more difficult.

There are many ways to tackle the understanding of emotions, including the spiritual and physiological. If you explore the books above, you'll find Emotional Intelligence and Blink address the physiological primarily, while the Hicks come from the spiritual perspective. I believe having both perspectives is helpful, and they seem to agree well with each other (in my opinion). We won't be addressing the physiological in depth today, so I'll leave that for your own research. It is discussed quite well in the first few chapters of Emotional Intelligence, if you'd like a place to begin.

Emotions are often frustrating because we don't understand them. They seem to come unexpectedly, and change without our control. This is partially because emotions are processed in a different area of the brain (the amygdala), which remains in our subconscious. This allows us to react to the stimulus faster, which was required when our lives were in constant danger centuries ago. However, modern life doesn't have as many mortal dangers, at least it doesn't appear so. Our emotions still respond to anything that endangers our quality of life, our family, and our happiness before our conscious mind can intervene. This is why we need to apply awareness to our self, allowing us to notice the physical changes emotions create in our body before we physically react to the stimuli. The book Blink has an interesting example of how much faster our emotions try to tell us something is wrong, while our conscious mind is still trying to figure that out. The excerpt can be read on Malcolm Gladwell's site, which has many other interesting articles to read. First, read this excerpt.

The Second Mind

In this excerpt, from the Introduction to "Blink," I describe the part of the brain that runs our rapid decision-making system:

Imagine that I asked you to play a very simple gambling game. In front of you, are four decks of cards--two red and two blue. Each card in those four decks either wins you a sum of money or costs you some money, and your job is to turn over cards from any of the decks, one at a time, in such a way that maximizes your winnings. What you don't know at the beginning, however, is that the red decks are a minefield. The rewards are high, but when you lose on red, you lose *a lot*. You can really only win by taking cards from the blue decks, which offer a nice, steady diet of \$50 and \$100 payoffs. The question is: how long will it take you to figure this out?

A group of scientists at the University of Iowa did this experiment a few years ago, and what they found is that after we've turned over about fifty cards, most of us start to develop a hunch about what's going on. We don't know why we prefer the blue decks. But we're pretty sure, at that point, that they are a better bet. After turning over about eighty cards, most of us have figured the game out, and can explain exactly why the first two decks are such a bad idea. This much is straightforward. We have some experiences. We think them through. We develop a theory, and then finally we put two and two together. That's the way learning works. But the Iowa scientists did something else, and this is where the strange part of the experiment begins. They hooked each gambler up to a polygraph--a lie detector machine--that measured the activity of the sweat glands that all of us have below the skin in the palms of our hands. Most sweat glands respond to temperature. But those in our palms open up in response to stress--which is why we get clammy hands when we are nervous. What the Iowa scientists found is that gamblers started generating stress responses to red decks by the tenth card, *forty* cards before they were able to say that they had a hunch about what was wrong with those two decks. More importantly, right around the time their palms started sweating, their behavior began to change as well. They started favoring the good decks, and taking fewer and fewer cards from A and B. In other words, the gamblers figured the game out before they figured the game out: they began making the necessary adjustments long before they were consciously aware of what adjustments they were supposed to be making.

The Iowa study is just an experiment, of course, a simple card game involving a handful of subjects and a polygraph machine. But it's a very powerful illustration of the way our minds work. Here is a situation where the stakes were high, where things were moving quickly, and where the participants had to make sense of a lot of new and confusing information in a very short time--and what does the Iowa experiment tell us? That in those moments our brain uses two very different strategies to make sense of the situation. The first is the one we're most familiar with. It's the conscious strategy. We think about what we've learned, and eventually come up with an answer. This strategy is logical and definitive. But it takes us eighty cards to get there. It's slow. It needs a lot of information. There's a second strategy, though. It operates a lot more quickly. It starts to kick in after ten cards, and it's really smart because it picks up the problem with the red decks almost immediately. It has the drawback, however, that it operates--at least at first--entirely below the surface of consciousness. It sends its messages through weirdly indirect channels,

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like the sweat glands on the palms of our hands. It's a system in which our brain reaches conclusions without immediately telling us that it's reaching conclusions.

Now, what does this excerpt tell us? Beyond that our emotional mind reacts faster to stimuli, it also should remind you of another tool Jedi use - intuition. Emotions are the messenger for our intuition, which is the primary tool the Force uses for communication with us. It is rare that we hear an actual voice in our head, or see Obi-wan's ghost coming to guide us on our path. However, our intuition is always with us, always communicating, always guiding us. When we ignore our emotions, try to stifle them, we are ignoring our own intuition. Thus, we cut ourselves off from the greater wisdom and perspective of the Force. I bet, when you joined this academy, you didn't expect to learn that our emotions bring us closer to the Force! But it is quite true. Our emotions are messengers, from which we can learn a lot about the path we are on, or a situation we are in.

Before we move on, I want to clarify something. Listening to our emotions does not mean we react blindly to them. It means we do not demonize them. We use them as tools to understand our self and our feelings about a situation. The goal of this lesson is primarily for you to begin to see them as a tool rather than as something that automatically leads to the darkside.

The truth is, the suppression of your emotions is your darkside. The darkside is nothing more than the things you choose to ignore within yourself, the aspects that you view so negatively you cannot even look at it. Yet ignoring something does not make it go away, including your emotions. Instead, all that you push aside within you festers, creating a pool of negativity that will show up when you least desire. This then feeds your reactions to emotions, giving you fewer options when a situation occurs. We will be addressing these aspects more in the future, but if you have an issue that is bothering you currently, please don't be afraid to talk to me about it. Hopefully this next segment will aid you in seeing emotions in a different light.

Emotions as a Scale

The Esther and Jerry Hicks book above shares a concept of emotions occurring on a scale. They use this scale to help people move from where they currently are to where they want to be.

A scale of your emotions would look like this:

1. Joy/Knowledge/Empowerment/Freedom/Love/Appreciation
2. Passion
3. Enthusiasm/Eagerness/Happiness
4. Positive Expectation/Belief
5. Optimism
6. Hopefulness
7. Contentment
8. Boredom
9. Pessimism
10. Frustration/Irritation/Impatience
11. "Overwhelm"
12. Disappointment
13. Doubt
14. Worry
15. Blame
16. Discouragement
17. Anger
18. Revenge
19. Hatred/Rage
20. Jealousy
21. Insecurity/Guilt/Unworthiness
22. Fear/Grief/Depression/Despair/Powerlessness

- from The Amazing Power of Deliberate Intent by Esther and Jerry Hicks

You'll note the scale is not split into good or bad, positive or negative. It is simply a scale. At the top we have emotions we typically view as positive, or those that feel good. As we go down the scale, we have emotions that we typically view as negative, and that don't feel very good. I'd like you to try to shift away from 'good or bad' and instead use the idea of emotions being helpful or forward/upward moving, or not helpful and backward/downward moving. Let me give you some examples to give you a better understanding of this scale and its usefulness. Let's say you are feeling depressed. When people are depressed, we characterize them as having low energy, not wanting to even get out of bed or eat. It's basically the lowest energy state a person can be in. Now, when a person is depressed, they can't just be happy. That would be an awful big leap on this scale! Typically people can only move a few steps at a time. If you look at some emotions in the same area as Depression, there is one that jumps out as useful to me - anger. Normally we view anger as bad, because we are sitting at an emotion above it on the scale, so anger would be moving us down. But from the perspective of depression, anger is moving us up the ladder. It creates movement forward, providing some energy and motivation for change. If you read the stories of depressed people who dug themselves out of that place, often you will hear them say they just got angry at where they were. They were angry at wasting their life, and just got sick of it - which is a feeling of frustration, which is even higher on the scale. They used that anger and frustration to propel them into finally acting, sometimes for actions as simple as show-

ering and leaving the house, which can lead to hopefulness. Once they reach hopefulness they can continue reaching higher until that depression is just a memory. Now, at any point, if they feel an emotion lower than their current state, it can start to bring them down, and they could end up right where they started. The good thing is that this process can be performed indefinitely. If they are aware of the process, it is even more useful.

How do we use this consciously then? First, monitor your thoughts and note how they make you feel. If you are having a good day, but start to worry, you will probably notice a feeling of tightness in your stomach, or other areas of your body, and a decrease in mood. If you aren't paying attention to these physical cues (just like the poker players in the experiment), you will miss the early opportunities to make a change. As soon as you notice anything that feels less good than you currently feel, shift your thoughts. As your emotions change, they are signaling to you that what you are thinking about or doing is in the downward direction, moving you backward so to speak.

This is useful for decisions, though it takes time to get to know your own body and intuitive signals. Here is an example from my life. I have taken part in many discussions with Jedi from various schools of thought. I've noticed that there were times when they discussed ideas that I would get this funny feeling in my stomach. Now, logically just listening to their pitch it seemed like a perfectly fine idea, but my intuition disagreed. It was telling me through this funny feeling and general uneasiness that this wasn't a good idea for me to get involved in. This is an important point - it was a bad idea for *me*. That doesn't mean it was bad for everyone. It's important to not assume an intuitive message is meant to apply to everyone.

This week I'd like you to consciously decide to pay attention to your feelings. If you can, get a small notebook and carry it in your pocket. Every hour or so, note how you are feeling. Just jot down a few words about what is happening and how you feel. Take a moment to note the tension or weird feelings in your body. Pay special attention to things that disagree, such as uneasiness in your body, but your mind feeling fine. At the end of the week, write up anything that stood out. Even if it's just an increase in awareness of all the ways your body tries to communicate with you – your pulse, sweating, or muscle tension.

Next, please tell the story of who you are as an emotional being. Do you find yourself swinging between emotions frequently like a roller coaster, or are you more consistently in a small range of emotions? Would you say you typically feel more “positive” or “negative” emotions? When you do feel “negative” emotions, how do you typically reach those more “positive” emotions? Is this a conscious process for you?

Finally, has your perspective on emotions changed after reading this lecture? Why or why not? Please be specific. I look forward to reading your assignments!

Lesson 10 – Living in the Present

I know the last lesson was a lot to take in. This week will be short to sum things up a bit and remind you that, even as we get behind in our training, or feel overwhelmed with needing to learn so much, we can focus on the present and make things more manageable. The work of personal growth is a marathon that has no end. If we get too caught up in who we were, we will find it very difficult to become who we want to be.

Living in the present does not mean you never think about the past or future. We can use the past to help us decide what to change about ourselves, and to note how far we have progressed. We can dream of the future to imagine where we want to go. These fail to be tools when we stop living in the now, and forget to actually live our life instead of dreaming of what it was or could be.

It might be a fun activity for someone to go through just the movies and count how many times a Jedi reminds someone else to keep their focus on the present. Obi-wan is most notable, perhaps, passing this lesson on to Anakin and Luke at various times. Let it be a lesson you carry with you as well.

Here is a snippet of an email from Neal Donald Walsch that I thought was a good reminder for me.

...it is well to avoid the tendency to catastrophize.
Stop worrying about all that could occur tomorrow.
You are getting agitated about things that haven't
happened yet...and may never happen.

Stay here, right here, in this moment. What is going on
right now...what is occurring right here...? That is all
that matters. That is where your life is being lived.

Are you getting caught up in the past or future? Are you perhaps worrying about what could happen in the future if you don't complete a task? Have you noticed that when you do this, you aren't actually working on the task before you, so you slip farther and farther behind? Living in the moment allows us to use our energy more efficiently, avoiding much of the negative outcomes that we fear.

Again, check in with yourself a few times a day. Without judgment, simply ask yourself, where is my attention now? Write down a few notes, such as, worrying about future, reminiscing about past, whatever it is. Also write a few notes about what you are supposed to be doing, such as homework, work assignments, watching a movie, or your Jedi assignments. ;-) At the end of the week, take a look at your notes. Do you tend to spend more time in the past, present, or future? Did you see any improvement when you made the effort to shift your focus to the present?

In addition to this, I'd like to see you continue working on the emotions assignment from last week. You can submit it separate or in the same document as this week's assignment. It takes more than a week to create a habit, and emotions take quite a bit of focus to gain a handle on.

Lesson 11 – You Are Not Your Past

Last week we discussed living in the present as a tool for growth and positive change in your life. Living in the present allows us use our energy more effectively. Too often, focusing on the past or future distracts our growth. Yet we also know there are times when it is a useful tool itself. If we ignore what has happened in the past, we fail to learn from situations, also slowing our growth. Like everything else on the Jedi path, we need to find balance. This week we'll discuss the past a little more, so it can be a tool rather than a hindrance.

When we take inventory of our life, we are looking back to see situations that didn't turn out well so we know what we want to change moving forward. Without looking, it makes it difficult to make changes. While this process can motivate some, it can paralyze others. Why is this? The simplest way I can say it is - it's not what you think about, but how you think about it. What you are feeling when taking time to focus on the past makes the biggest difference in whether it is a tool or distraction.

Let's look at some examples. When I look back at my childhood, I see a shy kid who just wanted people to be pleased with what she did. I didn't want to cause trouble, just wanted to be me. There are many occasions where I just went along with things rather than cause a conflict. As I matured into a young adult, situations came up that turned into rather emotional events because I was still acting from these non-confrontational behaviors, but I was also very upset and needed to address the situation. I behaved in very stupid ways because I didn't know how to deal with the situations.

If I were to use this example destructively, I could look at these situations and feel judgment. I could feel discouraged, because I lack courage. I could worry that I'll never understand how to handle emotional situations, or deal with confrontations in a mature manner. I could say - I'm not going to bother making friends because I'll just act like a jerk at some point anyway. Basically, I could use it as an excuse to avoid changing, because this is how I've always been, and that's how I'll always be. How many of you have used that phrase before - I've always been this way? The second you use that phrase, you've stopped growth. You've told yourself to not bother trying because you can't change. If possible, ban the use of that phrase with yourself. Don't let it just sit there in your mind, because you, as a Jedi, need to keep moving and growing. I realize banning a phrase from your subconscious is pretty impossible, and I don't actually mean you should do so. More realistically, you can weaken it by adding something else. "I've always been this way...but I can consciously choose to work on it and grow into a better person." This thought creates motion again, it allows you to think of options and solutions and allows you to grow.

It may take some time before you are viewing your past without judgment. You'll notice the difference as you work on it though. For instance, when I remove judgment and instead practice compassion for the person I was, and understanding that I was doing the best I could at that moment, I can see the pattern as a pattern that I can change. When I was 8, I didn't know what I was doing. When I was 20, I may have had an idea of what I was doing, but it still wasn't conscious enough to make many changes, especially in the moment. In my late 20's I started to see and understand. I could even begin to see why I reacted strongly to something at 20 because of things that happened when I was 8. I could release the internal conflict, allowing me to reduce the ex-

ternal conflicts. I couldn't have seen this if I wasn't willing to look at my past compassionately and objectively. And now, in my 30's, I don't allow my past to dictate my future. It remains a tool to heal old wounds, as well as a way to mark my progression along the Jedi path, but it is not a hindrance very often.

There is a key belief that underlies this entire process though, which is the title of the lesson: You are not your past. Humans have this tendency to judge a person based on what they have done in the past, because humans are notoriously slow to change. We say that people can't change, and leave it at that. And while it is true, there are plenty of people who don't try to change in positive ways, that doesn't mean that they are incapable of change. And for those who consciously work to change for the better, those statements mean nothing. People are capable of great change and growth. If you didn't believe you can grow, then you wouldn't be here. It doesn't matter how old you are, or what you've done in the past, it is possible to continue to grow and change as you seek to become the Jedi you want to be.

Next week we'll discuss how the story we tell influences the life we live. For now, try to feel comfortable with the idea that your past is not who you are right now. No matter how horrible you were in the past, that is not you now, unless you choose to repeat those actions again. Every day is a fresh start, if you allow it. Others may not be so kind, but that is not within your control. So long as you know each day is a fresh start, and you make new choices based on that understanding, you will grow into a better person and a better Jedi.

Change isn't easy, but it becomes easier when you understand how our brains work. This is a topic I plan to cover in future classes, but if you feel called to learn more I'd recommend a book called *The Brain That Changes Itself* by Norman Doidge. Knowing how we get stuck in thought 'ruts', and how to stimulate your brain so it can become flexible again is invaluable in creating change in your life.

For this week's **discussion**, do you believe you are capable of change? To what extent? For instance, do you believe you can change some things, but not others? What about others, do you believe other people can change? Do you expect it, or do you expect they will remain who they are? Are you disappointed when they don't change, or are you surprised when they do change?

Homework: Choose an event from your past to look at and learn something from. It needs to be somewhat emotionally charged, but you don't need to choose the most traumatic event to ever happen to you. Try to view yourself in that time period with compassion and understand, rather than judgment. Can you better determine why a situation happened as it did, and how you could better handle a similar situation now? Remember that you continue to gain new tools and understanding as you train, which you did not have at that time. Write up as much as you feel comfortable with regarding what you learned. In particular, how was the experience of looking at the past different when you consciously choose to release judgment?

Lesson 12 – Telling Your Story

We have reached the end of Personal 101. Over the course of this class you have looked at why you are here, who you have been in the past, and how to overcome barriers to become the Jedi you want to be in the future. The final tool I want to pass along to you is to further help you become who you want to be.

Last week we talked about how we aren't our past. To transition into our new story, I'd like to use a recent email excerpt from Neale Donald Walsch.

...you are not your 'story.' Who You Are is so much bigger than that. It's okay to give up your past now.

Most of us have a story about how we got to be the way we are, about what it's like to be 'us,' and about why it is so difficult sometimes to get through life. All of this is stuff that has nothing to do with who we are *now*.

How often do you 'come from' your 'story' when you experience life. Are you ready to let go of that now? What if you could create 'you' the way you want to be, rather than the way you think you are? Wouldn't that be *great*? Well, you can. All you have to do is let go of your story.

Are you ready to let go of your previous story? Are you ready to become what you dream of? Then it's time to tell a new story. The story we tell, like all of our thoughts and words, are creative. When we tell a story, we are focusing on those feelings and ideas in the story. What we focus on creates our reality. Does your story help you become who you want to be? One way to check is to ask yourself something like this. "If what I'm saying were to come true, immediately, would I be happy or upset?" We can also use my example from last week. If I say, I'm shy, I'm reinforcing a trait that I don't find useful. If I instead say, I used to be shy but now I consciously work to overcome this, I am changing my story and using it to support change. What story are you telling, and how can you adjust it to support change?

Homework: For your final assignment, you are going to tell your story. But, instead of telling it as you did earlier, challenge yourself to tell a story that supports the change and growth you want to see. Let it inspire you, the Jedi student learning to walk the path before them. You can take more time with this assignment, but try to complete it within two weeks. You will not have completed the class until I receive this assignment. ;-)

Closing Thoughts

The process of exploring the self never ends. We covered a lot of topics in a relatively short amount of time. Don't be surprised if old issues resurface, or if you become aware of new issues. This is very normal. When you shine a light you inevitably illuminate more than you expect. You're also more aware of aspects of your life which is going to make you see things that passed unnoticed before. If you are struggling, feel free to contact myself or someone else you trust. I recommend maintaining your training journal. And of course, review the tips in this course from time to time so you can continue to apply it to your life.

I look forward to seeing you again in Personal 102 when it is available. Keep up the good work and remember that the Force is always with you and supporting you in your path.

- Jax