Closure of the Dark Aspect

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WRITTEN BY SOTUNUS . POSTED IN ASPECTS OF THE FORCE BLOG

Ladies, Gentlemen, those who identify as neither, and those ruffians that do not identify as having the decorum of a Gentle-Person. The Inner-Council has decided it is time to conclude the mothballing of the Dark Aspect. The former head of the Aspect, Satelle, intended to close it in its entirety when she stepped down. However, it was felt by the Inner-Council that an opportunity for a new leadership to arise should be given. Yet, in the interim no suitable leader has arisen. There have also been concerns raised that the Dark Aspect has, historically, attracted those of political and ideological leanings which pose a danger to the intent of the Force Academy. The Force Academy is a place of learning with clear rules to protect its members. In recent years the Dark Aspect has served largely as a disruptive presence with leadership conflicts, and a shark-tank mentality which has driven away potential members of the Force Academy. It has also been a place which was used to entertain ideologies including, but not limited to, Social-Darwinism and Fascism. It has been seen as a space for discussing contrarian and controversial philosophies and ideas, several of which, would be unwelcome by the Terms of the Service of the current Force Academy. With the above said it is thus felt that it is best to close the Dark Aspect. The strength of the Force Academy is the disparity and variety of the philosophies represented. Present at the Force Academy are Jedi of different orders, the Shadows, and guests and independent thinkers. We do not require the Dark Aspect to keep this strength of the Force Academy. The Inner-Council understands that this announcement will be a cause of

disappointment for several. We apologise for any disappointment caused; however, this decision has been made in the best interests of the Force Academy as a whole. The extant and historical Dark Aspect material will be preserved and left available to members and guests to view. Now to the matter of what this means for the future. The Shadow Aspect was not an original aspect of the Force Academy. It evolved from the work of several members, until a coherent foundation was formed, and the aspect came together. It is always possible for an new aspect to emerge. All the inner council would ask is that the foundation be coherent, that it has people working on it and living it, and that it operates according to the Terms of Service and exists in a conducive manner with the rest of the Academy. With regards to a leader, and why we felt no satisfying leader emerged to take the Dark Aspect forward, we feel a leader must lead by example. A leader has a responsibility to their aspect, yes, but they are also the ambassador to the rest of the Force Academy. They must show a sense of duty to the Force Academy by adhering to its rules. We also expect a leader to be able to act professionally in their conduct to others, and most especially, their potential fellow leaders. We also expect honesty in conduct and presentation of information and premises. We also expect leaders to be able to defend their philosophy in a balanced and coherent manner with appeals to logic and rationality. Though several individuals made an effort to seek leadership of the Dark Aspect none of them satisfied the criteria that the Inner Council would welcome them to the Inner Council, or would be confident in their stewardship of the Dark Aspect. We present this information so anyone seeking to lead a new,

emerging aspect, will understand what would be desired of them.

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A Journey with the Code: Part 1

In my history as a Jedi I have worked with several codes; mostly by the insistence of others. It was not until the Armonia Code would I say I finally found a code that is my "own", despite it being as much influenced by the other architects of said code; it is one which reflects what I value as a Jedi. As usual with my warts and all approach; I have dived into my archive of old teachings, and lessons, and drudged them up as a potential learning experience for others. The first code I ever encountered was at Real Jedi Knights (RJK) and was the infamous Jedi Creed (or Luke Skywalker Code). Below is my interpretation of said code from my time as an instructor at the RJK:

The Jedi Code

This as you know is the whole code;

Jedi are the guardians of peace in the galaxy.

Jedi use their powers to defend and protect, never to attack others.

Jedi respect all life, in any form.

Jedi serve others rather than ruling over them, for the good of the galaxy.

Jedi seek to improve themselves through knowledge and training.

Now to look at each line individually.

Jedi are the guardians of peace in the galaxy.

This is a critical line, as all are, however, this is the clearest cut one. We are guardians of peace and thus, unless it breaks our other tenets, we seek to preserve peace for as long as possible. As guardians of peace we must realize that it is fragile and as impermanent as everything else, peace ends at one point and that is why we are warriors. To have peace one must prepare for war, to maintain and to restore peace, for conflict is inevitable. So, in conclusion apart from what the line literally means a Jedi must understand peace is impermanent and must be fought for and that is why we are warriors.

Jedi use their powers to defend and protect, never to attack others.

A misunderstood line at best. What if a pre-emptive movement saves more lives than can be done waiting? Defending yes one never makes a pre-emptive strike however protecting implies the guarding of a person's life there if a pre-emptive strike would save their life and other people's lives the right thing to do would be to make it but apparently the code prevents it. That is where the loophole lies, attacking someone is never allowed, however, if they have any intention to harm you or others striking before they do is an act of self-defence, not an attack. However, using your powers to kill is wrong especially if done in an attack.

Jedi respect all life, in any form.

Some would say there is no need to go into this since it should be read exactly as what it says, which is true in many

ways. However, and life has many forms and there are many forms of respect. Three things to remember, choices, all life makes them, the right to live as life wants, and the right to die. If you remember those three rules as well as this, all choices are justifiable, aim to allow life to live as it wants and preserve life, but when it comes time for life to die let it because death is a part of life. If you remember such simple rules following this part of the code is relatively simple.

Jedi serve others rather than ruling over them, for the good of the galaxy.

I think Master Mi-Zhe Fu exemplified this line the best when he stated the answer to the rhetorical question; The Jedi are the most powerful group in the galaxy, yet they choose to use their power to serve others, but why?

The answer is simple: A Jedi knows that all life is important and should be cherished. To rule over it would reduce the freedoms that all life has. The only way to benefit the galaxy is to help it along a good path, and to protect what is good.

Jedi protect life from tyranny from without but do not rule over others for we may be urged to impose our ideals on others and if we do so we commit tyranny from within which we abhor and, we betray those we protected by becoming what we protect them from. So, it is important to remember that even if you come across a culture that does things against your own moral code do not impose your moral code on others or you become evil in your own and the Jedi order's eyes by becoming a ruler. Try to steer them away from their dark path but leave if you can do no good.

Jedi seek to improve themselves through knowledge and training.

The most introverted part of the code at first glance however it is more in-depth than that. Jedi improve themselves so that they may help others, always remember that. The knowledge you gain and the training you undergo are to allow you to help others, they are not to be used for personal gain. Remember though that knowledge is not power, it is how you use that knowledge that equates power. So, use what power you must help others and always stay within the tents of the code.

I would hope the flaws in the arguments I wrote from those years are obvious to the reader. It is far too significantly martially minded; but that was both my own short-sightedness but the very nature of the code itself. It leaves no other conclusions except the martial, and discussion on life and death. Even Jedi respect all life is a line that inevitably comes back to the damage an individual can do; ultimately, this code is about what a Jedi should not do, as much as what it means to be a Jedi. Respect life so as not to destroy is; rather than respect life because it is a joyous, wonderful thing. So long as they are alive, so long as you are alive; you can change your world. The message I believe is more relevant to a real Jedi, and one I believe is reflected in the Armonia Code.

Chronologically; the next code I encountered was technically the Tenebrae Surgunt Code, written by my mentor and friend Jesse Bendyn. However, the code he developed was a derivative, and an answer to the No/Is Code (Jedi Mantra on Wookiepedia). I first encountered said code when I joined the

Force Academy's Light Aspect after a hiatus away from the Online Jedi community. Over the next few weeks, you will get to see how I responded to discussion questions at Tenebrae Surgunt that related to the No/Is Code.

Rumination on the Force

"What is the Force" is a question regularly brought up on Jedi forums, and other places where such a question is relevant. Often, questions such as "how does the Force influence your path", or "what is your relationship with the Force" also find their way into such inquiries. The responses are often predictable; the quasi-mystical responses, the responses exploring the Force as a metaphor, those that relate the Force to a spiritual belief, or the responses stating the Force has no place in the respondent's path. Ultimately, the Force as a concept is integral to the Jedi; it is the foundation of the structure of the Code, and Jedi ethics. Yet, there is a great degree of flexibility allowed regarding specific beliefs about the Force. The astute eye will have noticed that the Force is the subject of the initial module of study at Armonia. This is because your ongoing relationship with the concept of the Force will affect your ongoing studies. As such; I thought I would share, in brief, and in broad terms, my experience in dealing with this concept that pervades the Jedi path, but never seems to arrive at a strict definition.

When I first became involved with the Jedi path in 2005, I was 16, and took to heart the definition of the Force I was presented by my instructors at the time. Essentially; that the Force could be interacted with through the practice of Qigong. The Force was a literal, living energy, that we are part of, and can interact with, to achieve effects. As time passed I defined this notion as the "Living Force", and in fact have a lesson I wrote in that time that illustrates my beliefs:

"The living Force is present in all beings and living beings, such as plants and even cells, and is the most familiar layer of the Force familiar to a Jedi, or any Force user in fact and some with a less profound understanding of the Force consider it to be 'the' Force of which

it is only a fraction. To explain the living Force in scientific terms is difficult but at its essence at its very simplest the living Force is the very thing that allows for a life and allows life to feel the other layers of the Force. When you use the Force, you are manipulating the living Force using your own energy which is an expression of the living Force, your energy is part of the Living Force, you are part of the living Force, all Jedi are, all life is, and thus you should seek to understand it as much as you can. I cannot explain to you the very aspects of all the living Force, I have not seen all life, but as far as I know my explanation is as close to the truth as I can get. The most peculiar thing about the living Force is that it is the focal point by which we interact with all other layers of the Force. Another thing to understand is that the living Force in theory has no will, the will of the living Force is the will of every individual being."

Beside illustrating one's youth, and frank lack of understanding of science at the time, it contains some salient points I often still see in quasi-mystical notions of the Force:

1) The Force is the source of Life: a pseudo-scientific notion best described as metaphysical biology.

2) Ki/Chi as structurally the "Force" but in our universe. That such energy comes from us, but also exists as a "field" that can be manipulated.

3) Advocacy for human free-will; that the "Living Force" of which we are a part does not determine our actions.

Aside from this notion of the "Living Force", for a time I became beholden to a notion I described as the "Universal Force". It was married to the Star Wars concept, but largely served as a self-referential solution to questions left unanswered by the notion of the "Living Force". Again; I have a lesson from that same period defining this "Universal Force":

"This is the layer of the Force that is being talked about when one talks about an 'energy field that binds all' which in fact it does. The universal Force is what holds atoms together and is what is responsible for everything that is not alive for existing, if it is not part of the living Force then the universal Force is responsible for it, as we discussed before this is one of the many reasons it is easier to interact with people and living organisms using Force abilities since the layer of Force used to interact is familiar unlike when you attempt Kinesics where you are attempting to manipulate objects that are dissimilar to you though I am aware certain people find Kinesics easy but that is usually because they are more in line with physical manipulation then most.

The will of the Force is hard to explain, I won't attempt to explain its source merely what I see to be results of it. Fate and luck are both word used to define the will of the Force, many people refer to them without realising it, first look at games of chance where the game is fair, and all stakes are equal, the only way a person wins is by a defining factor unexplainable by science and not the responsibility of a single beings will, it is caused by the will of the

Force. Next fate, what defines a person's fate when it is not caused by the will of a living being? Again, the cause of the will of the Force. To recognise the act of a will of the Force all you must do is rule out any human or living being based factors and thus where no will of a being played a part then the Will of the Force determined the event. Also, coincidence, such a thing does exist, it's not always the will of the Force, it can usually be down to the will of a living being and usually leads to no greater destiny."

Again, a lack of scientific understanding is betrayed by the writing, and many issues I still see in some attempts to define the Force:

1) Self-reference; like many definitions of the Force, this one is self-referential. It references the definition of the "Living Force", and attempts to explain why absurd abilities such as kinetics are impossible, without denying their possibility.

2) Metaphysical Biology again; it gives the credit of Life to the "Living Force" and introduces a false dichotomy to explain away difficult questions about why Qigong cannot achieve certain effects.

3) Apophenia/synchronicity: It attempts to explain those events, and incidences, with no involved human agency. Again; a false dichotomy. Human beings can express their free-will, but there are aspects to existence beyond any one's power. Also, an ignorance of determining factors, and the human inclination to see patterns, is displayed simply to satisfy a cosmology grounded in mysticism.

Over all, I was influenced by several mystical concepts in my views of the Force. Qigong evidently played a large part, and

any student of Chinese Philosophy will recognise elements of the notion of Qi and Yi, and the different forms of Chi, such as Earth and Heaven Chi. They will also note a similarity, in broad terms, to the microcosm/macrocosm relationship prevalent in hermetic schools of mysticism. There were at times I also made the youthful mistake of co-opting scientific concepts to satisfy my world view; for example, in my explanation of the "Universal Force "I often utilised Unified Field Theory, without considering the significant differences between a unified field and the "Force". Similarly; in my explanation of the "Living Force" I often discussed paranormal psychology, and experiments such as Ganzfeld experiment, without seriously considering the problematic nature of the experiments. My beliefs in the Force were not based on my experience or deep reflection, but confirmation bias, and secluding myself within an echo chamber where these beliefs were valid, and went without criticism. I believe in a wart and all approach to one's relationship with their past, and so present this part of my life as a Jedi, and have taken a critical eye to it, in the hopes others will recognise the need for deep analysis of where their beliefs originate.

I moved away from the above beliefs, due to my primary Jedi Mentor and a close friend, deciding to create Tenebrae Surgunt, and I joined them in the effort. For a time, I further refined my definition of the "Living Force" and the "Universal Force", and indeed added a third angle; the "Social Force". The Living Force became divided into Inner and Outer factors; our personal Qi or Will becoming Inner, and the power of our social and environmental influences becoming the Outer. The Universal Force I changed into the

Unifying Force; the objective reality we share, and exist within, and ruled by the laws of nature, rather than pseudo-mystic concepts. Sadly, I no longer posses any of my writings from that time on this three-fold ideology, and have thus outlined it purely from memory, however, it was a key part of the evolution of my understanding of the Force as I came to recognise two notions I continue to hold to this day.

Self-Evidently; Tenebrae Surgunt did not survive, and for a time I left the Jedi Community. For a time, it was due to Exogenous depression; I suffered several tragedies including the loss of friends through suicide, heart-disease, and the war in Afghanistan. I lost direction in life; attempting a career as a professional fighter, specifically kick-boxing, before hitting the wall that was a physical limitation no amount of training could over-come. I then decided to return to education, and that took all the time I would have once given to the online community up. In many ways; with out Tenebrae Surgunt I had no ties to the Jedi Community. I was still in touch with the Jedi who mattered to me without being a part of the broader community. In my mind, and heart, I remained a Jedi, but I had to walk away. In that time, I read a book by Iain Banks called Whit, which is the tale of a women who belongs to a religious cult, and in it was contained a detailed passage on their theology. Inspired by said passage, and with my new-found passion for psychology and profoundly improved scientific literacy, I wrote a summary on an "ethical" notion of the Force; a document I have never published before, and in many ways, reflects an attempt to come to terms with the issues of my depression:

The notion of a "Universal Force" is inexpressible; it just is.

The "Will" of such a Force can only be strategic, not tactical, if we are to allow for human free-will, and the imperfection of creation.

Such a "Force" could be omnipresent but cannot exceed the laws of nature, and if such a Force exists it can only intervene in the events that are apocalyptically bad, or it's perceived good.

Man is not special to such a "Force". It is but one creation of many amongst the stars.

The "Dark-Side" is the cumulative misdeeds of history, and of man. Made possible by the "Force" but not the innate creation of this "Force". Evil begets evil; it is not simply a manifestation of an unknowable power. It is a process with a cause, and an effect. Conversely; the same is true of "good" and human progress. Good only exists by virtue of efforts of the past, and the efforts of the present.

The ultimate destiny of Man is not known, and unknowable; if the "Force" is a force of good, then we must presume transcendentalism and cosmological over optimism. Man does not know its destiny because of "spiritual" immaturity, but it may one day come to know it.

The Body and the "Soul" are not discernible; they are one in the same. A living being may have a spark of the "Force" and may return to being one with this "Force" but the body is not the lesser of this existence. If the soul does return to the universe than reincarnation is the only ethical spiritual destiny; after all, many experience pain and harm through pure mischance.

The genetic lottery is merciless, and unless the experience of birth and death is one where growth is possible, then any other outcome damns the soul unjustly, or makes the process of life redundant and meaningless.

A good writer of philosophy will notice the poor writing; too much is implied by absence of inclusion, rather than a written explanation of the counter points. Again; it is a self-justifying work. I would add; none of it in fact reflects my beliefs, but rather it was an attempt to reach a conclusion about a Force that makes sense if one wants to believe in the Force as "Good". I include it to illustrate how we can aimlessly philosophise the Force, without truly reaching a meaningful conclusion, and hopefully to give any students food for thought as they begin their studies.

The Next time I wrote anything regarding my succinct beliefs about the Force is when I returned to the Jedi community, and partook in the Force Academy's Light Aspect Jedi Training. In response to the question, "How do you feel the Force? How can you tell it IS the Force?" I wrote the following:

"That would require a definition of the Force that fits the idea of an energy field that can be manipulated by humans. I do not hold to that definition, but I do bio-mechanical exercises and meditation and I have had experiences such as sensations of heat and static electricity.

My definition of the Force would that it is best used to describe the tension between our external experience and our experience of our environment and the point at where those two are one in the same.

I do not believe in making conclusions about the human experience, I cannot tell what the Force is nor can I be certain I have experienced it. The human body produces energy in the form of heat and I have experienced that; but I consider it a function of the human body that can be learnt. Not evidence of the Force; merely that we do not understand ourselves well enough to understand the universe."

As one can discern, much about my beliefs regarding the Force changed from my initial training, and the point where I wrote the above:

1) I rejected the notion of the Qigong being a way to experience the "Force" completely. It is simply a biochemical, and psychosomatic experience, achieved through the right sort of exercises.

2) The Force is simply connection between ourselves and others, and that metaphysical beliefs in the Force, or the use of the Force as a cosmological model are simply an immature reaction to the mystery of the universe.

Since then, I have largely concluded that our individual beliefs regarding the Force are a moot point; what matters to a Jedi, and especially a teacher, are the core values that are summed up in the metaphor of the Force. Whether an individual believes in Reiki and that energy healing is an expression of the mystical Force does not matter; what matters is if they are doing good through such beliefs. The reason we must come to terms with our beliefs regarding the Force, is because such beliefs shape how we interact with our shared objective reality. However, what is most important is understanding the core values that bring us together as Jedi, and which are summed up in the phrase; "The Force".

Essentially; the Force is what binds us together, if we use the Starwars summation. It is the source of both good, and evil; The Light and the Dark-Side. This translates into the real world as two fundamental notions:

1) None of us exist as an island; we are all a part of our community, of our broader society, and of nature. We do not exist apart from our connections to others, and thus we are responsible for our place in this world.

2) Due to the above connection: Our actions have effects and consequences that impact on others; for both good and ill. Our kindness can beget kindness, and our cruelty can beget cruelty. We recognise that our actions can in turn effect those beyond our immediate actions, and have consequences and an influence far beyond our initial act. Similarly; we recognise the effect of our positive and negative experiences on our present behaviours. This is the Light and Dark-Side; our Jedi like actions, and our non-Jedi actions, but also those influences which drive us to our better actions, and our poorer ones too.

To summarize; we recognise that we are not truly autonomous, we are but part of nature. We recognise that it has profound effects on us, and that we too can have profound effects on others. Due to the connectivity of the world, we also recognise that what we do today can lead to events in the future that are beyond our control. We know and recognise that these events will come to pass because of actions now. None of the metaphysical questions, or spiritual beliefs, matter to the Jedi community; they only truly matter to the individual. However, this joint respect for the connections of life, and our respect for our fellow Jedi, or

shared belief in the right, way to do things and wrong way to do things binds us together as Jedi. You need not believe in a mystical power, but you must at least believe in yourself, and in what you can do.

A Journey with the Code: Part 2

While at Tenebrae Surgunt, I was challenged to look at each line of the "No/Is" Jedi Code and develop an interpretation. Below, you'll see my exploration of "There is no Emotion, there is Peace"

TS Assignment: What is peace? How does a Jedi live in peace?

Peace is an illusion and at once the essence of all. True peace demands an ideal, the end of change, a permanence. This does not occur in human beings nor in the universe, conflict, internally and externally is part of existence. Yet at the same time, on a sub atomic level, atoms and other phenomena must work in harmony otherwise reality could not work. Even on an observable level we see this same need for balance, a need for peace. Even among predators and prey there is a form of harmony when the system is balanced, they keep an order so that they don't place inconsistent or untenable demands on their environment. Even though superficially they are in constant conflict, they ensure each other's continued existence.

A Jedi thus faces a complex task in seeking peace, they must achieve it with in to achieve it without. In the films the Jedi are trained since children in managing internal conflict and have tangible supernatural power of the Force as a centering point of calmness, and they were trained ambassadors and were hired as such by the Republic as peace keepers.

Real Jedi of today's world lack such luxuries or conveniences. I shall attempt to explore the idea by two areas, emotions and external behaviours. Emotions are a difficult idea to discuss or understand. Psychology would hold there are no negative emotions and that all emotions deserve to be and should be expressed or explored. Yet at the same time psychology would hold that cognition run by extreme emotions are dangerous and destructive. Such thought forms dominated by emotion are central to disorders such as depression.

Thus, the perfect answer is to acknowledge our emotions while not allowing them to lead us to disruptive behaviour. The best way to do this is through acknowledging and identifying our own psychological defence mechanisms which are inherently a part of our emotional context and how they affect our behaviours. To reference the most recent and widely accepted model of defence mechanisms; Vaillant's categorisation of defence mechanisms, mature and emotional healthy adults utilise seven mechanisms:

1. Altruism: Constructive service to others that brings pleasure and personal satisfaction.

2. Anticipation: Realistic planning for future discomfort.

3. Humour: Overt expression of ideas and feelings (especially those that are unpleasant to focus on or too terrible to talk about) that gives pleasure to others. The thoughts retain a portion of their innate distress, but they are "skirted round" by witticism.

4. Identification: The unconscious modelling of one's self upon another person's character and behaviour.

5. Introjection: Identifying with some idea or object so deeply that it becomes a part of that person.

6. Sublimation: Transformation of negative emotions or instincts into positive actions, behaviour, or emotion.

7. Thought suppression: The conscious process of pushing thoughts into the preconscious; the conscious decision to delay paying attention to an emotion or need to cope with the present reality; making it possible to later access uncomfortable or distressing emotions while accepting them.

These same mechanisms would in turn ideally be utilised by a real Jedi. A Jedi must aim to be healthy emotionally so that in turn their behaviour reflects this. A Jedi's emotions and thoughts are as one, not in discord with one leading the other. When they are in discord a Jedi will sensibly step back and sort their emotional state before taking part in further actions. However, the practice of active suppression is unhealthy, an ignorance of one's emotional state will eventually lead to discord. Yet as an unconscious method it is invaluable.

In behaviour it is more difficult to suggest how a Jedi ought to act. However, a Jedi has invaluable tools in their hands to understand how. The Law of the Land, their own ethical compass and Jedi morality. A Jedi must always be respectful of the law, unless it is in violation of human rights or insults the idea of the sanctity of life. When their actions may cross into interaction with the law they must be mindful of this reality and act accordingly. When it comes to ethical concerns their actions should be in line with the moral decision.

On another level, how does a Jedi help achieve peace in their community? Probably through the principle of understanding natural laws. A Jedi is an enabler and facilitator, not an active changing element of his or her community. A Jedi must maintain balance by helping people help themselves against disruptive elements. If a Jedi constantly interferes directly they will cause dependence, and this will be disruptive, they will ruin whatever peace they may have achieved the first time they can't step in directly. Thus, a Jedi in their actions maintains peace by helping to create an environment of self-dependence among their community.

A Journey with the Code: Part 3

Unit 2: Part Two: There is no ignorance, there is knowledge

To complete this assignment, I was asked to define, in my own words, what knowledge is and ways that Jedi can use the Force to gain knowledge.

Discussion answer:

A text book definition of knowledge would be that knowledge is a familiarity with someone or something, including facts, descriptions, information, or skills acquired through experience or education. It can further refer to the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject; which can be implicit or explicit.

In the field of Epistemology; knowledge and its nature continue to be a subject of debate. Plato's famous definition was "justified true belief."; however, I feel the conclusion reached by Wittgenstein is possibly correct. He saw knowledge as a case of a family resemblance. If we follow and accept this conceptual conclusion, "knowledge" is a reconstruction of a cluster concept that points out relevant features yet one that is not adequately captured by any definition.

My personal definition of knowledge would be that it is understanding; divided between subjective knowledge and objective knowledge. Knowledge derived from a partial

understanding and knowledge that has no claim to certainty respectively.

I consider the concept that a Jedi can use the Force to gain knowledge bemusing on some levels. The Force itself is a concept that has no defined characteristic; however, if we consider the Force to be life and thus our own inherent potential then the concept of intuition comes into consideration.

In psychology, intuition encompasses the ability to know valid solutions to problem. For an example; Gary Klein found that under time pressure, high stakes, and changing parameters, experts use their base of experience to identify similar situations and intuitively choose feasible solutions. Thus, demonstrating that the recognition primed decision model explains how people can make relatively fast decisions without having to compare options. Intuition is a pattern-matching process that quickly suggests feasible courses of action. The analysis is the mental simulation, a conscious and deliberate review of the courses of action.

It should as be noted that Intuitive abilities were quantitatively tested at Yale University in the 1970s. While studying nonverbal communication, researchers noted that some subjects were able to read nonverbal facial cues before reinforcement occurred. In employing a similar design, they noted that highly intuitive subjects made decisions quickly but could not identify their rationale.

If we consider the Force to be life and thus our own unconscious nature an expression of the Force, then intuition is a further expression of this. By learning to trust their intuition a Jedi can thus gain knowledge from the Force.

A Journey with the Code: Part 5 (4?)

My friend, and first Jedi Mentor, Jesse bendyn wrote the following code, and his understanding of said code for Tenebrae Surgunt:

Tenebrae Surgunt uses a modified version of the "There is no emotion" Jedi Code. The High Council is aware that there are many Jedi Codes out there and that experienced Jedi may have been exposed to others that they like. However, the code that we use here is the code you will be held to in terms of conduct. If you are found in violation of our code while here, there will be consequences. Any other code may also be followed, but it must be followed in addition to TS' code.

Control emotion to bring peace.

Gain knowledge to overcome ignorance.

Temper passion to gain serenity.

Death is not the end of life.

Line by line explanation of the Code

Control emotion to bring peace

Jedi are human. Every human feels emotions are Jedi are not exceptions. Jedi at TS are in fact encouraged to feel their emotions, since compassion and kindness are central to our teachings. What we seek to discourage is extreme emotions, both positive and negative. Extreme happiness can lead to

detachment and arrogance as quickly as extreme pride can. What we seek here is a balance. Not too much positive and not too much negative. Negative emotions cannot defeated, they will come back. It is the nature of the universe. What matters is what we do with those emotions. Do we let them have free reign inside us, or do we address ourselves to them? As Jedi we must face all our emotions and accept them, not just our positive but our negative as well. Only when they are balanced can we in fact become balanced. Balance brings peace to the soul.

Gain knowledge to overcome ignorance

It is part of the human spirit to be curious. Even non-humans (such as animals, other kinds of beings) are found to have some degree of curiosity. It is curiosity that leads to new knowledge and new knowledge that leads to wisdom. Seeking knowledge helps a Jedi to understand all perspectives and points of view in a given situation. Perhaps the Jedi has been in the shoes of one or more parties. Knowledge is a tool by which we can better perceive and understand the universe around us. Though seeking knowledge is not without its risks. A Jedi risks everything he or she already knows when they seek new truth. New truths sometimes falsify older knowledge that we only thought was true. A Jedi must never be afraid of stepping beyond and leaving behind a piece of knowledge. However, the Jedi must be very careful when doing this. He or she must be absolutely certain that this new knowledge is true. Anyways check before you step, and look before you leap. Also, there is some knowledge that is dangerous to know. When facing something you think might be dangerous, seeking out a Knight or High Council member for guidance is highly

recommended. A Jedi should never be afraid or ashamed to ask for help.

Temper passion to gain serenity

Passion is the will that drives us, the fire within our hearts. It is the steel of our tenacity and toughness. But as with emotion, the key is not extreme amounts, but balance. Use that fire to melt that steel into a keen sword, and you will find yourself powerful, yet able to rest. Extreme toughness can make your hard, solid, unmoving. It can cause fear as well. Many beings become too hard when they have been through great times of trial or pain and suffering. Usually the fire inside is diminished or even gone completely. Re-awakening this fire inside and restoring it to the same strength as the steel will ensure balance and serenity. It is the same with extreme will. Extremely willful individuals will have a hard time resting and listening to others. In this case meditation is the best answer. If you can willfully calm your fires and gain some bit of wisdom to give your convictions a stable grounding, you will find yourself much more at peace, and much harder to push off your path. Sadly sometimes for some individuals bad consequences are required to bring the "steel" out of them. It is all an individual basis and it is all by choice. We can all choose to improve, or the universe can choose for us and teach us the hard way.

Death is not the end of life

New students may see the prospect of life after death to be a baseless belief in the sea of a factual universe. If you find yourself tending to agree with that, then part of following our Code is to accept such a belief as one of your own. However, in time and training you may begin to see this line a bit

differently, as a statement of fact. Now, we all have to make some sort of "leap of faith" to get anywhere in the universe. We make the "leap" that our perceptions are true for the most part. AS a Jedi you will learn to expand your perceptions and awaken a "sixth sense" in a manner of speaking. This is your ability to sense and use the Force. With time and training, you may begin to shift from belief, to assertion. This part of the training of every Jedi here at TS.

Chronologically the Tenebrae Surgunt (TS) code was the second Jedi code I abided by. I would like to think that it shaped how I later viewed the No/Is Code. In many ways; my talk of accepting, rather than dismissing emotion, and tempering passion into something useful comes from these teachings. The most attentive of readers will recognise elements of this code in the Guidance Mantra. The Guidance Mantra is indeed derived from this Code, and one can hopefully see the evolution of logic from one version to the next:

Accept emotion to bring peace.

Seek knowledge to challenge ignorance.

Temper passions to find harmony.

Death is not the end of life.

In many ways; the mantra is a logical conclusion to the philosophy espoused by the TS Code. However, we have sought to better clarify the actual meaning, and our modern approach by changing some words. Thank you for your time dear reader, and I hope this provides food for thought for those who are looking to participate in the course on the

Code, as well as those simply exploring the Jedi Code for its own sake.

Reflection on Prowess

I would like to start this blog entry with a deep cut from the archives at JustJedi; the first of the 21 Maxims from Jediism:

I. Prowess To seek excellence in all endeavors expected of a Jedi Knight, martial and otherwise, seeking strength to be used in the service of justice, rather than in personal aggrandizement. A Jedi strives to excel physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, and can put these in motion instantly. This requires discipline, patience and perfect practice, for a Jedi is always mindful of what lies behind and what lies ahead, and prepares for the encounter with his destiny. A Jedi Knight engages in the battle to be victorious on whatever front he is faced with in the modern world. - David Dorey/Seph (Jediism, 2001)

Students, and those interested in the courses of Armonia Seminary, will have noticed the mention of Arts; scholarly art in "A Jedi's Duty" to give a specific example. This is, as with other aspects of the courses, inspired by the Jedi Compass. The Arts are found under the title of prowess, and there are four arts, and for ease of readership I have included the relevant excerpt from the compass below:

Defence Art- A "Defence Art" is not necessarily physical in nature, it can be through speech, writing, diplomacy, art or several other options which lead to an active method of curing the world of oppression. Like many of the other disciplines, you may find that your defence Art is the same as another art (Physical, Scholarly, or Spiritual).

Physical Art- A Jedi should seek a physical art within their capabilities which keeps them them in shape and focuses on maintaining discipline of their body. Part of the physical art, which can be observed by all Jedi regardless of their mobility, is health. A Jedi should eat right and maintain their health to the best of their ability.

Scholarly Art- A Jedi should seek out skills that provide benefit to them and the people around them. The search for knowledge is fundamental to Jedi as one never stops learning, seeking knowledge or bettering their skills.

Spiritual Art- A spiritual art may be as simple as developing meditation but can go far beyond this. A Jedi may choose to develop a spiritual art aimed at connecting them with "the Force" through healing, seeking guidance, or simply developing their own self-awareness.

The arts are how we as individuals, and as Jedi; seek to better ourselves, contribute to our community, and hopefully better the world. Hopefully one can see the connection between the maxim from 2001, and the compass in 2015. The focus of the Jedi path has always been one of excellence; to hone skills that are of use to others and to one's self.

Admittedly; this post has been partially inspired by realising one is some what of a last man standing. The last of a particular generation of Jedi Masters from a site called Real Jedi Knights. From when it's original architects; Jesse Bendyn, and Mi-Zhe Fu were at it's head. Jesse Bendyn has long left the Jedi community, and Mi-Zhe Fu has at last retired, and the training regime of Jedi Knights (As it is now known) looking to change significantly in the coming year. It

has put one in a reflective mood, and in doing so I have taken a hard look at my choice of Arts; how do I help others through being a Jedi. I hope that in mapping my choice of Arts, and presenting the reasoning, that students, and readers in general will gain a better grasp of the Arts. Similarly; I feel a real-life example might better explore how all the arts are fundamentally integrated, as hinted at in the compass but not truly explained.

Defence Art: First Aid, Mental and Physical. I am a volunteer with St John Ambulance, and regularly go on duty as a First Aider to a variety of events. However, I am also trained in Mental Health First Aid, and have had many occasions to call on said skill to aid others in a multitude of other guises. You would be surprised how many people you can say hello to, and ask how they are earnestly, and find they need help.

Physical Art: Karate and Martial Arts. The amusing thing is that a decade ago this would have been my defence art. I used to work as a doorman and used to regularly teach self-defence to vulnerable groups. However, now my karate is merely a means to stay in shape, though I seek to constantly improve and learn more; it is my other passion in life beside music and psychology. However, it helps me significantly in my defence art, if in an in direct sense; much of what a first aider does requires some level of physical fitness. Similarly; it has helped in developing that sense of danger one needs when interesting any situation with high emotions and potential injuries. The reason behind the incident might still be present, and still be a danger.

I do still occasionally host self-defence courses, and try to do so at least once a year, so in that respect my physical art

does overlap with what are isolated in the compass to defence or scholarly arts; in a literal reading of the compass definitions.

Scholarly Art: Psychology; I am a literal scholar of psychology. It is my day job, but also how I help my community. I attend volunteer meetings for several mental health groups to facilitate said meetings. I am a Blue Light Champion for St John; doing my best to raise awareness of the issues of mental health. I also offer pro-bono sessions for individuals who provide valuable services to the community but might lack the funding or ability to access assistance otherwise. I am a tutor and try my best to help students of psychology, and related disciplines, to become qualified so that the world has more helpers against these issues. Lastly; I am active with several mental health awareness groups trying to raise public awareness of issues.

However, my scholarly art also contributes to my physical art and defence art. A knowledge of sports psychology, and topics relating to combat sports has helped me in my development as a karateka but also in teaching the art to others. Similarly; it has assisted me in developing my casualty communication skills and recognising issues in the field such as capacity of casualties to offer consent or assist with identifying the problem.

Spiritual Art: This is where it gets most confusing for me. I honestly do not know if I have a spiritual art. I practice Body Scanning meditation from Mindfulness as I find it useful to focus the mind on training, and for the recovery process after training. One might conflate my study of Nagare and Ibuki with Qi-Gong, but the reality is that if you do not know how to

breath, then you cannot fight. My study of Tai Chi is purely one of studying body dynamics, with out any real interest in Ki. I enjoy writing psalms and performing spiritual music; but I appreciate the art, rather than the message itself.

I have a student I have taught the fundamentals of ritual magick to, and in a past life I was an enthusiastic student of the occult. That skill set, and knowledge base has not abandoned me; but it is not a spiritual experience for me. I have sat in and helped with cases of exorcism; but I was very much the sceptic in the corner.

Now, why do I mention all this. Simply put; you can be a Jedi a long time and one art may just escape you time after time. For me, that is my spiritual art, however, I have never allowed this to get in the way of being a source of information and assistance for people suffering a spiritual crisis. I have always sought the knowledge, even if for me, it is just words on a piece of paper.

Ultimately; the lesson here is that arts are changeable things. What you are good at now, and use to help others, may in a decade's time fallen to the way side. Yet, also, that time does not always solve a problem; you must keep trying at it. Time has not brought to me a spiritual art; I must work at spirituality as a knowledge base because that is the only cross road where by I can be of help to people.

Explore your skill set and find your arts. Look for the relationships between them all, and remember; it is an ongoing journey, and that you must reflect on your progress, or lack of progress, regularly.

Also; whatever you do, never take some one's life story as a Jedi as gospel truth. We have had too many through the years shape their teachings through offering a personal gospel. I do not intend to join those ranks.

A Third Side?

When discussions of the Force occur often the notion of the Dark side and the Light side emerge. In many ways the Force Realist community continues to shape itself by such a model; Jedi and Sith representing the two sides. Some have attempted a more middle of the road approach, or embraced complexity over duality, and identify as Shadows or Grey Jedi. However, what does this mean in the lexicon of contemporary Force Realism and Jediism. I shall use the Force Academy as the model for this discussion as it is my point of reference, and the Force Academy is somewhat of some cross-roads, so my hope is that broadly speaking the terms have some ecological validity. To explain, in short, the Force Academy consists of three parts: The Dark Aspect and the Shadow Aspect, and Armonia Seminary, which serves as the Light Aspect in this model.

The Dark does not necessarily refer to evil, but rather those part of our own person we repress and hide in the dark. It is about the desires and wants that we do not always feel free to admit to. If we look at the Sith, and the Dark Aspect of the past, this is synthesised into the notion of passion; being honest about what drives one's actions and what one wants to achieve through those actions.

Now, one can argue that human beings possess dark desires, and that it is from desire that the worst of human behaviour arrives. Selfishness, violence, and so on and so forth. As such; some equate the imagery of the dark with evil. Indeed, I

would argue that it is indeed from these places that the harm we do to others arises, but I will return to that later.

Onto the Shadows; I have oft wondered at whether the term "shadow" was a pun derived from Jungian thought, or just incidental due to the founder's proclivities. Either way, as with the dark, the title reveals much about the belief of the Shadows but can first appear as a distraction; suggesting an integration of light and dark when in fact is a school of original thought. To summarise the Shadows; they embrace complexity. Their search is for the meaning something has within its own distinct context; including the self.

As such the Shadows explore the self with a model of totality, to the extent I would be tempted to consider it the Force Realist equivalent of Gestaltism. They explore the whole, but also seek the essential, immutable components that make up the whole. If one were to use the Light and Dark symbolism; one might say they ask why the light has cast a shadow in the shape it has, and at which point does a shadow become darkness.

Lastly, the Light and I will say it; I have no idea what Light means. One might say it refers to goodness, or the essence of good, but should one ever presume to be the supreme moral authority? We could go on about symbolism. That we as adherents of the Light seek to overcome the qualities embodied by the dark, and that we try to help shape a world not dominated by the darker parts of man's nature. To an extent, this is perhaps true;

"With Jediism...our religious observance is found through service to the community"- Andy Spalding

Our duty to others is what defines our path, and if we use the symbolism discussed prior, then the descriptor of Light makes sense. However, that symbolism is construed and still leaves Light an inept and meaningless descriptor. Dark Aspect clearly refers to the dark, repressed aspects of the person. Shadow Aspect to the complex issues of the human experience. Light, in contrast just sounds like the surface level; what is apparent to be seen, and essentially superfluous. As such, we at Armonia Seminary call ourselves Jedi. Jedi is a descriptor, for there is a Jedi way to be, and a Non-Jedi way to be.

This, at last brings us to the Nature of the Force. I have described before how I view the Force as a metaphor and the core values I attribute to it. To make life easier; I shall just copy and paste:

1) None of us exist as an island; we are all a part of our community, of our broader society, and of nature. We do not exist apart from our connections to others, and thus we are responsible for our place in this world.

2) Due to the above connection: Our actions have effects and consequences that impact on others; for both good and ill. Our kindness can beget kindness, and our cruelty can beget cruelty. We recognise that our actions can in turn effect those beyond our immediate actions and have consequences and an influence far beyond our initial act. Similarly, we recognise the effect of our positive and negative experiences on our present behaviours. This is the Light and Dark-Side; our Jedi like actions, and our non-Jedi actions, but also those influences which drive us to our better actions, and our poorer ones too. (R. K. Williams., 2018)

Note: For students, yes, cite yourself because otherwise it looks like you are trying to re-publish your own work as original, when it is in fact not.

Those are the core values I attribute to the Force. Even as a metaphor, I still attribute a Dark and Good side. Why I do this is very simple, what is done in the past effects what happens in the future. After all, what is the use of a concept or model of thought if it offers no guidance on what to do in a situation. I often read the claim of "I don't believe in a light and dark side" and so on and so forth. With similar claims that the Force just "is", and I must be frank my general thought is "who cares". Such an exercise is taking a thought experiment, and then making it moot. One might as well not deal with the concept of the Force at all; such thinking is an exercise in apathy. Now, to be fair, such statements are usually attached to the metaphysical and pseudo-mystical understanding of the Force prevalent in many Jedi circles; not specifically a metaphor about core values as I use it. However, my primary point is either have an applicable model of the concept or leave it alone. Do not get caught up looking for a black cat in a dark room while wearing a blindfold; take the blindfold off and turn the lights on.

With the above said, we can now approach the Third Side referred to in the title. If in my metaphorical model; the Dark and Good sides are the negative and positive influences of the past on the present, and are in turn the essence of the choices we can make now, what is this third side? Simply put; it is the potential of our actions. It is the human element that is we; the vessel and the agent of our experiences. A decision can often only be understood as for good or ill with the benefit of hindsight, and sometimes an action that

benefits one may harm another. Human beings are temporal creatures with a beginning and an end, and thus we often think of ourselves living in a straight line. That is our objective, shared reality, but human beings rarely live as temporal creatures. They often live in their memories of the past, and often travel to the expectations that have about the future. As such, we can often struggle to find a path forward in times of struggled. As Jedi, we seek the positive outcome for all situations, but we do not do so from a grand moral authority, but from our moral imperative. The Jedi way is not the ultimate moral authority, or the "Light" but rather a way of being that focuses on making the best of the potentials of all situations. We may not be the Light, and we may not have the truth, but the Jedi way can light a path in uncertain times. Keep in mind that essential, unfixed ether, that is the present and find hope in that. You have the power to shape something that could be negative, into something positive.

"The dark side has come before, and it will come again. Do not underestimate its power. That is why I have devoted my life to teaching Jedi Knights, to strengthen the light side against the tide of darkness that is sure to come." Vodo-Siosk Baas

I am often loath to quote the fiction, but in these times that is a statement I relate to more and more. We live in uncertain times, and we live in age where truths we told ourselves about the civilised world for the last fifty years seem increasingly like myths. However, there are good people who seek to make change in this world. For every terrible person, there have been tens who have tried to stop them, and billions who have despised them. Each day, we stand upon a precipice, and have choices to make. Do not become so tied

up in philosophical labels that you stop yourself every time you try to take a step forward. Do not be daunted by others not seeing what seems obvious to you but empathise and explore the issues; ask questions rather than rush to answers. Seek Knowledge to challenge ignorance.

Opportunities Over Dreams

Originally, I was thinking of expanding on my last blog post, or perhaps writing something about Love being a choice based on recent articles about Millennial's and their relationship problems. However, I have elected to expand on Alethea's post titled Chief Tui's Truth.

Finding happiness where you are can be incredibly difficult, and the advice to do so can seem very condescending if it comes from someone seemingly standing upon an ivory tower. The reason for this is that happiness is malleable. What brings us happiness now is not guaranteed to remain, after all, becoming an adult is realising the importance of the people and things of this world. All things in must eventually pass. We cannot find happiness when we are called by circumstance to be sad. However, no matter the circumstances, we can find meaning and look for satisfaction in what we do.

I have known people who have chased a dream for years and decades, and once they have grasped that impossible dream, they have no idea what to do with it. Some have even turned around and started talking about what they regret missing out on due to the sacrifices they made for this dream. That dream, in the end, did not prove to be worth their life. This is not to be pessimistic, but rather to point out an invaluable truth; a dreamer only thrives when they are dreaming. Also, that many times what you imagine is not the inevitable reality.

I saw a video featuring Will Smith recently where he made a valid point; people are rarely willing to make the sacrifices for their dreams. This is true, but I would argue that sacrifice is not always enough. You can sacrifice time, blood, sweat, tears, and your relationships and still have it not work out. Sadly, success is not linear nor a curve. It is a rollercoaster, and one where the rises and drops are dictated by opportunities and our willingness to take them.

I tried to become a professional fighter in my early adulthood, and specifically a professional kick-boxer. I shall blow my own whistle, I had a winning record, and I even fought a couple of paid matches. One could say I was a semi-professional. I was willing to make the sacrifices, financially and emotionally, and even travelled internationally for a couple of bouts. It did not work out because I hit the wall of the fact I have a curved spine. No amount of training, and modern medical science, is going to change the fact that such a spine does not stand up well to the equivalent of experiencing several car crashes in half an hour. The only thing that could have changed my trajectory in life from that point was, well, not being me. I would have to be someone with out the curved spine I was born with.

However, I was presented with the opportunity to return to education and pursue another of my passions; psychology. I now have a relatively comfortable life, and a satisfying one, due to my taking this other route. I shall also be frank, becoming a psychologist required a lot of hard work. It was not the dream I set out with as a callow youth, but it took just as much sacrifice. Right now, I am working on my next ambition; a doctorate. However, the truth is that if a

compelling opportunity that might pull me away from that showed up, I would be willing to consider that possibility.

Now, no one sat me down one day and told me that Kick-boxing was not going to work. I did not have some one with prophetic vision come to me and set me straight that my dream was futile. I will be frank, the choice was completely mine because that opportunity to go back to education was one I created for myself, and I took it. Yes, the injuries piling up and hitting a plateau in terms of my ring ability played a part in it, however, my last fight was a dominant victory for me. I won in under a minute into the first round. I was still seeing gains in my training as well. My punching power, and hand speed were still improving. By the time I called it a day I was lifting the heaviest I had up to that point and my road work was the best it ever was. All in all, I was still on an upward curve in my day to day activities.

Thus, why did I "Give Up" on trying to make it as a kick-boxer? Pragmatically speaking; a bird in the hand is better than two in the hedge. Several times as a fight approached I convinced myself that it was going to be the fight to change everything. Sadly, none of them were, and each time I was taking longer to recover from them due to the stresses on my back. As I mentioned prior, I made the opportunity to go back into education for myself. I was doing part time courses for my own entertainment at the time, because at the time they were free for my age group. Eventually, I accumulated the credit needed to pursue a degree, and now the rest is history.

The key thing is that I did not give up on myself. What I gave up was an effort which was seemingly going nowhere, and despite it being what I loved the most at the time, it was not

turning into a livelihood. You can fail at what you hate, so you might as well try to succeed at what you love. However, you must ask yourself; who is going to pay me to do what I love? It is okay to give up on something that is not working, but never give up on yourself.

Something I read in the gym recently was this:

"The best way to predict the future is to make it"

Basically, the future is a product of the present. Anything you achieve in the future starts here now, today. Every opportunity is in some way made by our own efforts now. To return to those life-long dreams I discussed earlier, many came at the cost of setting aside opportunity after opportunity to do something else. Ironically, the happiest people I know are those who have followed the opportunities that presented themselves instead of chasing impossible dreams. For example, the people who settled down with the right partner and having children, instead of chasing a career that years later they have realised was not for them anyway.

You only get one chance at life; take the opportunities that come your way. Putting aside today for a chance at a tomorrow that may never come is not a wise gamble. With that said, it is important to have goals and ambitions, and some opportunities will not be the right fit for you. In that sense it is finding that ever present happy medium. A question I wish interviewers would stop using, but I find useful to ask myself is the infamous "Where do you see yourself in five years?"

Five years is a realistic time frame for making decisions, especially any requiring significant investment in terms of

money and time. If you cannot visualise a goal coming to you in five years it is probably unrealistic. If you cannot come to a strategy that you can implement in that time frame, again, you are probably looking at something unrealistic.

Stay mindful of the future, but not by sacrificing the present. Also, keep in mind that every opportunity you turn down is a gamble on the future. Changing your direction can be terrifying because it requires a change of our self-image. To change our goals is to challenge our sense of what we value. If I give up on this dream, did I ever really have said dream? Yes, but you are just allowing yourself to value your happiness over an image of the future.

That is where finding happiness where you are becomes important. Cherish the choices you have made for what they have given you. Sometimes, those choices simply give you the impetus to change your ways, and that makes them as valuable as all your good choices. Also, remember happiness comes and goes. However, you are not going to find it if you are not doing meaningful and satisfying things. If chasing your dream makes you miserable; is it a dream or a nightmare?

Love is a Choice

This week I want to address the issue of relationships, and especially the ones people consider most profound; our loving relationships. I watched a video lately about how millennials are the generation that do not want relationships. It made some astute points, however, I felt in many ways it missed a significant fact about the generation labeled as millennials. They, or I suppose I could say we, have grown up in a digital age. The world now is the smallest It has ever been. I wrote this sat on the Welsh border, but you could be reading this anywhere in the world so long as you are connected to the internet. A result of this is that they have never experienced a world where connections to others are not facilitated through mobile devices and social media. Our shared objective reality is increasingly concrete when it comes to relationships. People increasingly record their lives through photos and videos taken on their phones. Many shares these experiences through social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Conversations held in the form of text are not subject to debate about their content. These things are only subject to debate about their meaning. However, we are increasingly subject to finding ourselves trapped in echo chambers because of this. This concrete information is harder to dismiss, or rationalize into something palatable, and thus politics and other heated discussions become more divisive. As such, we increasingly retreat from problematic topics, and resolving them, instead choosing to ignore them. This is not aided by algorithms and other mechanisms which emphasize showing us what we are interested in, and likely to

have a positive reaction to, then what might in fact be useful to us.

However, where do relationships come into this? Simply put, millennials are not the generation that do not want relationships, they just have different expectations of relationships. Expectations torn between the emerging social norms of our 21st century digital singularity, and traditional expectations of relationships inherited from our parents and grandparents who come from an increasingly alien world.

We have a generation to whom marriage is not necessarily considered commitment, but rather a socially acceptable form of indenturing. Where a memetic legacy can often seem more important than a genetic legacy. Where the meaning of what we do is as important as the rewards of what we do. However, regarding relationships, one thing remains true; love is only a feeling, and one that can be fleeting.

Yet, how do relationships survive, if the above is true. Love is also a series of choices, and love survives because we continue to make the choice to keep the feelings alive each time the question is asked. Love ends when we stop making that choice, because we have different priorities, or because the object of our affection has made that choice impossible to keep making. This is true of our romantic relationships, our friendships, and even our familiar relationships. The married couple that divorce, the friends that drift apart, and the child that ceases to love their parents. All these outcomes are due to one party or both finally making the decision that "love" is not worth it. Now, this can be for any number of reasons, but the key thing is to remember that people do not simply stop loving one another. They must be forced away, or they must

make the choice to stop. This does not change from generation to generation and has not changed due to changes in society or the world. However, the nature, and expectations of relationships continue to evolve and change.

The next question is the more complex one; how do we continue to make the choice of love? A few of things are important to remember. All people have flaws, quirks, habits, and rituals. It is important to learn to accept the small things our partner may do that do not align with our own way of doing things. Yet, it is important not to let the small, every day things slide; it is the small things that set the big things up to fail. If our partner forgets to complete one of their chores, we can choose to talk about it with them, or we also can accept that this just might have forgotten or been under pressure to do something else. In those times it can be best to forgive and forget. Trying to change our partner into us is one of the mistakes we can make, and consistently expecting them to be robotically efficient in meeting our demands day in day out is also unrealistic. However, letting bad habits form is another. If you sort the small things out, then the big things will be easily dealt with.

This brings us onto the next issue many of us suffer from. When we are unhappy with a situation, and especially in our relationships, we can tend to focus solely on the problem presented rather than the causes, and we can focus on what the relationship costs us rather than what it gives us. Sometimes, we must recognise that "problems" are the symptoms of the actual problem. Fighting and arguments might in fact be reflective of the fact you do not take care of the house, and that this is disrespectful and takes away from time you can be investing in the relationship. We can also

tend to undervalue small acts of intimacy in favour of huge gestures when we are struggling in our relationships. It is all very well going on a romantic get away, but did you consider that perhaps helping to carry to shopping or maybe just getting some essential jobs done together could be what your relationship needs? Supporting one another is more than just words; it is the small things, and big gestures, together that give authentic support.

We can also lose sight of the reason we first fall in love with people, and we can also fail to accept that people change. All relationships have their trying times, and in such times, it is important to remember why we originally came to love someone. However, sometimes these trying times are brought on by one half of the party wishing to make changes in their lives, or people just naturally changing over time. Learning to accept change as part of a relationship is as important as remembering the good times.

Also, we must not let how the digital world is shaping itself to be how we shape our own world. Relationships do not allow us to run away from problems, nor escape to echo chambers. We cannot always surround ourselves with people who agree with us 100% of the time, nor can we communicate fully with others in short, sound bites, as we can be tempted to do in the digital world. Relationships demand you have the robustness to deal with disagreements, and communicate effectively. The digital world can teach us very bad habits about dealing with others, and it is important to be mindful of these bad habits in this changing world reliant on these digital interactions.

Ultimately, love is all about choices. The above advice is about keeping love alive, but on the inverse, it can set out reasons to fall out of love. Trying to change one another, not getting the small things sorted out, failing to be supporting, and failing to accept change are all, frankly, good reasons to make the choice to move on. To not love someone anymore. As important as love is, it is important not to be a martyr to love. The nature of relationships change, and how we interact with one another changes, and the expectations we have of each other change. However, what does not change is that Love is a choice, and that it is kept alive through effort and not luck or magic.

We might live in a digital age, and our lives might be changing more rapidly now then they have in the past. We might also live in a trepidations age where the future feels uncertain, but life does go on. However, we cannot bury our heads in the sand, and in terror at these changes proclaim our selves entering a dark age. To argue that human beings are no longer social animals which desire intimate relationships because the nature of how humans interact has changed, is short-sighted and fatalistic. Change is terrifying, but it happens, and it is happening all the time. However, the more things change the more they stay the same. This includes love and relationships.

The Divide: Our Prejudices

In my post last week, I discussed the nature of the digital world and its ongoing impact on humanity, and specifically it's part to play in our expectations of our relationships. Primarily the impact it is having on our interactions with one another, and how it can often lead us to finding ourselves in what are commonly called "echo chambers" and how it is leading people to habitually avoid conflict over having to resolve it. I suspect this is leading to people's diminishing skills in conflict resolution, and mutual success in ending disagreements. Yet, I also suspect it is not necessarily a diminishing of a skill but rather the discovery said skill was never truly developed. After all; in times now gone, we would go to work or school, or join a club, and in all frankness unless we became good friends with someone we would rarely know someone outside of the context of our association. We might not necessarily learn anything of their family, of their politics, or of their religion unless they were very outspoken about these matters. Now, many people "friend" or "follow" each other on social media whether that person be a fellow student, a colleague, or a fellow club member. Just by doing that we are given a window into information about people we would otherwise never access. That person whom you get on with well enough at work might suddenly become an avatar for politics you are ardently against, and it might then become difficult to distance yourself from this insight in the context of work. A person from a sports club you both frequent may in fact be a strict Christian with strong views on marriage equality, and

you may be a militant atheist, and despite being perfectly amiable at the club before then now find yourself at odds due to these deeply different views on the world. A view neither of you had insight into in the context of your original meeting, and in your general association.

The reality is people are now seemingly more at odds because we simply, on average, know more about each other. Qualities and aspects of identity that can be deeply divisive lacked the power to divide because of one thing; we just did not know. Our ability to like most people we met in school, in the work-place, and so on and so forth was fed by the fact we really did not know anything about them. We now, rather badly, attempt to re-engineer this "ignorance is bliss" model in this changing world by existing in an echo chamber, or by writing off those who explicitly disagree with us as wrong and thus devalue them as human beings so that ignoring them has no emotional cost.

Something that deeply divides people of either political leaning, and those who are largely centrist, is the issue of racism. The quickest way to dismiss an individuals' opinion on minorities or on immigration is to dismiss it as fundamentally racist. Conversely, the quickest way to undermine criticism of a country or of an individual in a political context is to cry racism if the shoe fits. Especially when it is convenient for most of the discussion to avoid deconstruction and fair appraisal of the criticism.

I shall not go into detail, for the benefit of those involved, but a recent experience by a friend of mine has made this impossible to ignore. In an online discussion about an article discussing how modern evangelical churches struggle to

attract and retain Black Members, my friend made the observation that- from his experience- Evangelical churches (especially those of the very modern trends) struggle to attract minorities and can in fact alienate them and that churches do need to work harder in their dialogues with minority members and communities. Sadly, he was accused of detracting from the main discussion, the issues churches have with attracting and retaining black members, and of being racist due to "colour blindness."

A correct assertion about the issue of racism is the phenomena of colour blindness. That a way to distract, and prevent effective discussion, about issues of race is to profess not caring about the matter of race and not seeing a difference between people based on their race. Not judging others by their race and accepting people for who they are is an important set of values to have. However, the darker side of colour blindness is when it is used to avoid effective discussion about the issues different minorities face. All minorities are at an innate disadvantage in any society, as they largely exist on the fringe, may have a distinct culture from the majority, and probably lack material resources. As such they lack political influence and power, and the protections such influence and power bring. Minorities can thus easily be attacked or used as vehicles for the political machinations of others. This is where colour-blindness is most dangerous, by talking of all minorities, in the minds of many this makes said minorities much more numerous and powerful. They become amalgamated "Other" against the "Us" that is the majority. Especially in race issues this can make it far more difficult to deal with specific problems, as talking about specific issues for a specific minority can be

framed as divisive or racist talk. Especially in a cultural paradigm where many are educated not to think of issues based on race. For many white people, due to the historical legacy of the Caucasian people, they are educated to not think of matters in terms of race. The historical conversation was sadly one of comparison of greater and lesser; the White Man the destined Homo Superior and any one else an inherently inferior sub-human.

As such, people have attempted to avoid racism simply by not discussing race. However, all that has changed is the language of racism. It is now grounded in religion, and economic status, rather than the colour of the skin. People do not discuss the specific issues faced by different minorities. Now, the language of superiority may have changed; even amongst white supremacists the eugenics talk has diminished in favour of reasoning based on what they are argue are important inherent differences between the races that make race war unavoidable. Thus, they argue the need the segregation, and to divide the world according to the rule of "Who was there first" for the good of all the races. Strangely, the rule of "Who was there first" only seems to apply to the "Old World". I am certain and thankful the genocide of the Native American peoples was not entirely successful, despite a damned good try I must sadly add.

The issue with colour blindness is thus two-fold. Unless you can discuss the specific problem, you can not identify cause and effect, and nor can you create a solution. The second is that most people belong to several minorities; not just one. The Gay Black Man faces different challenges than the Gay White Man, because attitudes about homosexuality in some black communities is not one of acceptance. This combined

with other systematic differences, leads to two very different life experiences despite them belonging to the same minority; they are both gay.

To come back to the example of my friend and the online discussion about the struggle of Evangelical communities attracting and retaining black members. Was he engaging in problematic colour-blindness, or was he simply speaking from his experience? I would like to argue he was speaking from his experience; his church was very white, and it was not spectacular at outreach to minorities in general, never mind to People of Colour. The mechanism of communicating, and speaking, effectively to people from any minority did not exist; never mind the specific issues of a specific minority. My friend is not one I would describe as traditionally colour-blind in terms of race and culture; we regularly discuss the issues that Vietnamese and Asian people often have in adopting to Western cultural norms. We often discuss the specific struggles of Black people in the United States of America. He is a person I would consider very aware of the need to talk about the specific issues to craft the best solution. Was it a moment of colour-blindness? Perhaps, we can all fall into that trap no matter how educated or aware of the issues we may feel we are. However, by immediately attacking his contribution instead of opening a conversation, they immediately lost a potential ally and to justify this attack they labelled him racist. I can understand people's sensitivity at this time to colour blindness, it is a frustrating issue to have your attempt to discuss a problem brushed away with the question "What about the other minorities and their issues?" or "Why are you supporting this instead of egalitarianism?". I do not blame the person for their reaction on such a heated

topic, and I can in fact understand the emotions; I just wish it had gone better. With that said, however, we need to beware our own sensitivity, and sadly we need to practice patience even in the face of feeling attacked or dismissed. As a white male, it would be very easy for me to give into the feeling of being attacked when the blame is placed upon the predominantly white patriarchy for problems. For me to feel my achievements are being dismissed when people talk of "White Privilege". However, I have educated myself on the issues and I know White Privilege is a real thing with regards to gaining opportunities in several areas. I also know when White Heterosexual Men are made fun of in satire and comedy it is not a personal attack against me, and the reality is if I cannot find the funny side of such things then I am part of the problem.

Now, onto the broader issues of the changing language of racism. The Leader of the Labour Party here in the United Kingdom, Jeremy Corbyn, is currently embattled regarding the issue of Anti-Semitism in the party. Yet, where does this emerge from? Nowhere in the stated policies of the Labour party are there statements against Jewish people, or anything asking for action against Jewish people. Nor has Jeremy Corbyn himself been found to have made Anti-Semitic remarks, or to support Anti-Semitism. However, the Labour Party, including Mr Corbyn himself, has been critical of the Israel-Palestine situation; specifically, they have been critical of the Israeli Government's, and Military's, actions in the Gaza Strip. Indeed, many student labour supporters acted as the thrust of the campaign to boycott Israeli goods. Similarly, Labour has been the traditional enemy of large corporations, and a critic of many significant and well-known Men of

business. This includes the Rothchild family. Sadly, but perhaps not to be unexpected, these stances have attracted the support of conspiracy theorists entrenched in Anti-Semitic attitudes. The Zionist conspiracy theorists who believe the Jewish people secretly rule the world, or are trying to, and those whom argue that Israel should not exist because it was a post-war creation of the British Empire and that the land should be returned to the Palestinians. One can see how such a dark underbelly may have attached itself to the Labour party. In the party's criticisms of Israel, they see a chance for their ideas to go mainstream, and in the strong stance on corporations and monopolies they see some confirmation from the oligarchy that there is indeed a Zionist conspiracy.

To the pedants, I am certain your immediate criticism of this part has been that being Jewish is an ethnoreligious identify, and not a racial identity. However, I have used it as a current example to demonstrate how powerful language is, and the evolving language of bigotry. These Anti-Semites have latched onto statements that have been critical of Israel and people with a Jewish identity, but not the existence of the country and these criticisms of individuals have nothing to do with the Jewish identity of said people. However, because of the target of their hatred, they have latched onto anything they can use to attack the objects of their hatred.

This in turn brings me to another example. A couple of years ago, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, made remarks about attitudes of people to refugees. In context they were perfectly balanced, however, out of context they almost earned him some very unwelcome friends. In discussing the concerns of communities about the refugee

crisis, he stated: It is "outrageous" to describe people who are worried about the impact of migration as racist.

A number on the extreme right attempted to latch onto this and argue that this was an endorsement of what they professed about the dangers of immigration and refugees. However, in context, this was very far from the truth. The Archbishop was talking about the genuine concerns people have about the impact of a sudden influx of people, such as refugees, on housing, jobs, and social services. Especially in communities where they are already struggling to provide sufficient services for those already there. In context it was an indictment of the failure of the government, and local authorities, to administer to the problems faced by British Communities. On balance, he also stated that Britain's promise to accept 20,000 refugees was woefully inadequate for the crisis, in terms of the shared burden.

These examples, I hope, serve to illustrate a key point. Earlier I discussed people's lack of ability to talk candidly and effectively about issues of race. Many because they have been educated to be colour blind, or that to talk about race is in of itself racist. What it is in fact racist is what you say, not the topic of discussion. It is this that actual racists are now exploiting. They are exploiting people's inability to confidently discuss race issues. They have been doing it behind closed doors to say horrible things about others for years; it was not intelligent conversation, but they have practice in talking about it confidently. In democracies where we admire and respect the power of free speech, and sometimes slavishly worship it, they have also learnt another lesson; they must appear reasonable enough that the majority ignore their worst aspects. They do not need to convince the majority, merely

make the majority believe what they are saying is largely harmless. They also have changed the dynamic of the conversation in this way. By co-opting reasonableness, they have created a distrust of attempts at reasonableness. They also do not talk in terms of Race but rather economic status and religion, even though the reason these people are a target for them is the colour of their skin and their ethnicity.

Therefore, people are now sensitive to the issues of "Colour-Blindness". It comes across as this co-opted reasonableness, and an unwillingness to challenge the specific issues. It also serves to camouflage what these reinvented racists are in fact talking about. However, sometimes it is very important to discuss the broad issues, and the underlying problems that all minorities face. Rushing to the battle cry of racist, because we disagree with an observation, is not useful. Yet, this is what I see happening increasingly on both ends of the political spectrum.

As Jedi, how do we contend with the conundrum of discussing heated and divisive topics, which at the end of the day are about qualities a person never chose. We do not choose the colour of our skin, and we do not choose many things about ourselves. How do we say reasonable, but critical, statements about countries and issues of migration and ethnic integration without people latching onto and misusing the critical aspects? Ultimately again, it is about patience and remembering one thing about free-speech; though you are free to say many things, you are also held accountable to what you say, and you are free to be criticised. As Jedi, we must learn to take a critical eye, and not fall onto the sword that is our initial reaction. We know some statements are inherently racist; the words used can

indicate as much. However, some arguments can have an underlying element of racism, and yet because the language used was not obviously racist it can be missed, and so we must look to the argument itself. We must, however, always use our criticisms as a learning opportunity. Many people are misinformed, and have their genuine fears co-opted by political agendas. If we return to the example of Justin Welby, the genuine concerns he talked about have been co-opted by the likes of Britain First and UKIP to fuel their rhetoric, and they turn these fears into antagonism against refuges and immigrants. They push the blame from the system and onto the victims of an unforgiving world. As such, we can use opportunities where people present a misinformed stance as a learning opportunity.

This criticism also must be applied to our own thinking. Human beings rely on stereotyping to make life easier, and the tragic thing is; our first impressions are often stable. Rarely do our perceptions of individuals change. If those individuals have left a negative impression, we may often see those repeating negative themes in others with shared characteristics. When we discuss race, and identity, we must always look at what we are in fact saying and the implications of our statements. Richard Dawkins described Islam as a religion of Evil. This is bigoted and implies that a follower of Islam is inherently evil due to their religion. It is not a balanced, effective, criticism of an aspect of Islamic law or belief. It is a generalised condemnation. Islam has been used to justify actions I consider reprehensible, but so has Christianity, and even Buddhism. However, would I argue those religions are evil, and that their adherents are thus

inherently evil? No, because that is a nonsense judgement statement, that is not quantifiable.

In writing this piece I have tried to remain sensitive to how this topic can upset people. I have doubts I have achieved a completely un-offensive article. That is part of the process of self-critical thinking, however, and that is trial and error. Yet, also, realising you cannot perfectly predict the reactions of the entirety of your audience. Anything that does offend some one, I apologise for, but I would ask you to step back and ask why you have found it offensive. I did not write this to be offensive, or intend offense, but racism and identity politics rarely goes any where that does not cause discomfort. That is the nature of the topic, bigotry is dehumanising and painful. Also, being talked about by our skin, of what people can see, takes away from us and who we are. We are not just our skin colour; we are all so very much more than that. Yet, it is a quality that continues to divide. Until we talk about why, and why skin colour must be a factor in the problems of people, we are never free of racism.

Stop talking about it. I'm going to stop calling you a white man. And I'm going to ask you to stop calling me a black man. I know you as Mike Wallace. You know me as Morgan Freeman. You're not going to say, "I know this white guy named Mike Wallace." Hear what I'm saying? – Morgan Freeman (2005).

The Hero's Journey

Last Wednesday, during the Armonia Weekly Hangout, the group discussed the Hero's Journey and during it a few interesting points were brought up. Largely, what was discussed were where people felt they were on the hero's journey in their own lives, but that is not what I want to get into, but rather a look at the notion of a hero. As was stated in the chat, Hero is perhaps a very strong word for most people's journeys. However, if we are to be congruent with what we are exploring we must use the title of the method we are applying, in this case Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey. In many ways, a stream of Jediism has been shaped by the exploration of the Hero's journey, and that is why it is often discussed in Jedi circles.

Personally, I am not a fan of Campbell as I feel several of his assertions are based on misguided interpretations. For example; he often fails to distinguish between the cycle of vengeance as exists in Greek and Roman Mythologies. Furthermore, he makes assertions about the myth of Horus without in fact identifying the Horus he is discussing. To be clear, there is "one" Horus, but many versions of his story and thus it is important to identify which version, otherwise you get into the realms of divine incest. All this aside, the Hero's Journey very effectively fits the story of one Luke Skywalker, and it is well known that George Lucas found a mentor in Joseph Campbell during his tumultuous years in college, though it would not be until after Lucas had completed the original Star Wars trilogy that he would meet his "Yoda".

Real Jedi use the fictional Jedi as their inspiration and use the fictional Jedi as their joint foundation. Now, some have used the Jedi Archetype as a vehicle for mystical teachings from real world traditions. Others have built ideas purely from the inspiration of the fictional materials. Most have tended to marry these two paths; taking inspiration and ideas from the fiction but looking to tried and tested philosophies and ideals to frame said fictional ideas. An example of this, as mentioned prior, is to frame the story of Star Wars and specifically Luke Skywalker within the Hero's Journey, and to expand this and apply the frame work to one's own life.

This is not unlike Dialectical Behavioural Therapy, Logotherapy, or Psychodynamic Depth, where one studies the "narrative" of one's life to understand the plot points and gain an understanding of the factors affecting one's life. This is a gross simplification of said therapies but hopefully illustrates the point that the study of one's life from a narrative driven perspective can be effective and useful. I do bring up these therapies, however, because unlike a story with a beginning, middle, and end where the story teller has a logical path of progression, life is more chaotic and cyclical. We can take a step forward, and then take two steps backwards, or we can find ourselves repeating the same smaller cycle within the whole. Also, unlike a book or myth, we are often on several disparate journey's in our own lives. We can be some where along the road in one part of our life, and else where in another. Rarely does everything converge on one identifiable spot on the Hero's Journey. However, what is the Hero's Journey? To some it will be a very familiar term, and I suspect it has been lost on others. The Hero's Journey or monomyth, broadly speaking, is a template made

up of three cycles and 8-17 stages. The number of stages depends on the model, but each model consists of three major cycles or acts. The first act is titled departure, and for Luke this is encapsulated in Episode III and IV if following Leeming's model. However, the first act proper is found entirely in Episode IV, if following Campbell's traditional model. This includes the stages of "Call to Adventure", "Refusal of the Call", "Supernatural Aid", "Crossing the Threshold" and "Belly of the Whale". The Empire Strikes back fulfils the requirements of the second act "initiation" and Return of the Jedi closes "initiation" and begins the Act of "Return" but ends symbolically on crossing the return threshold. The Last Jedi, to an extent, finally brings an end to the Journey proper of Luke Skywalker.

Yet, what is powerful about Luke's story? In many respects, he is the classical hero. Like the Hero's of Antiquity, Luke is entrapped in a cycle of vengeance begun before his Birth, and like Orestes he is the one cursed to bring it to a close or attempt to. He is of a divine parentage which sets him apart from other men, and it is revealed with all the tragedy and drama of the ancient plays; "No, I am your father". In turn, his fate and destiny are determined by this parentage.

Like Arthur and Beowolf, he is a great Hero, of great personal courage, and yet his final years are dominated by inactivity, failure, and defeat. His old self dies a symbolic death, and yet in his actual death he reclaims all he once was and becomes more. Like Arthur who is the once and future king, or Beowolf who secures his legacy by slaying the dragon, Luke's final act secures his true legacy and points the way for those that follow him. Yet, in turn, his failures are what set forth the

conflicts to come as the actions of Aeneas and Odysseus did in their journeys.

Luke Skywalker embodies, in many ways, the primordial fears humanity has long had. That the mistakes we make cannot be undone and can breed only further turmoil. It also reflects our own childish fears; that we are doomed to become our forebears or that we will inevitably fail to surpass them. Also, the pain and anguish that comes with any relationship, especially the ones we have with our parents. Yet, he embodies heroism because he overcomes these fears to amount to something greater.

Now, in all this, we must be wary of ignoring Lucas' other influences. The work of Frank Herbert, and Dune, can be seen throughout Star Wars. For example, Luke's mystical awakening and rise to the status of War Hero mirroring that of Paul Atreides. Indeed, the key conflicts of a Galactic war being hand-to-hand combat (Lightsaber duels) or guerrilla actions take almost exactly from Dune. In fact, the Lightsaber was not meant to be a special weapon, but one ubiquitous to the setting, like the Personal Shields and the brutal close quarter fighting such technology demanded. We can further see the parallels with the Bene Gesserit and the Jedi; orders with special powers, and with monopiles on services essential to the powers they nominally serve. Indeed, the influence of Dune can still be found in the new films which lack Lucus' direct control. The story of Luke is almost akin to that of Paul when he was acting as "The Prophet", and as Paul serves to inadvertently convince Leto II of the righteousness of his path, Luke does the same for Rey in Episode VIII.

This leads me to my essential point. Often, we also fail to consider what "Type" of hero we are looking at when we apply the Hero's Journey to their story. Though the Hero's Journey can appear to be a re-occurring pattern through myths, books, films and story telling in general, we must consider Heroes come in many shapes, sizes, and forms. We in turn make this mistake when looking at our own lives when using the Hero's Journey; we can forget to ask who we are in the Journey.

To me the Prequels of Star Wars were interesting, when discussing Heroes, as Lucas either on purpose or as more often with Lucas, by accident, explored to a degree the makings of a Hero. In Qui-Gon Jinn he presents a maverick hero more akin to the characters of Kurosawa's period pieces than to the classical hero of Luke. In Obi-Wan he explores the tragic hero, a character that does everything right by the standards of his peers and the ideals of the story, and yet still fails because he is fighting forces greater than he could overcome. In Anakin we are given a Byronic Hero, doomed by a fundamental flaw, which undoes his otherwise heroic character; Anakin's fractured, and damaged, capacity for love.

Qui-Gon Jinn was a flawed maverick hero; a man capable of great compassion, who sought to do what was right and equitable rather than what was simply legal. Indeed, he did not balk at using the unjust rules of the society of Tatooine against those that benefitted from them. Even if his actions amounted to cheating, and potentially illegal, as he was gambling on slaves it was in the pursuit of a greater good. Yet, his inability to put aside his sense of duty ultimately doomed him and imperilled those he had taken into his care.

He had taken Anakin into his care, and yet put both himself and the boy in great mortal peril to fulfil his duty to Padme and Naboo. In doing so, he was killed, and again Anakin's future was put into danger. In trying to consistently do the right thing for everyone, Qui-Gon failed to consider what was most important to achieve, and this was perhaps his greatest failure.

Obi-Wan consistently did the right thing by the standards of the story. He kept his word to his Master, was an attentive Student and Mentor, and put his talents to great use as a general and pilot despite his disdain for war and violence. Yet, he consistently denied himself happiness for the standards of Good in the story. He did not take his emotional connection to Anakin to it's logical conclusion until it was far too late. Telling some one you love them, and that they are a brother to you, while they are burning to death by a lake of Lava after you have removed their limbs is not the time to say that. That is something you say when you feel it, and it is obvious they need that emotional support. However, by the standards of the Jedi, he was right to keep his emotional distance, and he was right to consistently deny himself. Obi-Wan sacrificed everything, and in turn lost everything, despite doing everything right by the standards of the story. He is ultimately a tragic hero, as despite his heroism, all he finds is tragedy.

Finally, to Anakin, who I would argue is a Byronic Hero; a rebellious young man, distressed by his own terrible actions and the terrible actions done against him, yet still capable of great heroism. Anakin is doomed by his own twisted concept of love and searching for it in all the wrong places. In his youth he only experienced unconditional love from his

mother, and the first person to show him admiration and respect was Qui-Gon Jinn. Both died violently, and without him being able to truly say good bye. He tried to find these lost figures in other people; in Padme, his mother, and in Obi-Wan the impression Qui-Gon had left upon him. Yet, Padme was an independent woman whom could not look past Anakin's flaws and could not love him unconditionally. Obi-Wan was human, and simple exposure over time would reflect that he was not perfect nor a replacement for Qui-Gon. Anakin's destiny was also crafted by his actions; his secret marriage to Padme was a mistake by Jedi standards, and an aspect of their relationship was that they alone knew of what he had done to avenge his mother. He could never seek assistance from the right people because he never felt secure in their love; that they could forgive, or still care for him after admitting his errors. Ultimately, he was doomed to become Vader because that was the path crafted by mistakes uncorrected. Yet, he was a truly heroic figure, of great personal courage, who saved countless lives during the clone wars. A walking contradiction of a man.

Now; those three are all fictional characters, but I have talked of them as living and breathing to make you consider what other ways their tales could go. Yet, also to make you question which type of Hero are you in your story? Are you the maverick taking your eyes off the actual objective? Are you doing everything right but getting nowhere? Are you letting something from your past dominate your present? It is not just about where you are in your journey, but how did you get there and where are you going from there? What sort of Hero are you going to be?

Before we finish I also wish to discuss the other key figure of the Hero's Journey; the Mentor. With the prequels, we again get different types of mentor, but also of father figures. I often make the remark that the original parts of Star Wars come from the issues Lucas had with his father. This is not a joke, as through out the film, we can see allusions to the very real conflict Lucas had with his father, and indeed, even the resolution; forgiveness and acceptance. Indeed, Palpatine is an interesting figure, perhaps the father we sometimes wished we had; one who offers solutions, support and acceptance no matter what. Yet, he is a terrible father figure. He utilises the flaws of Anakin to keep him on a leash, and indeed the father who fails to challenge and fails to point out and help correct mistakes is not a good father. In Palpatine we can see the awful step-father, or the disinterested father, who uses friendliness and money and power to avoid conflict; they do not want the effort of being a father, but offer only its most superficial qualities, a form of support.

Qui-Gon in contrast gives that support but disappears. He is like a child's early image of a father to Anakin. Powerful, Wise, and able to solve everything, and with answers to all questions. Anakin never grows up from this image, and it is mirrored in his relationships with Obi-Wan, Yoda, and Palpatine. Indeed, Obi-Wan is like the struggling father trying to be a good father. Struggling to find the balance between sternness and indulgence; he is critical of Anakin's flaws, but readily acknowledges his abilities. Indeed, he also tries to protect Anakin and guide Anakin, but is caught between his relationship with Anakin and his duty to the council. Like many parents are caught between the desires of their children, and what they know what they must prepare their

children for. Yoda is like the grandfather who tries to give good advice, and is a hint indulgent, but for all his efforts can do nothing effective because Anakin keeps him at arms' length. Both Obi-Wan and Yoda want what is best for Anakin, but Anakin's own secrets, and their own peculiar relationship with their emotions caused by being Jedi means the man they are trying to mentor is alien to them. This allows Palpatine, who seems to give unconditional support, to manipulate Anakin horribly.

Again, my own reading of the fiction but that is the joy of art; it gives something to read into. Now, I mention this as I believe it important to also consider that we are mentors as well as students; we probably have someone in our lives who looks up to us and counts on us. How effective are you as a mentor in the journeys of others? Are you being a good mentor or a bad mentor; are you giving superficial support, and failing to challenge your mentee when you should?

To paraphrase the Bard; the world is a stage, and we are all but players. The Hero's journey can help us understand the story of our life, but we must consider who we are in that story. Are you playing the part you want to play?

Mental Health Awareness Week

Yesterday was the beginning of the Natsu Basho. However, more importantly today is the beginning of Mental Heath Awareness Week. Mental Health Awareness week is exactly what it says; it is a week where campaigners try to raise awareness of Mental Health and Mental Health issues. As individuals we can often underestimate the impact life has on our wellbeing, from stress, to all matter of other factors.

As Jedi, we are often very good at taking care of others, and those who do not identify as Jedi, but we do not often consider our fellow Jedi or ourselves when it comes to our responsibility to each other. A huge focus of many organisations this Mental Health Week is stress and well-being. The potential damaging affects of stress have long been understood, with Seyle performing the seminal research on biological stress in the 1930s. However, how truly detrimental it is to human beings is a rather recent body of research. Researchers at the Yale Stress Center found that continued durations of high stress dramatically affect the prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex is the most recently evolved part of the human brain. Brain functions localised to the prefrontal cortex include regulation of the amygdala, blood pressure and heart beat, however, it is also houses functions of learning, planning, focus, and judgement making. Chronic Stress is related to reduced functions within the prefrontal cortex, and even shrinking of the prefrontal cortex. None of that is a good thing.

Though, what is stress? To paraphrase Marmot, Stress is what happens when we can't control what is happening to us. This is consistent with most models of biological stress, and indeed might have routes in human evolution and the issues of a modern world. Our stress response is also our fight or flight response, and the fight or flight response has incredible effects on the body. Imagine that extreme response as a daily experience, and you have chronic stressed. To return to Seyle's model, and subsequent research, we know that long term stress increases chances of stomach illnesses, cancer, and heart disease. However, we also know from research that the more resources we possess, and the type of society we live in can help and protect us from stress.

During this mental health week, I want you reader, as a Jedi, to consider what sort of society you are helping to build and live in. Are you being part of a society which induces stress, rather than protects people from it's worst and most dramatic effects?

As a mentor or teacher, to others, consider your role carefully. As a teacher we must often challenge our students and their world view, but are you doing it effectively with a growth-based mindset? If not, are you simply being an additional stressor? Is the person you are challenging retreating from your lessons because you simply trigger their fight or flight response?

Furthermore; consider the stressors in your own life. Do you spend far too much time on social media? Do you allow yourself a break from the online world and others? Are the moments you are physically alone moments of actual

solitude, or just times you take a chance to go through e-mails?

Lastly, however, consider the resources at your disposal and the resource you are. How do you effectively communicate with those around you that can help you with your struggles? Also, how effectively are you helping others with their stress?

Thank you for reading, and please during this week feel free to share all you can about mental health awareness. Every little helps in confronting the issues of mental health.

The Peter Principle

The Peter Principle is the rule of thumb that individuals will rise to their level of incompetence. That is, an individual in a company or organisation who is competent will be promoted, and once removed from that environment will be discovered to be incompetent in their new role. To quote Laurence Peter, the name sake of the Principle, himself:

"In time, every post tends to be occupied by an employee who is incompetent to carry out its duties." – Peter (1969)

Why, though, is this important to keep in mind as Jedi? For the same reason it is important to keep this in mind traditional Japanese Arts, and the Dan structure. Let us consider its use in martial arts such as Karate and Judo. As one progresses through the Kyu Grades (The coloured belts for junior Grades), and in time, hopefully achieve the Kuro-Obi (Black-Belt) or more importantly recognition as a member of the Yudansha (One with Dan grade) one is given an increasing degree of responsibility. This responsibility often encompasses teaching, coaching, or simply assisting the Chief Instructor of the school. However, let us consider the Judo system of awarding the coveted "Black-Belt". One must earn the belt through competition, by earning point, to challenge for the rank. Now, one does also need to do a mandatory technical grading, to demonstrate base competencies, but largely the ability to earn the rank is through pure competitive ability.

An advantage of this approach is that the Kyu/Dan system is reflective of the growth of the Judoka as a combat sport

player. Judo is a martial art, and martial comes from Mars the God of War, and means something suited to War or to be Warrior like. If one has progressed to be a member of the Yudansha, one is competent in the combat sport of Judo. However, does this make one potentially a good instructor?

Largely, no. Some of the best Judo players I have met have been relatively poor Judoka in terms of skills as a coach, and knowledge of Judo. They have known enough, technically, to pass gradings, but otherwise their ability to win Judo matches came from their athletic ability and a handful of very well-honed techniques. Yet, it is the responsibility of the Yudansha to teach their kohai (juniors), and to be the next generation of leaders and instructors of Judo.

This is where the Peter Principle becomes apparent. The means of achieving the rank and grade are not consistent with the expectations eventually placed on the meaning of the rank and grade. This is true across the board of this ranking system in general. Many Karate, Kempo, Quan Fa, Wushu, Tae Kwon Do, and Gendai Budo Jujutsu schools promote based on the rote memorisation of Kata/Hyeong/ Taolu (Forms), demonstration of Self-Defence techniques on compliant partners, and sparring formats which are relatively benign and do not accurately reflect fighting competency. Ultimately, the ranking structure does not effectively reflect fighting ability nor the talents and skills to pass fighting ability along. Simply reaching the coveted status of Yudansha does not make one competent to teach.

The focus of the artist determines the reality of his art. The form competitor can beautifully perform the form, and derive exciting routines which supposedly demonstrate the fighting

techniques found in the form, but is that a deep understanding of the form? It is easy to look at movement and derive something from mere observation. It is simple to perform a form with athleticism and good movement. However, a form is a useless thing without fundamental fighting skills. It is not a useful mnemonic device for the rehearsal of combat-based movements if one has no understanding of combat.

The Jedi community suffers from the same fundamental problem. We teach, and explore, a life philosophy that is materially grounded in helping, and serving others. However, we also admire, and respect, self-sufficiency, self-mastery, and competency. We also, however, favour an introverted path which focuses on the inner reality, as much as the outer world. On times, our teachings can appear contradictory. How we promote, or refuse to promote others, can also seem strange and alien. Merely passing a course, or a training, does not constitute the right to be acknowledged as a knight or master. The judgement of one's peers as to how well you reflect an abstract sense of "knightliness" or "masterfulness" must be passed as well.

It is this last quality where we fall victim to the Peter Principle. In the Fiction, the role of teacher and mentor was the role most sacred and integral to the Jedi. One was judged a Master by one's success in training a Padawan to the rank of Knight, as much as by one's knowledge and Power in the Force. The relationship between a Jedi and his or her teacher was also the greatest guard against the Dark Side, as well as the weakness by which its temptations could overcome a Learner. Similarly, since the earliest time of Jedi, and Force, Realism the role of mentor and teacher has been the mark of

the Knight and Master. Those remembered by history, are those who were the architects of the foundation of the Jedi way. It has also been the source of the greatest turbulence.

We know not all are meant to be teachers, and still that is how we think of the rank of Knight and Master. We are still given to the thinking of Einstein: "If You Can't Explain it to a Six Year Old, You Don't Understand it Yourself". This is not necessarily a bad thing, as frankly if you cannot explain the Jedi path in simple terms you do not understand what it means to be a Jedi. However, to return to the initial statement that we are not all meant to be mentors.

Mentoring takes the development of many skills, and the possession of personal qualities, that are not necessarily cultivated by the fundamental teachings of the Jedi path. The ability to have a deep meaningful mentoring relationship, built upon helping another human being grow is a difficult task I doubt many Jedi are capable of. Not because I believe there are many incompetent Jedi, but because I know it is a difficult path. One of heart and meaning, but one hard to walk.

Yet, we magically expect these skills of Knights and Masters, although we rarely promote or acknowledge them based on that quality. We judge knights and masters on their self-mastery, and competency. We should not presume or embolden knights and masters to presume that their rank grants them any new talents of instruction that they had before.

Why do so many people fail at the critical juncture of apprenticeship? Many simply discover they do not have the qualities to be a Jedi, but many also suffer from incompetent

mentors. This comes from a lack of training, but also a lack of quantitative expectations. Jedi training cultivates awareness, competency in helping others, and self-mastery but those are not the building blocks of a Mentor. Empathy, not merely sympathy, and the capacity to challenge a student are the core skills of a mentor. However, many Jedi lack these qualities. Our demand for a Jedi to be a Jedi can blind us to being helpful to our peers and companions. We can often demand people be better, rather than offer a way to be better. In times of tragedy we are quick to offer sympathy, and perhaps solutions, but rarely do we simply listen. A Jedi picks themselves up and moves forward, yes, but we can do so much better than pointing out the obvious.

Similarly, we can be quick to challenge misconceptions, and challenge people's views; especially when they are critical of our peers and people we respect. However, challenging is a skill that takes patience and practice. It takes nuance, and more importantly it takes knowing the views and behaviours of whose ideas you are challenging. Arrogance, defensiveness, and the like can very quickly prevent you being effective in challenging the thinking of another.

To bring this full cycle to the Peter Principle, and the Dan system comparison; people spend their initial training as a Jedi learning one set of skills, to often be promoted to a new role demanding an entirely new set of skills. One requiring leadership qualities, and the mindset of a mentor. This is not effective, and it is why the different roles of Guardian, Healer, and Mystic exist. The reality is that on promotion one must learn how to best use their skills, and how to pass them on. You might not be a mentor and leader by nature, but are you someone who understands their path, and can write with

authority on it? You need not be a personal mentor, but you could be a content creator. Are you a successful mentor? Have you considered mentoring a mentor to be? Taking an understudy and assistant to help you as a teacher. There are many ways to embody the role of the teacher, but maybe not dive head-first into being a mentor to a Padawan/Apprentice. The Way of the Jedi is a life-path, we have the compass to guide us on what it means to be a Jedi, but how we embody being a Knight or Master is on us. Pursue excellence in the sphere which allows you to grow, and help others grow.

This is where the final, dark, and uncomfortable truth must be stated. We do not always promote people based on competency in the Jedi Path, and we do not always put people with the right skills into the right roles. All Jedi groups suffer from the same problem; they are all volunteer organisations. Often, the people we see promoted to different roles, and ranks, are the people who have put the time in and have been by the powers that be to be active, rather than the people with the best skills and qualities for the role. Therefore, I would ask people to have a degree of mercy when it comes to the leadership of their groups. You do not know the battles they are facing, and you must keep in mind they got where they did in the organisation due to their obvious passion for the work. Never be afraid to critique, and point out issues, but also focus on solution and growth-based thinking. If you only ever look for the negatives, and speak on the negatives, that is all people will find in your words and all you will ever find in your path.

Also, keep in mind that we are a community of volunteers (Mostly). Most of us are not paid to deal with bullying, rudeness, or evident contempt. Even those of us who do take

money for a service (Such as Armonia's online school) we would still be taken aback if we were subjected to treatment as mentioned above by a student. Our community is only as harmonious as its most distinct character.

"There is no instance of a country having benefited from prolonged warfare" – Sun Tzu

This is true of any semblance of a community. No community thrives from disharmony, and out and out conflict. A community can thrive from distinct differences in views, and multiple perspectives, but only among those who at the end of the day recognise those differences as superficial compared to the grand aims. Who can put aside differences as moot when it comes to maintaining friendship. This, again, comes down to the Peter Principle. Someone who is unfit to be part of a community that is built upon mutual responsibility, and leadership, is unfit to be a Jedi and is unfit to be promoted, yet I have seen it happen and I suspect readers can think of examples where they have seen it happen.

It is on this that I wish to end this discussion:

1. To those in charge of promoting; define well what you mean by your ranks and define well your expectations. Is your model of training setting people up to fail the moment they are promoted?

2. To those seeking to understand the ranks or feel frustration. Keep in mind the Peter Principle, and keep in mind that our community is run by those with a passion for it. They are not experts or professionals and you cannot extend

those expectations to them. They must find a balance between the digital world, and life.

3. Seek to be a friend to your peers. Only by mutual respect, and admiration, can we have a growth orientated community. If you cannot be a friend to those in your community then why stay?

Also, seek the positives and not only the negatives. If we only seek problems we will only find problems. You inevitably find what you are looking for.

Jedi & Gender

It is Pride Month, and that means specifically LGBT Pride Month. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Month. Often, however, I find the T is relegated to a secondary spot or not realistically discussed. After all, being transgender is not about who you are sexually attracted to, but about what gender you identify as. This can often lead to the important dialogue about Transgender issues being lost among discussions of marriage equality, and rights to openly engage in romantic and sexual relationships with who you want.

Yet, Transgenderism seems to be a hot topic these days in the United States. With the Sex change of Caitlyn Jenner to her actual sex identity, and the absurd bathroom debate in the United States of America seeming to have opened up a forum for shouting matches about what it means to be transgender. Now, what is a transgender individual is not always readily answered. To quote the American Psychological Association, in the field of psychology, transgender is an "umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression, or behaviour does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth." (APA, 2011).

A simple definition to understand, I would argue. However, what is harder to understand is the nature of the debates that persist, and why they are so prevalent in some circles. The transgender population is far from a large population, nor the population making the most noise about these issues. Now, it is impossible to accurately generate a statistic regarding a

world population of transgender people, after all even in the west as many as 71% of Transgender people remain closeted publicly for fear of discrimination (Grant et al, 2011), however, the conservative estimate of below one percent in any given country can be said with a degree of confidence. How does such a small part of the population have such an impact on public discourse?

Transgender individuals who identify with their actual gender rather than their presented sex face pervasive anti-transgender bias and resulting discrimination, however, this is especially true of those who belong to racial minorities as well as being transgender. The results of these biases are that most live in extreme poverty. Samples of Transgender individuals indicate that they are approximately four times more likely to have a household income of less than $10,000 per annum compared to a general population of the United States.

The final impact of this is that 41% of the General Transgender individuals report attempting suicide compared to 1.6% of the general population. The discrimination discussed above also affected suicide rates:

- 55% of those who lost a job due to discrimination had attempted suicide.
- 51% of those subjected to harassment and bullied in school had attempted suicide.
- 61% of those living in a low-income household had attempted suicide.

Similarly, these rates were affected by the violence that transgender individuals experience. 61% of respondents who experienced physical assault reported attempting suicide,

and 64% of those who were victims of sexual assault responded they had tried. The significant increase in violence against transgender individuals, including murder, since 2009 has only compounded matters.

Simply put, if you are a transgender individual, then you are part of the worlds smallest population. You are also perhaps part of the most misunderstood part of the world's population. Many factors confuse people when discussing transgenderism, but what are these factors?

1. Transsexual and Transgender are not one in the same, as sex and gender are not one in the same. A transgender individual does not identify with how they present in a Binary system, where the sex of male is indicative of Masculine or being a Man, and the sex of female with feminine or womanly. In contrast, a transsexual individual is undergoing, or has undergone, a transition from their presented sex to their actual sex. A transgender individual may progress to transsexual, but not always, and a transsexual individual is no longer transgender: their presented sex is their actual sex.

2. Male and Female is a largely Eurocentric, or patriarchal, social construct. When observing other cultures, we can discover with regularity the existence of "Third-Genders" (Again, a dated Eurocentric word but the best we have). Concepts of masculinity and femininity are cultural, and social constructs, that are as readily deconstructed as they are constructed. (Deutsch, 2007).

3. The existence of the phenomena of Neurogender. How an individual's mood, and other mental health factors, affect their concept of their gender identity. Gender Dysphoria is also still considered a mental health diagnosis, though, not

always with negative connotations that it must be "cured". Rather, that a positive outcome be found, such as allowing the individual live according to their identity. However, the fact it is still a diagnosis confuses many with it being the mental health problem, rather than the distress of having to live as the wrong gender.

Many also believe that nurture, rather than nature is the key component in the issues around whether one is transgender or not. However, we have long known that genetics play a significant part in human behaviour, and outcomes. Similarly, modern research is revealing a significant number of truths to us:

1. The XX and XY chromosome to determine the presented sex is far more complicated than once believed. The Y chromosome carries the SRY sequence, which is the "Data" that signals the development of Male Genitalia. However, we now know this can be absent in a Y chromosome, so that everything but the development of male genitalia is activated. Similarly, many women carry the DAX1 protein, which functions as an anti-testis gene by acting antagonistically to SRY. As such, we have individuals who present as women but were born from an XY chromosome sequence (Walker et al, 1992).

2. There have been many studies on differences between female and male brains, and studies indicate that transgender individuals do have a biological basis for the "man/women trapped in the wrong body" phenomena. In 2014 Julie Bakker, a biologist, and Sarah M. Burke, a psychologist, used functional MRI to examine how 39 prepubertal and 41 adolescent boys and girls with gender

dysphoria responded to androstadiene. It is well documented that the hypothalamus of men and women respond very differently to androstadiene, an odorous steroid with pheromonelike properties. They found that the adolescent boys and girls with gender dysphoria responded much like peers of their experienced gender. This sort of result is very important to remember, because sex differences in responding to odours cannot be influenced by conditioning, nurturing, or the environment.

Now that we have broadly discussed many of the issues about Transgenderism and I would like to summarise:

1. The transgender community is incredibly vulnerable. It is often the silent partner in the LGBT collective, and the conversation about Transgenderism is often dominated by those outside of said community. As such a small group, rarely are they able to speak on their own behalf or be the leaders in the conversation about themselves.

2. Gender is a social construct, often influenced by presented sex (hence the traditional western binary model), that can be deconstructed. Similarly, in discussing gender people often fail to recognise historical examples of non-binary models. People lack an understanding of the language of gender.

3. There is a biological basis for transgenderism. It is not a modern, cultural, construct or delusion. It is a very real experience that people have, and a very real part of people's identity.

Now, what does all this mean to a Jedi? First, we are protectors and servants of others. Transgender individuals are some of the most vulnerable in the world; if we fail to be

an ally to them in their struggle we have failed as Jedi. Secondly, our codes say it all for us:

Yet Code

Ignorance, yet knowledge; Passion, yet serenity.

No/Is Code

There is no ignorance, there is knowledge; There is no passion, there is serenity.

Armonia Guidance Mantra

Seek knowledge to challenge ignorance; Temper passions to find harmony.

Skywalker Code

Jedi respect all life, in any form; Jedi serve others rather than ruling over them, for the good of the galaxy.

Armonia Code

We are Jedi; Protectors of Freedom

Heartland Jedi Code

I acknowledge all life is sacred; I use my training to defend and protect; I will seek knowledge with the understanding of self-ignorance

We rely upon knowledge to guide us, not belief but objective study of the world around us. The evidence supports the reality of the transgender experience, and the evidence reports their vulnerability. With this knowledge, we cannot act in any other way but to be allies to the cause.

Our beliefs, and passions, and attachments to our own concept of the world is secondary to the suffering and autonomy of others. Whatever we might believe about the divine masculine and feminine, the design of God, or perhaps where we stand on the debate about the diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria: the suffering, and the right of the person before us to be their own person surmounts all of that.

Aside from the code, and basic human decency, we can also consider the Jedi Compass and how it guides us. Above, I have discussed important of loyalty to the code, and how the tenants inform us how to deal with complicated issues such as transgenderism. Seeking knowledge, and adjusting to this new information, and remembering that empathy is more important than defending our own beliefs. For the remainder, I wish to challenge the reader to explore and discuss the compass' tenants in the contexts of their own beliefs, and for them to ask if they can be dutiful to the compass with regards to the issues confronting the LGBT and particularly the transgender community.

Ethics

Duty to the All: A Jedi's mission is to support their community through service.

Are you aware of the issues that Transgender individuals face in your community?

Respect the Law: A Jedi must act for the best interest of mankind as he/she sees the situation.

Are there laws, or prohibitive acts, which are detrimental to the vulnerable transgender minority in your country?

Defense: A Jedi understands that there are many ways to defend a person.

How are you serving the purpose of mitigating the vulnerabilities of those transgender individuals in your community?

Action: A Jedi recognizes that there are times when getting involved with a situation is against the will of the person they are seeking to assist.

How are you acting as part of the ongoing conversation, or are you even part of it? Are you empowering the right people to speak?

Self-Awareness

Interior: A Jedi works to become aware of their emotions and things which make them "tick".

Are there issues with the matter that are purely your own? How are your biases affecting your part in this?

Exterior: It is important that a Jedi be aware of the person they present to those around them.

Do you present your self as an effective ally, and source of support?

Virtues

Tolerance: Tolerance is not about agreement, it is about showing respect for the freedom of a person's choice.

Whatever your personal beliefs, are you being a source or harm or not?

Responsibility: Responsibility is at the heart of learning to overcome our problems.

Do you struggle to rectify your concept of gender models with that of transgenderism? Until you take responsibility for your biases you will only be part of the problem

Discipline: It is your responsibility to continue your growth throughout the rest of your life.

Are you allowing bias, fears, or unresolved issues to dominate your life?

Fortitude: Fortitude is the emotional strength and conviction to press forward in any given situation which poses an internal or external adversity.

When someone we love admits they are making a significant change about themselves, it can be difficult to accept emotionally at first, but it is your duty as a Jedi and a human being.

Integrity: A Jedi seeks to maintain their integrity to the Jedi Code always.

I have discussed how I believe the code tells us to act, but can you act according to the demands of the code?

Objectivity: A Jedi trains themselves to gain as much relevant information as possible before drawing their conclusions.

Are you allowing knowledge, or stereotyping and past attitudes to help you navigate the modern world?

Overcome

Aggression: A Jedi must keep themselves open to the world.

Are you fighting to make your perspective the one heard, and dominate the conversation?

Recklessness: In overcoming recklessness, a Jedi acknowledges and is mindful of how small the impact is perceived to have on themselves or others.

Are you being mindful of your words and actions with regards to the gender conversation?

Attachments: Overcoming your attachments is about forward movement.

As the world changes, and those we love change, we must learn to let go of those things that are childish and irrelevant. We must learn to overcome our attachment to what we want people to be, and instead learn to accept them for who they are.

To Conclude

We have barely scratched the surface, or the information out there, regarding the ongoing issues the Transgender community faces and the scientific studies into the reality of the Transgender experience. However, I do hope I have at least illuminated that it is no simple thing that Transgender people face in their daily lives: The world can be a scary place. I also hope that I have encouraged you to have a serious time of consideration about whether you can reconcile being a Jedi with any other beliefs you may have. As Jedi, we are foremost tolerant, but also servants and protectors. It is not enough to tolerate the existence of a minority group by not being their enemy, but you cannot be complicit in the actions of their abusers by doing nothing to protect them. That is the task, and duty of a Jedi.

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The Way of the Sword

The Lightsaber, an elegant weapon for a more civilized age, and the eponymous tool of choice for the Jedi. A devastating weapon for which few beside the Sith had a defence, and a shield which rendered the weapon of choice of the age, the blaster, as dangerous to the one using it as the Jedi being shot at. However, it existed for no great symbolic meaning, beyond George Lucus' love of swashbuckling films and a wish to use dramatic sword-fighting scenes in the film. Yet, unlike many action directors, the Lightsaber duels of the Star Wars films do tell stories in of themselves rather than being action set pieces that explain a transition from point A to B. For many, the Lightsaber duels are one of the many things that capture their imagination about Star Wars, and the Jedi in of themselves. However, at the end of the day, the Lightsaber is very much a laser sword, and it fulfils this narrative role throughout the Star Wars films.

Understandably, as Jedi Realism has grown, it has produced enthusiasts for Lightsaber fencing and learning Lightsaber choreography. Not all of those involved are real Jedi in practice, but there is a healthy cross-over. The Jedi Path has also been something which has drawn Martial Artists, as the Spiritual-Warrior aspect of the Jedi has a certain appeal to those wrestling with the concepts of Bushido and Chivalry in an age where such warrior ethoi are increasingly alien. For every Jedi you find that can twirl a piece of plastic with great dexterity, you can probably find one who knows how to use an actual blade to some effect. Undeniably, the way of the Jedi and the way of the Sword are intimately connected; be it

through fetishism for the Jedi Aesthetic or the meeting of philosophies at the cross-roads that is the living person.

I have been a student of the martial arts for over two decades; though I only count the last twelve years as years of serious study from when I began a proper study of traditional Japanese and Okinawan Bujutsu. Prior to that I was largely involved in Occidental Kempo, Kick-Boxing, Shoot-Wrestling, and HEMA for re-enactment rather than combative ability. Recently, I have been considering the way of the Bushi and the symbolism of the sword, and the way the world changes. We live in an age which is very different from when even I was born just 29 years ago. I spent my earliest childhood in a world which was only just becoming digital, I did not have a mobile phone or personal computer until I had left secondary school, and in my area my experience was not uncommon or unusual. Now, a whole generation is graduating and coming into the work-place, into the higher levels of academia, and entering politics, that never lived in a non-digital world. They have an experience those that came before them did not have, and those that came before them have no notion of what growing up in a digital world is like.

The Bushi who fought to maintain their way of Life in the Boshin Sensō and Seinan Sensō, and those that fought for the Confederacy with a sense of "My country, right or wrong" for a long time all represented the worst aspects of conservative thinking to me. Let us not be asinine though; they did lay down their lives for brutal class systems, and nothing will change that ultimately, they fought for ways of thinking and living that are not compatible with modern ethics. With that said, being a witness to a changing world, where paradigms seem to be shifting in huge waves, and

change has come as a land-slide rather than as a continental drift, has garnered some sympathy for their causes. If nothing else, they fought against the terror of a changing world.

Last month was Pride Month, and it is something I feel very strongly about. I have many friends, and associates, who exist within the umbrella LGBT. Part of this changing world is the scientific understanding of why people differ from heteronormative and gender binary majorities. These scientific discoveries are challenging long held beliefs that these differences are disorders or life-style choices, or largely a product of nurturing over nature. As a scientist-practitioner, I accept the science and move on with life. Yet, many lack faith in science and trust in the authorities that report on science. They have faith in something else, and trust in people other than scientific authorities. Their reaction to this changing world is to fight it, and argue against it, and so on and so forth. Is it out of malice, or is out of fear that what they believe in is perhaps flawed and untrue?

The aforementioned digital age. We have a generation weighed down by the memetic legacy of generations that lived without a concept of social media. That did not exist with the din of information the majority now carry around in their pockets. They did not live in a time of people being open-books at the click of a button. A digital age that has been crippled by a recession that seems to be going nowhere and dominated by two sides. One which appeals to a mystical time of yore, where things were better, and another which sees the past as the making of today's troubles and woes. A generation split between feelings that their birth right, and privilege, has been robbed from them, and the

other that the world must change if it is to be right. Does either side have any grasp on the truth of it?

We as Jedi live in a tumultuous age, a changing age, where humanity is entering a new epoch. In many ways; the Jedi path could not exist in any other age. It exists because the circumstances have been there for it to exist. We live in an age where apathy is the worst crime imaginable because there are no excuses for it. We can make our voices much easier heard than ever before, we have access to information and knowledge that was once the privilege of a few, and we live in a small world; we can connect with people across the globe. As individuals we are called to be intolerant of intolerance; our codes extoll the values of peace, knowledge, and our duty to our connected world and each other. Our code calls us to be among the archetypes of our world, not it's victims, witnesses, or bystanders. This, to an extent, means in no uncertain terms that we must fight for what is right. That is not to say through violence, but at least through using our voices and acting to correct wrongs. This brings me back to the way of the Jedi and the way of the Sword.

I have fenced, and I have also learnt to use a sword properly if the intent is to kill someone. They are very different things; one is about speed and precision, the other is about intent. There is a significant difference in slashing and cutting. Watch the mechanics of Kendo Players, and Olympic fencers, and then study the kata of Iaido or watch HEMA competition. Now, in martial arts circles it is not uncommon to hear of the notion that "Blocking is for Beginners" and there is some truth to this. In most martial arts, one of the first things learnt is the most basic ways to defend the self; to block. In wrestling, how to sprawl, in Judo how to fall, in

Boxing/Kick-Boxing the Cover-up, and in most karate/kempo/quan fa how to receive an attack with the arms. One will recognise, if they have any martial arts experience, that all those approaches surrender the initiative.

In Japanese martial arts this is often summed up with the phrase G-No-Sen: post-initiative. Once the aggressor has begun their action, the defender combatant performs his/her technique. As one evolves, the action need not necessarily be purely defensive, but as one begins their training they often are. Indeed; the human twitch reaction to defend the self is to simply put their arms in the way to protect the relatively valuable parts of the body and try to create distance. Something exploited by Tony Blauer and his SPEAR system.

However, this extends to just the simple habits of the beginner. Put a sword (or safer training alternative) in the hand of the beginner and ask them to defend themselves and they shall put their weapon in the way of your attack. Ask them to attack, and the simplest way to defend is to Block their attack and control their weapon: Beginners lead with the weapon, and not their feet. In this sense; blocking is for beginners is indicative of all three factors. It is the way beginners are taught, it is the way beginners act, and is the way beginners are beaten.

Yet, as one evolves as a swordsman, the notion of blocking or parrying to defend the self becomes redundant. Indeed; moving to preserve the self becomes redundant. If one is moving their weapon to defend themselves, it is already a move of desperation. If one tries to move out the way of an attack they will quickly find themselves attacked again.

Rather, one learns well the Idiom Abara issun or one inch of the ribs. A saying from Shinkage-Ryu with the implication that you must be willing to risk at least that much to cut your opponent. If you can cut, then you can be cut being another way to put it. Ultimately; there is no defence except the Kamae, the posture you adopt in relation to your foe. Many of the fundamental postures of kendo and other sword arts reflect this truth. They surrender all apparent defence for the opportunity to cut, but this is a form of defence. The warrior who is afraid to die cannot attack against a posture which makes it likely that both shall die in the exchange. Similarly; the swordsman who cannot sacrifice his sense of safety can never secure victory for he can never move forward.

This is where the lesson for Jedi begins. As we start as Jedi, our worst habit is to believe that to help others we must put ourselves between them and the problem. In doing so we become the victim of the problem, rather than being the one to solve the problem. If we are over eager to solve the problem by taking the obvious course of action; often we can fail to recognise the real obstacles. As Jedi, we must instead think like the swordsman who uses his posture to achieve his goals. In confronting issues, we must be willing to put aside notions of complete safety and we must not think like the beginner. We must not rush to be a barrier when we do not need to do anything except be present to achieve our goal. We are most effective when keep options open, and choices free, and we allow problems to find a path to a resolution.

Consider well your kamae, your posture, and the message you are sending with it. Where you stand as a Jedi says everything and is part of the power you possess. When we seek to help others, we must remember the consequences

are dire. Mistakes we make hurt others, and not ourselves. To be a Jedi is to practice this; to take a life, you must first present your neck. To protect a life, you must first present your neck. The Jedi path is one of heart and meaning, but it is also one that calls you to put aside yourself for the good of others. As Jedi, this is what gives our lives our meaning. Though we do not wield literal lightsabers or laser swords, and though we lack magical powers, we still have a power. Though our struggles may not be a drama on a galactic scale, the costs of our mistakes or failure to act are much direr for the lives are real. We do not live by the sword, but we live by the tools we use to protect others; and as a man who lives by the sword dies by the sword, we succeed or fail as Jedi by the tools we use.

The Jedi Master and the Gospel of Me

What does master mean? As a noun; it refers to a person in charge of someone or something. As an adjective: it means to display great skill and proficiency. As a verb it means acquiring complete skill or knowledge in a subject or gaining control or overcoming something. However, what does any of this mean when we talk of a Jedi Master?

The Jedi Master, in the films at least, are shown as fundamentally teachers whom also possess profound self-mastery. Despite their circumstances, Obi-Wan Kenobi and Yoda never give into the despair of their circumstances, though they have more than fair reason to do so. Anakin Skywalker was not rejected the title of Jedi Master due to any lack of personal courage, power in the Force, or skill as a General, but his lack of self-mastery. Luke Skywalker failed in his role as a Jedi Master until the final lesson of acceptance of failure sunk in. Indeed, if Luke Skywalker's story was to be put into its true perspective; the narrative of his life was the strength to overcome his errors. Ultimately; the quality of a Jedi Master is someone who has displayed self-mastery, and the ability to overcome and subsume their weaknesses by living by the essence of Jedi Teachings.

If we look to archaic meaning of master as well, and to a key relationship we see in the Star Wars universe; the teacher-student dynamic, we can give greater context to what it means to be a Jedi Master. Historically; such a dynamic was

not uncommon in the world of skilled craftsmanship around the world. A student would study under a master craftsman, in the hopes that some day they could become a journeyman or an expert. The Master in turn would rely on the apprentice to carry out mundane, but essential tasks, by which the apprentice would learn the craft but allow the Master to attend to the works only the Master could do. There is truth to this in the Jedi way as well. The Jedi Master is one who can pass on the secrets of her, or his, self-mastery by guiding and directing his students. The Jedi Master does not dictate to his students though but recognises their value as individuals. A good master directs his apprentice, and student, in how to be a Jedi and act as a Jedi. The apprentice, though still an apprentice, is entrusted with valuable and important tasks from which they can learn. A Jedi Master expects, and assists their student, in being a Jedi and through this they help them gain self-mastery.

These are ultimately the marks of a Jedi Master, and what distinguishes them from a Knight and other Jedi. The Knight has overcome their old self but has only made the first steps into their life as their new self; the individual dedicated to unceasingly walking the Jedi Path. The Master has walked that path for some time and knows the trip-falls and where the road gets narrow. The Jedi Master is beyond the "doing" aspect of being a Jedi. They do not do things because that is what the Jedi Teachings tell them to do. Rather, they have proceeded to "being", they do these things because it is who they have become, and it part of being their most authentic self.

Below is something I wrote years ago when I was still active at Real Jedi Knights, I believe it has returned to it's original

name of Jedi Knights now. The lesson is about finding a good teacher. I find some of the notions continue to resonate with me now, so I wish to share it:

This is not necessarily important to you right now, but it will become important to you and all those who want your advice on who they should study under and how you your-self can become a good teacher.

As an initial test for a prospective teacher look for these three points; first discern the orthodoxy of the teacher's approach, secondly observe the teacher's students to see if they have benefited from his instruction and lastly a truly good teacher does not destroy the sight of the student but instead opens the possibilities and shows them their true nature. Other points to look for is the teachers own attainments, a good teacher is one whom combines understanding and practice and has no lingering delusions, he or she has a unified mind and body and will thank those for praise and will take blame into account but will not have his actions moved by either. Also make sure the style of teaching the teacher incorporates matches your temperament and brings out your potential.

To apply these teachings to your own search for a good teacher check the credentials of a potential instructor, do their actions match their words? What was their training? Have they been accredited by another reputable teacher? If you can confirm these with others do so. Lastly, be careful and don't immediately study under the teacher, watch them carefully and then use your common sense on whether to study under them or not.

In many respects the lesson was informed by Zen Buddhism, hence some notions of orthodoxy, though that was also

guided by the emergence of the concept of Grey and Dark Jedi at the RJK in the time frame I wrote it. I had a certain distrust of such concepts; however, I would argue that strangely this concept of orthodoxy is again relevant. I would like to summarise the lessons briefly and how I consider them still relevant:

1. We have the Jedi Compass, which is largely accepted as the foundation of what it means to be a real Jedi. Is the person claiming to be a teacher knowledgeable of this work, and effective in applying them? Also, are their teachings largely consistent with the Jedi Teachings of others, even if it has its own nuances, it should not deviate from the essential concepts and values of being a Jedi.

2. What sort of students has the teacher produced is still a good question. Also, what have they achieved themselves, and are they well-spoken about by people whose views are trustworthy. Ask yourself if you should you be training with a teacher who has caused people to abandon the path needlessly or produced students who are not well respected by their peers.

3. Is their approach to the Jedi Path one that is growth orientated and practicable? Is their path about adopting the Jedi way, and living it the best way you can, or is about following dogmas and dictates they demand of you? Ultimately, are they providing you with a mentor-student relationship, or are they simply telling you to be who they think you should be. Consider yourself, and your nature as a student, and whether it is compatible with the teacher.

Ultimately the marks of a good teacher and mentor are the marks of a Jedi Master. At the end of the day; that is why the

Jedi Master exists. To serve his peers as well as others; Master is not a privilege but a responsibility. With any power comes responsibility, and a Jedi Master is wise to this. This is where the notion of the Gospel of Me begins, however, and why it is the pitfall of even Good Jedi Mentors. The way of the Jedi is a life philosophy, and like all philosophies, strategies and tactics, it often crumbles on encountering reality outside the scope of the literal words of the lessons. As we are teaching self-mastery, and we are teaching about life, we often adhere to the great lesson of writing; "Write what you know".

Jedi, like all, often misinterpret this advice and thus write of events in their lives where they feel they acted the right Jedi way. From this they then elucidate a teaching, and a moral lesson. However, what it means is much more abstract: writing what you know is about emotional content, and not concrete events. If you have been in love you can write about love. If you have felt loss you can write about loss. However, you can write about these things without writing about yourself, so long as the authenticity of the feeling is there. In contrast, in writing about concrete events from our lives, and moralising them, we are consistently in danger of writing Gospels about ourselves. Framing lessons this way does not make them more human, and relatable, because they are real. No; rather it restricts the reader, the listener, the student, to your perspective and how you have modified the story to fit the objective of the teaching you have decided to extract from the tale. I would add the caveat that sharing a story of your own life, at an appropriate time, and in an empathetic manner can be a powerful tool for reaching people. It can give you a common bridge, and it can provide a sense of

mutual vulnerability where they can feel more secure in talking to you; it can break down an otherwise unequal power relationship. It can also explain to someone who does not know you particularly well, why you have the perspective you do. Yet, to frame all our teachings; to make our teachings little more than a moralised, thinly veiled, form of autobiography is paralysing. To the aspiring teacher, because we then limit ourselves to narrow notions of what we can talk about. To the aspiring student because they then feel as though they must copy the teacher, and aspire to be like the teacher, rather than living as their own person, as their own Jedi.

The Jedi Master is your example, and your guide, but your goal is not to become them. Your goal is not to become A Jedi Master, or the Jedi Master you admire the most. Your goal is not to be the next Andy Spalding or Alethea Thompson and so on and so forth. Rather, it is to become the Jedi Master you can become. If some one who professes to be a teacher simply makes you feel smaller than them; they are a poor teacher. If someone professes to be a Jedi Master, and casts you aside when you struggle, instead of lifting you up; they are a fraud. If the narrative of your instruction is about the teacher, and not about the Jedi path; then they want your acceptance and adulation, rather than to be your teacher. Better to struggle alone with a good book at your side, then to struggle under the boot-heel of narcissist. The Jedi Path is about everyone who has ever made a step on it and does not belong to any one person. When you begin your journey, it is about you and realising who you are. The mark of a good teacher is giving you the time and space to

be you. The mark of a Good Jedi Master is the Master who serves you as his pupil, rather than himself and his own ego.

Tranquillity meditation

Tranquillity meditation is designed to calm the mind and body by focusing single-pointedly upon an appropriate object. You could focus on the image of an object you find calming or your breath, though either can be used with equivalent results.

In terms of how your body should be whilst meditating it is best to sit with your legs folded in front of you, sitting on a cushion will elevate your back and will help you meditation though it is not necessary, your hands should be placed palms upwards, either on your knees or one on top of the other, with your thumbs raised and touching with each other to form a circle or with your fingers if your hands are separate. Your back should be held straight but your shoulders should be relaxed and your head slightly inclined forward. Your eyes should be partially open and facing four feet in front of you. Lastly when you sit down find a position you can breathe naturally in, some positions restrict breathing, and feel comfortable in.

Now on to the meditation state itself; either envision an object and count your breath cycles to ten or higher depending on how well you can visualise objects or in fact concentrate on the breathing cycle itself, the part of the top of your mouth where you feel the breath is the best part to concentrate upon and again count the cycles for as long as possible or until you lose your focus. This meditation is designed to increase your focus and the length at which you can meditate so even though it's simple in relation to

meditations requiring you to clear your mind or go to extreme time periods it is a good stepping stone and will serve as a useful practice tool throughout your time as a Jedi.

Every Moral has a Story; Every Lesson a History

In my last entry for the blog I shared a lesson I wrote several years ago on finding a good teacher. This week and subsequent weeks, I wished to share the broader lessons it was a part of, which I wrote for an apprentice based on Zen Teachings. My primary influences in my early times as a Jedi were as follows:

1. Jesse Bendyn was my primary Jedi Mentor, and provided me the most feed-back. He was the marker of my trials and spent the most time interacting with me via Instant Messaging. He remains one of my closest friends to this day.

2. I was once embarrassed to admit it, but the Knights of the Old Republic Video Games. It was the first place I encountered the Jedi Code, and Kreia's deconstruction of Light and Dark informed much of what I came to think of the code. Mostly through the power of coming to disagree with her at every turn.

3. Zen Buddhism and Greek Philosophy. Due to my love of Martial Arts I encountered Zen Buddhism early in life, and I studied the classics in my late teenage years. They have been the significant philosophical roots of my approach to Jediism from the perspective of apologetics. The logic behind why we do what we do; psychology, and pragmatism, have largely informed my thought s on the practical aspects of being a Jedi.

With the above said, that is why I wish to share this lesson from my past. Many do not know who I am; I must admit Armonia has succeeded thus far from the good will Alethea has in the community by being a known element. As a teacher; I believe in a Warts and All Approach. It is all very well to ask students to judge my teachings by my approach today, but if I am to stand on the pulpit and outline what I believe makes a good mentor; I need to be willing to show where I started.

However, with all that said, one should not go down the route of an ego trip. Over the next few weeks I will be sharing some lessons to help you with this. These different exercises are grounded deeply in the Zen Buddhist teachings. Indeed, one lesson name drops Deshan Xuanjian; a famed Chinese Chan Buddhist thinker. Similarly; I share these lessons because they are a reminder that all we do arrives from what has come before us. I might write original combinations of words, and they may be grounded in an original thought- but all originality is grounded in what we have learnt and observed. My teachings are nothing without the teachings of those that came before. Truly; we all stand upon the shoulders of giants.

Combining work with meditation

There are several of transforming your daily experiences into a Jedi or spiritual practice. First consider your occupation; if it harms or exploits other living beings then it is detestable from a Jedi point of view. If your occupation is acceptable from a Jedi/spiritual point of view, then the second step is to integrate some form of meditation or application of the Jedi arts into your day. Ask yourself if you're 'present now' when you're working or is your focus elsewhere? Train your-self to focus on the here and now and to be mindful of what you're doing without letting your thoughts wander off. Just like when you meditate and may focus on your breath so to when you work, focus your mind on the task at hand. Take note when your mind wonders off and refocus it.

At a deeper level does your work make you happy? All you need really is the money to support your-self and whoever may be dependent on you, does any of the extra money you may earn in your occupation to buy luxury goods make you happy, do these objects make you happy? If not, you would simply be happier simplifying things and learning to be content with what you have. Plus remember this; you are only self-sufficient when you do not deprive others of what they need.

Finding a good teacher

This is not necessarily important to you right now, but it will become important to you and all those who want your advice on who they should study under and how you your-self can become a good teacher.

As an initial test for a prospective teacher look for these three points; first discern the orthodoxy of the teacher's approach, secondly observe the teacher's students to see if they have benefited from his instruction and lastly a truly good teacher does not destroy the sight of the student but instead opens the possibilities and shows them their true nature. Other points to look for is the teachers own attainments, a good teacher is one whom combines understanding and practice and has no lingering delusions, he or she has a unified mind and body and will thank those for praise and will take blame into account but will not have his actions moved by either. Also make sure the style of teaching the teacher incorporates matches your temperament and brings out your potential.

To apply these teachings to your own search for a good teacher check the credentials of a potential instructor, do their actions match their words? What was their training? Have they been accredited by another reputable teacher? If you can confirm these with others do so. Lastly, be careful and don't immediately study under the teacher, watch them carefully and then use your common sense on whether to study under them or not.

Getting down to basics

Become aware of not becoming obsessed with concepts and speculation, teachings are merely a means to an end. In the long run they are useless apart from the fact they help you reach this end.

Think of it this way, a Jedi in our world is in theory an enlightened being or should aim to be, and enlightenment is a method of emptying rather then one of filling and acquiring, put as much effort into simplifying your life and eliminating attachment, aim to be spontaneous and put aside all pre-judgements and goal-based actions. By getting down to the very basics, you come to the simple realisation that you are capable of enlightenment and thus becoming a good Jedi, you become in the words of Deshan, free and spiritual, empty and marvellous.

Trusting blindly in the Force is not the Jedi Way

"Trusting blindly in the Force is not the Jedi Way. Good Judgement and Wisdom must temper that trust." - Jaric Kaedan One is not given to quoting characters from the fiction of Star Wars, and especially not the more fringe and unknown sources, but this is a statement that struck me when I played through the Jedi Consular Storyline of The Old Republic. Even in the fiction, where the Force is a present and demonstrable Divine Power (Or Quasi-Magic Scientific fact), its most devout adherents, The Jedi, did not give themselves wholly over to unthinking piety. Rather, and we see this elsewhere in the fiction, they treated unusual trends, visions, and unlikely circumstances as things to be reflected upon and viewed through the lenses of introspection, wisdom, and most importantly: the Jedi Code. As the Jedi Path came into being in the real world over two decades ago it was birthed into a space of alternative religion and magical thinking. It had its genesis in spaces where people were discussing ideas contrarian, different, and, on times, decidedly antagonistic to traditional religion and mainstream thought. It was a fringe movement, grounded in what has become termed hyper-real religion: an imitation of religion created out of appropriated popular culture assets which provide inspiration and a source of beliefs. For Jedi, this appropriated popular culture asset was our namesake: The Jedi of the Star Wars Universe. Carried forth from this popular culture, and an artefact of the New Age influences of

times past, has been a belief in following the Force or the Will of the Force. Indeed, the term Force Realism implies the idea that the Force is real, and that the philosophies that engage in Force Realism do so by treating the Force as a concrete idea relevant to living. This, however, is not entirely true and one would direct readers to the Jedi Compass, and writings on the "Ineffable" that precedes and prefaces what follows. That is not a matter within the scope of this essay. What is sufficient to say is that among the Jedi there are those who consider the Force a term for the objective reality we all exist as part of, a connection to others we are an immutable and indivisible part of, and there are Jedi who believe in the Force as an actual, binding, energy field common to all life. Neither of these beliefs are mutually exclusive but neither are they always intrinsically accepted by all Jedi. For the purposes of this essay, we are dealing with the idea of the Force as a presence that exists and can be interacted with. For today I wish to discuss what I call the Inductive Model of Jedi Rationalisation. This name derives from the fundaments of inductive reasoning which are the foundation of this model. There are two broad definitions of Inductive reasoning: 1. A method of reasoning, also called bottom-up logic, grounded in generalising, or extrapolating from specific cases or evidence to general rules to reach a conclusion. (Jan, 2019) 2. Where an individual interprets experiences and observations, their own and others, to produce a conclusion from inferred premises. (Rainbolt and Dwyer, 2014) Ultimately, inductive reasoning always leads to epistemic uncertainty in conclusions reached: deficiencies caused by a lack of knowledge or information. As inductive reasoning does not follow exclusively from premises/evidence, but rather utilises reasoning grounded in probabilities, it allows faults in

interpretation to be carried forward and false and uncongent conclusions to be drawn from them. The fault in this is hopefully self-evident, and what is clearer is that we all engage in inductive reasoning regularly during our day to day lives. As human beings we live through reasoning based on premises grounded in our personal, empirical, experiences each day. We draw many conclusions from our own interpretations, and often with great ignorance of many complexities, or acknowledgement of fault in our reasoning. Quite often because we get through life, day to day, without our inductive reasoning failing us profoundly or to a troubling, and disastrous degree. However, as Jedi, we are called to the task of objectivity. Similarly, if we are to help others most fully, we must most fully understand their circumstance. Recognise our inductive reasoning is but our own understanding of life, and through communication and reflection, come to a mutual understanding of the situation. Hence, it is important to be mindful of the evidence presented to us. To act in a manner whereby we eliminate, and confirm, what is presented to us in a critical manner. Although, inductive reasoning can aid us, and indeed inductive reasoning can lead to enumerative induction, it is fundamentally biased and capable of arriving at certainty only in rare instances. A margin for error is always present, but when dealing in the lives of others, we have a responsibility to reduce it as far as we can. Our intuition is a tool like every other tool. It is here I now wish to arrive at the flaws in the Inductive Model of Jedi Rationalisation. What I mean by the Inductive Model of Jedi Rationalisation is a broad stance towards decision making is a model based largely on two truth claims: 1. That our actions are intrinsically guided by The Force: We are extensions of the Connected Universe.

That the Force is a power that trumps and supersedes mere human authority. 2. We can rely on intuition and can appeal to experience as a revelatory authority by which to make decisions: including information gained by visions or dreams. There are several intrinsic flaws in this model of thinking, and arguably, ideas that go against the teachings of the Jedi Code. The first premise is flawed in that it allows appeals to a silent witness. It appeals to an authority that does not speak for itself, but rather through whoever places themselves as spokesperson. Furthermore, it creates a circumstance where the word of the Spoke's Person can be argued to be more important than guiding documents and agreed rules and ethics. It allows the person taking this stance to exonerate themselves of the authority of ethics, and to abdicate their personal responsibility to matters to The Force and its Will. The second premise is similarly flawed, and for the primary reasons that inductive reasoning is flawed: biases distort the application of inductive argument, thereby preventing the forming of the most logical conclusions. Similarly, to paraphrase Hume, inductive reasoning draws conclusions that appear correct, but which are far from certain due to being based on limited experiences. Compared to deductive reasoning where the truth value of the conclusion is based on the truth of the premises used to justify it. Both forms of reasoning have faults, and it can be argued there is an inevitability to our use of inductive reasoning in day-to-day life. However, there is a difference between accepting the inevitably of reasoning faults and considering them incidental and doing nought about them. Overall, an inductive model of rationalisation given over to the Force, and a personal relationship with this concept of the Force present several issues in actualising ethics and morality. They present

barriers to collective action, and to accountability. This is why the Way of the Jedi is concerned with Deontology and Orthopraxy: ethical guidance we can all study and recognise as a collective. The Codes, Creeds, and the Compass give all Jedi guidance. It gives us a set of definitions regarding Jedi Like, and Non-Jedi Like behaviour. We can all look to these ideas, these premises, and we can adjudge whether our actions have emerged from following said premises. We can have objective discussions about behaviour, outcomes, and intents through a dialogue grounded in well-understood language. Such a means of evaluation appeals to an authority we can all challenge, we can all speak from, and make meaningful conclusions. It also makes us responsible to an idea: it transforms the word Jedi into a Mantle. It gives us our personal, and collective, mandate. Neither model is perfect or ideal. We all rely on inductive reasoning, and discussion about codes is also subject to bias. We must beware the issue of human error, even in a robust system. However, appealing to an unknowable authority and sources of information known only to the decision maker, is not a means of working with others: it is an act of egoism. It makes one unaccountable to others, and it is reasoning that allows one to self-justify through self-appointed authority. Only through an authority we can all know can we all engage in being Jedi together. Thus, the importance of the Jedi code, but more importantly: responsibility and accountability to something other than yourself. Responsibility to your connection to the Universe: Your connection to others and your fellow Jedi.

Wielding the sword of Insight

Our normal, confused thinking can put us in danger in many everyday situations, especially in self-defence. The trick to getting around this is to allow the mind to flow where it will, without conscious, and therefore potentially deluded, control. When a person does not think the mind shall effectively extend throughout the entire body and to move to any place at all, this is discipline. Not stopping the mind is object and essence. Do not restrict your mind to one direction; allow it to be in all directions. When a life-threatening situation arises, if you allow your body to be controlled by anger or fear it cannot respond properly to the situation at hand. In a dangerous situation an attitude of alertness and inner calm is the most powerful tool for self-defence, it allows the body to do what it has been trained to do.

Conclusion

That concludes the section on teachings from Zen and Buddhist masters, they are teachings that can be used throughout your life and may quite possibly be some of the most important teachings I pass onto you. It is at this point I feel we should discuss the relationship between teachers and pupils. A teacher is a stepping stone; never believe your training over once you have finished training with one master, there will be many masters to study under after your first teacher, experience, life, pain, love, compassion, metaphysical teachers but teachers none the less, they shall teach you much in your life and you should remember their lessons well. Of course, there are going to be other human

teachers in your life, but I just felt that this needed to be said, think of me as a stepping stone for it will give you the mind set to always know you can learn more.

Pacifism and Pragmatic Responses to Violence

In our Friday hangout those of us there discussed pacifism, and whether being a pacifist is compatible with being a Jedi. We had a serious look at the fundamental definition of being a pacifist:

"A person who believes that war and violence are unjustifiable."

We largely concluded, after discussing our own personal views of what it means to adhere to a principle of non-violence, that being a Jedi is not compatible with that strict concept of being a pacifist. Absolute pacifism and being a Jedi are not compatible; as we all concluded that being a Jedi means we must in fact support the concept of physical violence for emergency defence of self or others. That as adherents of a pragmatic, applied philosophy we must admit that diplomacy and other means of peaceful resolution can, and have, failed in the past. That there are individuals who will refuse, or are unable, to be reasoned with and for whom there is no other course but violence. When confronted with individuals as such, we thus have a moral imperative to defend ourselves and others. To paraphrase a lesson, I once gave:

"If you are sincere in being a Jedi and living your path; then you are at least one good person trying to do good in the world. Allowing harm to come to yourself because you believe in the sanctity of human life is foolish, and self-

defeating; what is better for this world? You, as a person trying to do Good, or the allowance of the person doing harm to continue on unabated?"

One need not agree with the logic presented in said lesson, and indeed, disagreement is one of the boons of living in a time of peace. We are free to let ideas fight over us, rather than us fighting over ideas. Ultimately; the Jedi way is not one of absolute Pacifism. However, it is one that advocates the value of peace, as a means and as an end. Above, I discussed one benefit of peace; in a free society it allows the conflict of ideas without the violence of war. It allows for economies based on trade, and moderated by market demands, but also creativity and the liberty to create new avenues. It allows for people to be where they are most needed, or most prosperous, rather than trapped behind walls crafted by enmity. It broadens perspectives and allows people to confront ideas and issues from a place of growth.

No society, or individual has ever benefitted from perpetual war; war is not in of itself good nor evil. It is merely a monster that consumes everything in its path, and it is worse than Hell; it makes no distinction between the innocent and the guilty. War is the plague that man unleashes on its self and destroys all things. Be it philosophy, nations, families, or anything human; war is an affliction that cares nothing for its victims. Conflict narrows perspectives, and our ideas of ourselves become divorced from individuality; conflict reduces humankind to the mentality of my tribe, my clan, my nation be it right or wrong. Conflict enforces a mindset of victory or defeat, and in this the novelty of being wrong, and learning from mistakes is not nurtured, but instead punished

because the situation is life or death (or being part of the in-group or out-group from the civilian perspective).

Therefore, as Jedi we advocate for peace, as both a means and as an end; we believe peace provides the most opportunity for growth, but because we recognise that peace does not mean the absence of competition. Peace provides a platform for competition which is not inherently destructive. Therefore, we advocate peaceful living and the pursuit of inner peace; it does not mean to stagnate or to not confront ideas and experiences. Rather, it is not to waste energy on conflict that is futile and artificial. We invite conflict into our lives by creating it or acting in a way to allow it to persevere.

This, however, is only one part of the conversation and I shall not put words in the mouths of the other participants; the above is solely my own perspective but coloured by the conversation. Aside from the concept of pacifism, we also discussed pragmatic responses to violence, and we largely agreed that it is circumstantial and appropriate responses are best judged by context. We also came to some consensus that you can only effectively deal with the violence you expect and have prepared yourself for. I brought up the established notions of civilian self-defence, and that we know most adult individuals will have only one major fight in their life, and they will have had said fight before they have left mandatory education. Similarly, that regarding acts of violence, civilians are more likely to be confronted by a violent attack in the form of an attempted mugging.

Speaking of knowing the nature of the violence, we know of three various approach strategies being common in cases of civilian violence:

1) An initial approach, and one often trained against in martial arts is the "blitz". The attacker strikes suddenly with force to rapidly overcome the victim, and gain control of the situation. Most often used by physically stronger, or armed, criminals it is often the "assumed" approach in a lot of self-defence training, but it is only one type of approach.

2) The "Ambush" method is essentially as it is described. The approach is characterized by the attacker waiting for certain conditions to be met (like allowing people to pass through an isolated area), before acting to swiftly subdue their victim. Most often employed against women, by rapists, but a common method used by many criminals of opportunity. The key difference between this approach, and the "blitz" approach, is the waiting aspect on the perfect opportunity.

3) The final means of approach is what is called the "Con" where the attacker performs a deceiving action, to get the victim into a vulnerable position in order to make the "real" attack easier. For example, asking their intended victim what the time is to get them to look at their watch or phone, and thus take their eyes off their attacker.

In all these examples, what we have is the attacker being in range, and ready to begin the attack without any real cues to their proper intention. We also need to keep in mind that all three of the approaches can become blurred. For example; 3 and 1, where the attacker performs a distraction but then immediately attacks their victim. Arguably, this undermines any argument for using a weapon, or various tools, for self-defence. The civilian, in a civilian setting, when considering the situation, they are mostly likely to be confronted with would be best off practicing a form of reality Based-Self

Defence. Similarly, they would be best off practicing strategies which will best prevent them from being vulnerable to these sorts of attacks.

However, this is a very narrow view. Everyone's self-defence needs are fundamentally different. Similarly; the approaches above are very broad, and the commonality and differences from country to country, and indeed community to community, differ vastly. When it comes to pragmatic approaches to violence, the individual Jedi does need to consider the types of violence they are likely to face. A Jedi in the sphere of security work, or where they may face violent individuals in the work-place, has very different needs to someone who has no such concerns. Depending on country, one has different concerns about potential escalation of force: the average citizen in the U.K is unlikely to have any form of weapon on their person, and thus if they become violent will try to engage with their bare hands or an improvised weapon. Contrast this to the U.S, where depending on the State, there is a 1/3 or 1/5 chance that the individual is carrying a fire-arm, and that number is based on legal ownership. The potential for an aggressive altercation with a stranger to escalate into potentially lethal violence differs immensely when discussing averages.

As such, as a Jedi, it is important to ask one-self two questions when we consider literal peace, and how we confront the issues of violence in our lives:

1. What does peace mean to you as a Jedi? Where do your beliefs fall when it comes to the interconnections between factors of force and matters such as civil resistance, and so on.

2. What is "violence" in the context of your life? Do you live a life where violence is potential outcome on most days, or is violence something you have never had to give significant consideration? What are your individual self-defence needs, or what can you contribute to issues of violence in your community?

There are no right nor wrong answers, but it would be wrong as a Jedi to never explore these questions, or deeply consider what "Peace" truly is, and what brings an end to peace.

The Jedi Arts: What is Art, and what is a Jedi?

[Print](#)

Words are by their very nature exclusionary. They have exact, concrete definitions, and though context may help understand the use and intent of a sentence or phrase; the words themselves have exact meanings. That is how language works; now you may have a unique experience of language, your range of vocabulary is uniquely yours, and how and why you use language is yours, but the meaning of words is democratic. How the masses use a word is what the word invariably means; be it the majority of those who speak the language (The English Speaking World) or the majority of the sub-culture in which new words or new uses of words emerge.

This article emerges from the simple question: "What is art?"

"In 1917, Marcel Duchamp, using the pseudonym R. Mutt, submitted a store-bought urinal, which he titled "Fountain," to an art exhibition. Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He chose it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under a new title and point of view and created a new thought for the object." – Duchamp et al (1917)

The above, of course, expounds on the notion that anything can be art, and indeed is perhaps the great example of context giving art meaning. However, we recognise that act as art, but not every urinal as art; despite aesthetic concerns

(and thus artistic expression) being a part of the act of design itself. Thus, what differentiates art from anything else, and indeed returning to the original topic of words being exclusionary; if anything can be art then what is the meaning of the word art?

To be frank; I am far from a great mind, and many of the great minds of history have attempted to answer the question of what is "art", and all have come to a variety of answers. Plato claimed that Socrates saw art as a poor imitation of life, whereas Georgia O'Keeffe saw the act of creating art the act of filling space with beauty. Invariably, art achieves many things, and many things relate to art. The creative process is intrinsic in all actions, but not all actions exist to be creative to the ends of being creative. This essay, though created for the joy of creation, has several practicable purpose; to engage students/an audience in a discussion, to advertise ArmoniaSeminary as an educational entity, and to communicate a lesson and message. It is not divorced from an innately practical purpose. Thus, is it art? I would argue no; it is not a work that exists for its own sake, and its contexts denies it being an act of creativity to create something beautiful or emotionally moving. However, that is how I would understand the word art as a concrete word:

"The expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power." – Oxford Dictionary

However, what does this have to do with the Jedi Path, or being a Jedi? The concrete definition of Jedi to most people is the following:

"A member of the mystical knightly order in the Star Wars films, trained to guard peace and justice in the Universe." – Oxford Dictionary.

Although the phonetic phrase Jedi existed long before the Mind of George Lucas: Jidaigeki (Japanese Period Drama) and Al-Jeddi (an Arabic phrase referring to a master of the mystic-warrior way) being just two poignant examples, it was Lucas who gave "Jedi" their meaning. As such, to be a Force Realist, Jediist, or more simply a Real Jedi, one cannot entirely divorce themselves from the concrete meaning of the word Jedi.

An aspect of our path is forever married to the fiction that inspired our movement. However, the democratic process is indeed winning out control of the word: Wikipedia has an article (Though biased and dated) dedicated to Jediism, and even the article on the fictional Jedi has a section dedicated to Jediism. Some open-source dictionaries now define Jediism as "A minor modern religion based on the Jedi of the Star Wars series". Increasingly people recognise the sincerity of our dedication to Jediism through media exposure, and increasingly people know Jedi can mean an adherent of Jediism as much as a Laser-Sword wielding, Hermetic Space Wizard, from The Star Wars.

However, do either of these broad definitions serve us well:

Jedi: An adherent of Jediism.

Jediism: A minor modern religion based on the Jedi of the Star Wars series.

I would argue, that on balance, both are fundamentally true but deeply flawed, because of one simple factor: What, once

you get past the superficial presentation, is Jediism? Let us consider the definition of Christian for a moment:

Adjective: Relating to or professing Christianity or its teachings.

Noun: A person who has received Christian baptism or is a believer in Christianity.

We do use Jedi as people use Christian. We talk about behaviours as Jedi-like or unbecoming of a Jedi. We have rites of initiation, and peer recognition, and beliefs which constitute whether one is recognised as a Jedi or not. Linguistically; we use Jedi as an exclusionary term, but our main problem is we all use it in slightly different ways because we have all approached the task of becoming a real Jedi differently. I, myself when I use Jedi, use it to carefully refer to only those living the path; orthopraxy (what one does) is far more important to me that orthodoxy. I care little about other people's beliefs regarding the Force, so long as they have confronted that important question of spirituality. I care if one is committed to their duty to all; the religious service that defines being a Jedi. I am also rather unapologetic as seeing the Jedi Compass as the key document of our current period of Jediism; it was created by input from people from the vast breadth of the active Jedi community between 2013-2015. It also one of the few documents which outlines being a Jedi available in multiple languages (Six including English).Lastly; it defines our core values, our ethics in broad terms, and the proper practice of being a Jedi. Something few documents do in a systematic manner.

However, for every Jedi who is compliant with the concepts of the Jedi Compass, you will find another who feels its

structures too rigid and against the original spirit of being a Jedi. For every Jedi who feels that the Force is a metaphor for the connection between all things, the actions and consequences that all living things impose upon one another, there will be others who give it a devout, metaphysical meaning. Thus, what on Earth does the word Jedi mean when we cannot even decide on the fundamentals of Jediism? Have we allowed Jedi to become as nebulous at the word art in a post-modern world? Have we allowed Jedi to become so broad a term that it can be "anything" so long as the person professes they are a Jedi? I suspect we are closer to the answer of "What isn't a Jedi" than we are to an answer as to what a Jedi is. It is at least a start however.

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It's Easy to Cast Blame (Pt. 1)

"It is easy to cast blame, but it is perhaps time the Order accepted responsibility for their teachings, and their arrogance, and come to recognize that perhaps we are flawed."

—Zez-Kai Ell

On our Friday Hangout last week (28/09/2018) the group assembled discussed the following topic:

"Discipline in the Jedi Community, and the Act of shunning"

To briefly explain what shunning is; it is an act of act of social rejection, and emotional distance, through the means of social exclusion. In the context of religious practice, particularly in Christian Sects with significant cultural autonomy (Amish communities for example), it is a formal decision by a community, though often decreed by Elders or other authority figures, to cease interaction with an individual or a group. Often, these actions have many rules and guidelines, and can be deeply damaging to a person raised in a community that then shuns them. Shunning is largely characterised by the enforced dissociation of a member from other members of their community, however, it may also include far more antagonistic psychological behaviours, but those are not important at this part of discussion. Often, the goal of shunning is twofold:

1. To rectify what are perceived as maladaptive behaviours of a member. By removing them from their immediate support network; the act of shunning is intended to influence, encourage, and coerce the expected and accepted behaviours from the member. The intent is also to dissuade unaccepted behaviours from members by providing a demonstratable disincentive; a consequence for unaccepted behaviours.

2. To remove the influence of the perceived problem member from over other members in a community. By isolating the member, it allows for the opportunity to discredit and dis-empower such a member; often through oblique or exact criticism of that individuals' behaviours or what they advocate, without them having the ability to provide retort. For groups built around key behaviours or ideological precepts, and where membership roles have defined criteria, shunning may be justified in the context of limiting damage to the community.

Understandably, this approach to punitive and corrective behaviour is often seen as abusive and an example of relational aggression, indeed, it more often leads to terrible unintended consequences rather than achieves the intended goal. Of-course, Shunning is approved of, if on times regretfully, by the group engaging in the shunning. Conversely, the shunning is often disapproved of by the target of the shunning. The members subjected to shunning will of course all respond differently, and the act of shunning has been known to cause psychological and relational trauma. The act is often polarising and rarely, if ever, leads to a mutually beneficial outcome; indeed, the divorcing of the parties becomes the most positive outcome.

However, with that said, most civil societies in some form practice what could be called shunning:

- Restraining orders or peace bonds.
- Court injunctions to disassociate.
- Medical or psychological instruction.

In these cases, however, they are all to the benefit of the individual. A restraining order is placed to protect the victim from their abuser. Court injunctions to disassociate are ordered to remove a person from intimidation or coercion. Those suffering from addiction are often instructed to remove parties from their lives who might provide temptation. Note, however, these are examples where it is to the benefit of the individual, not the community or the leadership of a group.

It is at this junction I now wish to discuss the Jedi community, and how we, as a community practice shunning. First, I would point out a distinction from the shunning I have just discussed, and what I intend to mean by shunning in the Jedi community. Within communities such as the Amish community; membership is often essential for personal security, safety, or health, as this is an example of where people are born into a community and thus their support comes from that community. As such, under such circumstances, shunning can be incredibly traumatic, disrupt lives, and be destructive to important familial relations.

In contrast; to become a Jedi is voluntary, and the rules of behaviour are often clearly set out prior to one joining the community. The expectations are outlined and set when one finds an online group, or an offline chapter, and you intend to join. Similarly; the Jedi group one joins is rarely your only source of support. Rarely is membership of an online group

an essential source of personal security. As such, before we continue, we must be wary to not conflate the trauma of shunning in traditional communities, with the sort of practices I am about to discuss regarding the Jedi community. With that said, I shall now outline what shunning behaviours, and acts of social exclusion, one can observe in the Jedi community.

As a community, we have long recognised that our formation, our genesis, was primarily if not solely in the realm of the internet. Jedi Role-players recognised the power of the lessons of the Jedi, and began to extrapolate lessons from the fiction, or looked towards what sources inspired Lucas and the other writers responsible for the Star Wars expanded universe. Our reliance on forums, and what methods of control available to a forum admin has also coloured our approach to disciplining "trouble" members. Similarly, it has shaped the boons and benefits provided to those who are seen to have earned them:

1. Temporary bans have characterised what is considered the softer approach, and permanent bans as the hardest punishment. However, temporary bans often lead to the person never returning, and they do not fulfil their objective: How can a person grow into a contributing member, or have the support to find solutions to their problems if they are isolated from the community?

2. Punitive measures have often involved the notion of "humility". A person loses their rank until they demonstrate they are worthy of it again, or they must undergo some form of training to "save" their rank. This carrot and stick

approach, however, makes the rank important rather than actual change, learning, and growth important.

3. Rank has often been used as the gateway to being permitted to teach, take an apprentice or apprentices, or be a member of the council. All regardless of demonstratable third party qualifications. Thus, unless a person is willing to tow the party line, they are easily silenced by being denied rank. This allows leadership to easily silence and disempower critics, dissenting voices, or contrarian thinking, until their views vocally change. This is not a method based on education and learning, but a difference in power between parties.

However, the above are all symptoms, or the answers to issues created by the nature of internet forums that we have failed to grow pass:

1. Troublesome members, or "Trolls" are easily banned, and given no further mind. Often, this was the only approach for an admin in those heady days of EZ-Boards and Yahoo Groups.

2. Forums demand a structure of denial. In structuring a forum, one often had to layer the various degrees of being a Jedi (I.E Knight, Master) into sub-forums, and behind permission masks. One would only get greater access to material when one was granted access. This of course is controlled by the administrator and could be arbitrary in its nature. This also meant that the authority of an order was always invested in an admin who was often the de facto master or was given a position of importance by the head of teaching due to their need for the administrator's skills. A council could have de jure power, but the de facto power

over the orders home was within the hands of one or two people, creating an unfair power relationship.

3. Being the first, rather than the best and most able, became the key component of teaching structures and ranking in Jedi communities. Authority was often invested in the person who decided to just "Do it" and create the foundation for the community, rather than those who might in fact be the better teachers. Similarly, time in, and personal relationships with the founders or old guard are often factors in promotion; regardless of whether one has passed the key "concrete" trials such as written tests, or interviews.

These are only some of the underlying causes of what creates "Problem" people in the Jedi Community. If a person is banned at one place, they can find themselves blacklisted, and unable to gain traction elsewhere. Similarly, the act of banning can silence them; they may be unable to demonstrate their side of the issue, and thus remain labelled as "trouble". I dislike name dropping, but I would use Hannigan as a well-known example. His troubled time in the Jedi community is aptly described in the synopsis of American Jedi, in which he appears, as a "trolling lifestyle" by some reviewers. It is something he has worked hard to overcome (although he still rubs a number of people from his past the wrong way) but I know of several times he was banned, and it is something I suspect the Jury of Public opinion will never truly forget. However, Hannigan is just one example of where people have been let down by our community simply because the easy thing to do was discard them as trolls.

I have seen several orders brought down by the founder abandoning the path, or leaving their creation, and failing to have empowered others to take over. I have seen several denied promotions despite being fit for the role, because their competency was a threat to the founder. Similarly, I have witnessed a number being denied promotion despite passing all the tests and trials put before them, because the council felt they were not ready; that some aspect of their character was inadequate. Something that makes the process of tests entirely arbitrary. Conversely, I have seen some invested with power undeservingly because they had skills essential to the online running of the group, and the matter hand waved by the council or the founder.

This is what we must now explore. The dark truth is that the online roots of the Jedi Community have some very rotten roots indeed. People had power because they started forums and websites. People were given power because they were willing to write lessons and were more prolific than others. People were promoted because of personal relationships, or because of the desire to grow the community over developing the quality of the community. Therefore, our means of discipline continues to be banning (be it temporary or permanent) or denying people promotion and creating glass ceilings to limit the power and influence of those who go against the grain. Most, if not all, Jedi communities are still wrestling with this poor organisation and managerial practice.

Communications is essential

Banning, in most communities, has long been the last straw as it should be. However, it is often because as Jedi we have

a commitment to our beliefs in redemption, growth, and forgiveness. Yet; it is a self-fulfilling practice. Often, a person is warned about their behaviour, but not talked to about their behaviour. They are expected to change their behaviour because a consequence is placed before them: a potential ban. They are expected to become more Jedi like, and adhere to the rules, and seek to grow. We engage them in a one-sided conversation; it is not a discussion, but a dressing down. This creates an attitude of an inside and outside group. The individual is not welcomed to be a more constructive member of the group, but rather encouraged to moderate themselves to please the community. As discussed above as well, temporary banning creates its own issues. How can a person grow and become a constructive member if they are isolated, and removed from guidance to become one? Similarly, it demotivates them from engaging with the community, because they are forced to spend time away from it. This can damage connections they had begun to make in the community, and the time away can create negative sentiments towards the community; absence makes the heart grow fonder is rarely true with an online forum.

Alethea Thompson posted this on the Armonia FaceBook page on 26/09/2018, and it grants us an insight into the issue this lack of dialogue with "problem" people presents:

The problem with people, is they think it's very simple to hide who they are from a community (social or physical)- instead of actually seeking to change and improve who they are. But worse yet, is that in trying to hide it from the world- you're missing out on how the world can help you.

If you're addicted to drugs, you need outside help. It's not something that can be done easily on your own.

If you're an abuser, you need help. It's a lot easier when you have people around you that insist upon you developing moral integrity.

If you're emotionally hurting, you need help. Outside insight and good social interactions can jolt your system into seeing new things available to you.

If you're being abused, you need help. Strong individuals that know how to get you out of those situations exist, and they can assist you with finding resources.

There's no such thing as an enemy- only people who present a challenge for you to overcome or people who support you in the battle.

The final part is what is most integral to this discussion; who are we, as members of the community in these issues? Are we actively communicating with "problem" people to seek why they are "problem" people? Many talk of the Jedi path as one of acceptance and redemption, but often we react to people who cause trouble with punitive and corrective actions. We often treat the symptoms without treating the cause; why has a person who has otherwise been a positive or least quiet part of the community begun acting out? Similarly; is it not feasible that troubled person come to the community, and instead of helping them find a solution to the causes of their troubles, we instead support them to tolerate their troubles and not act to do something about them.

As Jedi we have a duty to each other as we do to others. Just because one aims to be a Jedi, and is striving to be a

Jedi, does not absolve them of being in a dark place. Having progressed as a Jedi does not prevent someone, in time, when vulnerable and struggling from lashing out or acting in an out of character way. Before banning, the threat of banning or any form of censure is even considered, we must as a community consider something much more effective; a conversation. We must also recognise that punishment is ineffectual compared to rehabilitation; if we do not invite people to be a part of the community, and work with them to be part of the community, they will continue their way. In the hangout on Friday I discussed an analogy which is used in some martial arts circles:

"If you hit a black-belt hard enough in the head; they become a brown belt. Hit them again; they become a purple belt. Hit them enough and they will be a white belt."

This is very true with regards to life as well though, and rank among the Jedi; a Jedi Master is only as masterful as his reserves of energy to deal with problems. No matter how capable, unflappable, and composed someone might be; they will always have something that can shake them. Enough of that in a short space of time, can bring down even the most capable of us. This being the next lesson; we are reactionists to problems. We react, rather than pro-actively, attend to individuals causing issues. We are finally made aware of issues when the person becomes a "problem" rather than when something could have truly have been done about the issue. This is true of every level of involvement, and investment, in our community. People are not a problem, but when they cause a problem, it is a symptom that they are struggling with problems of their own.

With that said, we do have the other side of the coin. We do have internet trolls, studies indicate that those most likely to be internet trolls are high scorers in two traits; psychopathy and sadism. Similarly, that trolls have lower affective empathy, and psychopathy moderates their cognitive empathy (Sest, N., and March, E., 2017). Cognitive empathy refers to the capacity understand others' emotions. Whereas affective empathy refers to the capacity experience, internalize, and respond to those emotions; put one's self in another person's shoes to say it another way. We do sadly have people who simply engage in behaviours to hurt others via their words and actions online. However, we have studies which suggest that trolling leads to negative emotional outcomes for trolls. Similarly, the internet makes it difficult for any one to recognise the human being on the other side of the screen. The internet dehumanises us all and makes some behaviours more prevalent. Overall, the key is education, and rehabilitation. Next week we shall look at the solutions to the organisational problems that perpetuate issues in our community, however, for today we shall finish on tips for how you can better understand the online world and not contribute to problem behaviours. These were suggested by Davis, T. (2016) in an article titled "Six Tips for Reading Emotions in Text Messages" which, though expressly designed for texting are more than applicable to forums and message systems such as Discord.

1. Assume good intentions:

Test is a difficult medium for communicating emotion. We lack many of the cues we have when talking to a person via video or face to face. Unless the text expressly states an emotional content such as "I am sad" then do not assume

the emotional content of the writer. It is better to assume the writer has written with good intentions to simply convey a message. Assuming or reading anger or other emotions into text can be the cause of unnecessary arguments.

2. Practice being aware of your own unconscious bias:

All people have unconscious biases that lead to different conclusions being drawn from the same information. This includes the ability to interpret other emotions; even presented with all the information of facial expression and vocal tone. Try to remember that unconscious biases affect our interpretations; the anger we detect in a text or a post might be anger that we are projecting onto the material.

3. Explore, and analyse, the words themselves:

The words, and lexicon, people use about a topic can reflect the emotional content. An approach to understanding emotions in text is the "bag-of-words" method: essentially study each word, that describes an emotion, individually. By looking at the nature of each word, we might be able to figure out the prominent emotional content of a message.

4. Never presume you know the emotional content of the writer:

Written information is generally incomplete, and often missing essential content with regards to fully understanding the writer. As human beings we often to seek to fill in information we lack, or to try to intuit connections between the information we do have. We automatically start thinking about how we would feel in the situation the writer is describing. Unfortunately, there are significant individual differences in how people feel in any context, and the

emotions that emerge are dependent on individuals' experiences. As such; never be afraid to ask for clarity, rather than presume you have understood the picture fully.

5. Research and apply theories of emotion:

We all have a theory of emotion; not just academics and psychologists. Individuals have individual concepts of where emotion emerge, and what they mean, based on their individual experiences of these emotions. It is important to study researched theories, however, consciously exploring our own assumptions about emotions can help us relate to the emotions of others. Do we experience our emotions as discrete, and separate, experiences or are our emotions all inter-related? Understanding our emotional content is the foundation to understanding those of others.

6. Seek out more information

Never be afraid to seek more information from the person you are communicating with. You will never receive answers, if you never ask questions. If you require clarity; ask for clarity. Similarly, remember it is a two ways street; always be open to answering questions about your responses. Never guess; always ask, is the mantra here.

Next week we shall be discussing various ways organisations can change their structure, and employ methods, that will help avoid creating "problem" people. I hope the topic of today has made you think more deeply about how we as a community work with people. However, I'd like to end on a positive note; we are a community that values forgiveness and kindness. As long as we honour those values we are a

strong, and valuable, community no matter the problems we struggle with.

CITATIONS

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It's Easy To Cast Blame (Pt. 2)

Last week we discussed the concept of shunning, and how, as a community we often rely on it as our method of discipline. We also discussed the flaws of such an approach, and the underlying causes of why this approach was originally adopted, and why it continues to be used. The underlying causes are primarily down to the nature of internet forums, but also the foundations of the Jedi community; as they primarily came to exist from 1995 onwards. It is hard to deny the direct impact the internet had on the Jedi community existing. The underlying issues being based around unfair power relationships, and the fact that many early leaders were simply not fit for the role and have left in their wake the very same unfair power structures. However, it is easy to criticise and discuss the problems; it is not always easy to come up with solutions. This week, I want to look at some strategies that could be employed to deal with issues discusses last week.

1. Mentoring

The Apprentice/Master model is not what I am talking about here. Rather, I am talking about mentorship in broader terms. In 2004, David Clutterbuck created an acronym for what mentors do:

- Manage the relationship
- Encourage
- Nurture

- Teach
- Offer mutual respect
- Respond to the learner's needs

In the context of an organisation, mentoring relationships are often entered with a clearly defined goal. A time-frame, what the responsibilities of the parties involved are, and how regular meetings will be and for how long, are usual aspects of the frame work. For the learner, or mentee, the benefits are obvious; they benefit from their mentor's focus and expertise and can explore their learning under the guidance of another. More importantly though, learning and development can be one of the first things we begin to neglect when we become busy or distracted. A mentoring relationship can help prevent personal development falling to the way side.

Where does this fit into Jedi organisations? The Apprentice/ Master model has already been mentioned, but who is mentoring the mentors? Teaching is a difficult role, and the role of the Jedi Master is one that is complex and has many facets: learning consultant, coach, counsellor, advisor, role model, and critical friend. The prior are all the many hats a Jedi may have to wear when teaching an apprentice. In most Jedi organisations, sadly, once one reaches the role of Knight one is left to fend for one self. Knights are expected to become teachers and mentors, based on their own experiences of mentorship, but I would argue this is not wise.

The tradition of the Apprentice/Master has in it's past as many poor mentors as it has had brilliant mentors. This means that the tradition alone is a mixed bag of good and bad mentoring practices. Similarly, if a person is left to teach, and given only the broad context of the tests and trials their student will need to pass it can be difficult for them to truly

educate their student. Furthermore, it is not the role of teacher that is alone in having important responsibilities and struggles in the Jedi community. There are many roles and responsibilities that need to be filled in any organisation.

Thus, what am I suggesting? A robust structure of mentoring, but also models designed to grow people into a role. Let us consider some basic ways to apply this:

1. A knight wishes to take an apprentice. Have them work as an assistant to someone who is working with an apprentice, and over a fixed time have them take an increasing role in teaching the apprentice, while having the oversight and support of the primary tutor. This will allow the individual to experience teaching, while having direct support, and if they struggle it will not dramatically affect the apprentice.

2. Have a mentoring overseer, or several, for those engaged in responsibilities for the organisation. Ensure weekly meetings are being held to ensure everyone is getting the correct support. Such meetings will help detect potential issues and will also maintain a focus on personal development through out the organisation.

3. Mentoring is not about rank, but about the needs of individuals: if someone has volunteered for a new role, ensure they are receiving oversight and mentoring from someone who knows the role. Have someone who will help them grow into the role.

With all the above said, mentoring relationships are not for everyone, however, some structured oversight is still important. Take 2 from above for example; you should still have people attending a regular one-to-one so that you know

their ambitions for their role but can help foresee issues. It need not be a mentoring meeting, but it's important to create opportunities for people to talk. As stated last week, the key to all of this is communication. Mentoring is just one key tool in the tool bag.

2. Disassemble Unfair power relationships

An issue we discussed last week was that in the online realm, the creation of Jedi sites was often done by those with the will to do so rather than those who were most suited to do so. Similarly; that rank and administrative power have been intimately entwined ever since. The problem with this is that it creates unfair power relationships; the highest authority is beholden to no one because they have all the power. The forums, websites, and online homes belong to the creator, not the community. As such; how do we resolve these issues:

1. Invest executive power in a team, not an individual or a pair of individuals. If one operates a traditional council; have power invested in the council. Also, make part of every leadership role the responsibility of finding one's successor; make sure the leadership is always looking to the future, and have in place the means to pass on responsibilities.

2. Define roles clearly and without ambiguity. If there is an intended chain of command, make it implicit in the role structure. Similarly, clarify clearly what authority, and responsibilities, every role has. No one should be left uncertain of their membership expectations. This will help prevent such things as "pulling rank" but also situations where a person may feel their hands are tied due to being outranked; the integral issue which undermines transparent communications in a hierarchy.

3. Define rules clearly and without ambiguity. The rules of conduct should be informed by your organisation's doctrine, ethical guidelines, and stated values but one should keep in mind that a forum is a distinct space. Clarify your rules for various contexts, and whether some spaces have different rules from others. Also, ensure everyone is subject to them and the rules are enforced consistently. There should be no exceptions to the rules. This ensures everyone is on a level playing field when it comes to conduct.

4. Have an anonymous complaint model; allow members the ability to issue complaints against others in a safe manner. Similarly; have a clear set of measures in place for when complaints occur. Does it require someone being suspended from their role (please do not read as temporary banning) while the issues are investigated for example. What is the responsibility of the organisation if the concern is potentially criminal? Make the process consistent with the rules.

5. All key roles should be shadowed and have an official assistant role. In the event some one in a key role must exit or leave the role, there is an interim officer immediately ready to take over the role. This helps split work loads between two volunteers rather that playing the onus on one and ensures a continuity of administration in the event one of them leaves or is dismissed from the role. It also prevents key responsibilities being monopolised, and held to ransom, by one person.

3. Fitness for role Policies

Returning to a key point earlier that it was the people with the will to create sites, and teachings, that ended up well known rather than those with the ability to be good leaders that

ended up in places of power. Similarly, however, ranks are often awarded and retained despite changes in training programs, and the changing of expectations about what a rank means. However, in no other context would we be happy for someone to not stay consistent with the expectations of their role. We would not accept a surgeon who has been retired for five years and has not attended a single medical conference in his retirement, to perform surgery on us in a cutting-edge theatre. He would be out of practice, and out of his depth, because the setting would be unfamiliar to him. We would not take Judo lessons from someone who has not trained in twenty years, even if they were a fifth dan when they stopped training. He would not have the physical ability any more to be effective in demonstrating the techniques.

Ultimately, this all comes down to skill fade, and it effects all skill sets. Six months without practice can have a debilitating effect; to the point one might as well effectively start again from the beginning. However, how does this effect Jedi organisations? How often do we as organisations run requalification courses, or skill sessions? I would be tempted to suggest that most reading this have never even considered this a factor in being a Jedi. Yet; as Jedi we have roles which have important skills. Teaching, mentorship, and mediation are all skills we must practice online before we even consider our offline existence. As organisations we have several options available to us to maintain fitness for role:

1. Requalification in key online training modules every year or every other year. There are many skills that are taught online and can be demonstrated online. We can ensure our members in key roles are maintaining the essential skills and

are kept aware of changes to training material and procedures.

2. Defined dead-lines as to when training modules expire. This enforces the acknowledgement of skill fade but gives guidance on best practice regarding staying on top of the game. How often should one be requalifying and undergoing key training.

3. Acknowledge and credit significant and relevant third-party achievements. Degrees for example probably exceed the current training any Jedi community provides. By acknowledging individual's existing qualifications, and contributions, we can better locate people where they will be most effective and of most use. Similarly, we can identify the training they need rather than direct them to training that is redundant for them.

4. Give time guidance for the time a person is expected to put into a role; be it a mentor, or some other form of administrative officer. How many hours are you realistically expecting people to put into their roles, and responsibilities? A common guideline for many volunteer organisations is sixty hours, with twenty of those being committed to the primary goal of the organisation. That is just under and hour and ten minutes a week. If one is operating as a mentor in an apprentice/master relationship; asking that someone in that role spends at least that much time a week on their apprentice is not at all unrealistic.

5. Divorce rank from responsibilities where possible, and instead focus on qualifications. Responsibilities should be connected to the fitness for role policy, however, rank should not be taken away simply for a lapse in a qualification. If

someone has allowed their mentoring qualifications to lapse, they simply will not be allowed to mentor until they get the qualifications back. They should not lose their rank of Knight or Master.

The key thing is ensuring people with responsibility are trained, are maintaining their training, and are supported in maintaining their training. Similarly, that they are not punished for a lapse; life happens. Making people step back is not a punishment but making sure they are not vulnerable to liability.

4. Rehabilitation rather than punishment

Discussed last week with the issue of shunning. I will quickly reiterate the key part of last week that applies to this discussion:

1. Temporary bans have characterised what is considered the softer approach, and permanent bans as the hardest punishment. However, temporary bans often lead to the person never returning, and they do not fulfil their objective: How can a person grow into a contributing member, or have the support to find solutions to their problems if they are isolated from the community?

2. Punitive measures have often involved the notion of "humility". A person loses their rank until they demonstrate they are worthy of it again, or they must undergo some form of training to "save" their rank. This carrot and stick approach, however, makes the rank important rather than actual change, learning, and growth important.

How do we resolve these two issues?

1. Do away with temporary bans and employ only permanent ones. If someone warrants exclusion they have demonstrated an inability to learn and become a constructive part of the community. Temporary exclusion will not resolve this; rather, problematic actions are the symptom of a problematic environment. If an individual's behaviours are "problematic" they should not be isolated, but rather given mentorship, and invited to discuss problems with their peers. They can only grow into a contributing member, by being given the opportunity. If this is not a solution make all bans permanent but have an appeal process; if someone wants to return and put the effort in, they will pass an appeal.

2. Mediation should be done properly. If the conflict is between an authority figure and a member who has no role, then the authority figure cannot be left to solve the problem. It is an unfair power balance; the leadership should organise a resolution and appoint a mediator. It takes two to tango, and though their may be an aggressor and victim, that will become clear with investigation. Assume equal responsibility until it is evident that is not the case. Similarly, advise they take measures to avoid each other if the problem between them cannot be resolved, and it's simply a matter of clashing personalities. This is not a perfect solution, and to be fair if it is a person in a key role; that person should not be in a key role if there is valued membership that refuse to work with them. End of the day; all roles are voluntary but should be approached with a professional mindset. The rule of thumb though is mediation and communication, over investigation and punishment.

3. Suspend from responsibilities, not from the community. When a person in a key role is under investigation, suspend

them from duties, however do not exclude them from the community. Instead, treat as innocent until proven guilty. Now, there may be exceptions to this, such as potential criminality in which case a permanent ban is in order, and a report to the appropriate authorities. However, general rule of thumb is to remove the pressures of the job and allow things to be resolved. Resolving issues for the health and welfare of the members involved comes before any jobs and responsibilities to the organisation.

4. Ban everyone involved if they have any culpability in creating the problem environment. Unless it is clearly a case of a bully attacking someone, and that person has done nothing to retaliate except report the incident, then all the parties involved are propagating the issue. Do not find the "main" culprit and ban them; ban them all. Banning one person leaves the situation unresolved, because the problem characters remain. Now, this should be taken with a pinch of salt, and all cases should be investigated on their own virtue. Someone might have some mitigating circumstances, in which case they should be allowed to remain but placed under mentorship and helped to accommodate for problems. However, the key thing is this; do not solve the problem half way. If a group of people are the problem; get rid of them all.

5. Challenge Bad Leadership

It is the responsibility of any member of an organisation to challenge poor leadership habits. Below I have outlined several poor leadership habits that we, as a community, need to be able to challenge:

1. Blame problems on their predecessor and/or others:

A poor leader blames their predecessor or others for problems. They may claim that the predecessor has left the situation in such dire straits, it will take time to get everything in order, and of course they cannot possibly work on achieving any real change just yet. Similarly, they may blame those that they are responsible for leading for the problems; citing incompetency and so on. They blame the weakest colleague; thus, the organization first needs to find someone new before they can be expected to achieve the desired goals.

Similarly, a poor leader will always have engineered excuses at their disposal. For example, that the reports or statements of others are inaccurate or do not have the whole picture, and that their own information is the factual version. Lastly, they blame factors that they rightfully have no control over, but the impetus is that everything was going against them and therefore it was just impossible to get anything done, rather than focusing on a solution-based approach or showing any self-awareness about what they could have done differently under the circumstances.

2. Consistently busy.

A poor leader finds ways to make themselves appear busy. They involved themselves in projects they argue are integral to the organisation and are important enough that they cannot dedicate their time to regular tasks. The importance of these projects is moot, rather it is the failure to prioritise and fulfil their key jobs but masking the issue by making themselves appear productive. It can be a failure for the leader to prioritise, but it can as likely be a smoke screen for incompetency.

3. Goals based on avoiding failure, rather than pursuing growth.

A poor leader sets goals that cannot possibly be missed, as the organisation is largely fulfilling the goal as it stands. This means they appear successful in consistently meeting goals, however, it prevents the organisation from growing or developing because it is not investing in progressing or chasing goals. It hides a failure to grow behind a doctored appearance of continued successes.

4. Lead from a distance

Poor leaders rely on numbers, algorithms, and other technologies to gain insights into performance. Though these technologies are useful, poor leaders use them to practice off-hand leadership. It allows them to avoid interaction with those they technically lead, and indeed, when problems arise they have the excuse that they were not aware of the problems; especially if they are interpersonal and do not show up in the algorithms they use.

5. Lengthy interesting but unfeasible plans

Poor Leaders excel in presenting expansive, verbose, and ambitious plans. However, buried in such plans are the reality that they are based on assumptions. This can be from blatant incompetency; the poor leader does not realise they have based their plans on unmet preconditions. However, it can pre-planned as such an approach can serve to guard against criticism if these assumptions are presented as preconditions, that must be met to achieve goals. These plans can also confuse peers, and appear comprehensive,

but enforce the notion that the poor leader is the only one that can implement them.

6. Communicate in only one manner

The poor leader will feign interest in thoughts and interests, complaints and input of others. Often, they will hold open forums, and appear to be open to other thoughts. However, in practice they consistently hold their own council, and stick to their own plans. Instead, bad managers stick to their own plans. If people complain, often a poor leader will use open forums as opportunities to critique others, and poor leaders will often try to normalise their own incompetency by citing the errors and mistakes of others.

7. Machiavellianism

Poor leaders practice Machiavellianism; they look to use "divide and conquer" strategies, and actively try to manipulate colleagues, peers, and others. This results in paranoia against the poor leader, but also an environment on where people are wary and on guard against such methods, rather than focused on the betterment of the organisation,

8. Have an exit strategy

A poor leader always has an exit strategy; somewhere else they could go, or something else they could focus their energies on. Their mind is always on the next thing, never on their current organisation. They are unwilling to accept responsibility for their mistakes, and errors, and instead always have a plan of escape for when situations turn against them.

Conclusion

I hope there are three core lessons here:

1. Communication is key: problems can only be solved by addressing them, in the same way that if you want answers you have to ask questions.

2. Support your members constantly: everyone, no matter where they are in life, can benefit from having someone to talk to on a regular basis. Similarly, make sure people have the training you want them to be able to employ. Do not ask of your members skills and abilities you have not trained them to use.

3. Do not take half measures when it comes to resolving inter-personal issues. Compromises between the aggrieved parties is fine; a compromise on your general solution is not. Removing a bully is acceptable; removing one antagonist when there are multiple antagonists is not. Justice must be balanced by mercy but tending to our community requires we be willing to take the measures needed.

These are just my ideas for helping with problems in our community. They are guidelines I try to operate by, however, I would like people to discuss and debate these contents. Offer their thoughts about other potential solutions, or perhaps how they would adjust solutions I have suggested. I would like this to become the start of a community project to look at our approaches to leadership, and discipline and maintaining order in our own house.

Wilfred Owen

[Print](#)

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?

    — Only the monstrous anger of the guns.

    Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle

Can patter out their hasty orisons.

No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;

    Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, —

The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;

    And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?

    Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes

Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.

    The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;

Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,

And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

- Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)

The famed poem Wilfred Owen was born near my home town, though his birth place, Plas Wilmot has long since been absorbed by the town itself. This year marked both the centenary of his death, but also the centenary of the end of the First World War, with yesterday being Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday (Also known as Veteran's Day in the

United States). As you can imagine, much has been said about his life these last few weeks. Wilfred Owen wrote the following, In the preface to the collection he was working on, shortly before his death:

"This book is not about heroes. English poetry is not yet fit to speak of them.

Nor is it about deeds, or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, might, majesty, dominion, or power, except War.

Above all I am not concerned with Poetry.

My subject is War, and the pity of War.

The Poetry is in the pity."

COMMENTARY BY SOTUNUS: For Halloween, I wrote much about death, and even touched upon the subject of remembrance then. For this week, I would rather leave you the words of Wilfred Owen to contemplate; for he was a witness to the "War to end all Wars" and even now his words speak to us down through decades. As Jedi, it is important for us to remember the terrible cost that is accrued when peace fails.

Citation

Owen, W. E. S. (1986) W. Owen: The Poems of Wilfred Owen(J. Stallworthy, Ed.). W. W. Norton and Company, Inc.

Death, Yet the Force

Samhain, All Hallows' Eve, Calan Gaeaf, Allantide, Kalan Goañv, Hop-tu-Naa: names of a variety of beginning of Winter festivals, days of remembrance and veneration, and in ancient times New Year's Eves, that occur at the end of October/beginning of November.

Winter is a dangerous time, even these days, and modern technology has only mitigated some of the dangers it presents. International trade, preservatives, and refrigeration might have mitigated the dangers presented by the need to subsist on seasonal food our ancestors lived with. Insulation, central heating systems, and electronic and gas-based technologies make issues of keeping warm a less immediate life and death concern; where as an inability to get a fire started, and kept alive, might have been the difference between surviving the night or not to our ancestors. Motor vehicles, and public transport, make travelling in the weather that winter is famous for much easier than it was even a century ago, though even now it carries its own dangers still. Books, Television, the internet, and other luxuries also protect us against the terrible burden of inactivity and boredom that would have worn down our ancestors during the harsh, dark, winters of the past. We live in a time where winter no longer feels an immediate, threatening, thing that fills us with moribund. Death because of winter alone is not something we must make peace with as winter approaches and autumn end. We do not concern ourselves with storing food and water, and indeed, the winter is perhaps now a time of consumerism in contrast to a time of austerity. Halloween,

Thanks Giving, Black Friday, Christmas, and New Years are all times of indulgence. Celebration, rather than contemplation, is now the nature of the Winter months.

However, with that said, all the festivals I mentioned prior, which mark the start of Winter are still treated as times to remember the dead. To those who practice the Wiccan Faith or the Celtic branches of reconstructed paganism, the time of Samhain is one to remember those who have left us in times prior. It is a time to remember life is fleeting, and none of us escape the embrace of death. Perhaps a way of thinking inspired by the terror of winter. November is also a deeply sombre month, for it was the eleventh of November 1918, that the guns fell silent and the war to end all wars came to an end. We know now that sobriquet, said both in horror at the scope of what had happened, but with the hope that perhaps humanity had seen something it would not dare repeat, was naïve. Perhaps, it is the knowledge that we know that the hopes of generations were crushed beneath the behemoth that is war, wars on a scale never seen before, that makes November a poignant time. The eleventh of the eleventh marks armistice day but is now the day of Remembrance Day and Veterans Day. From the last day of October to the end of November, it is almost impossible to escape the concept of mortality; we surround ourselves with stark reminders of death.

As Jedi we have the Mantra, and no matter it's form it evokes the Force and reminds us of death:

"Death, yet the Force."

"There is no Death, there is the Force."

"Death is not the end of life."

Some interpret these, as one should from the content itself, that Jedi believe that we become one with the Force after we die. That though bodily we no longer exist, we in some part carry on. Many Jedi believe that we have a soul, and that the code is discussing a metaphysical truth; that we have a soul that will return to its origin. However, this is but one belief, and I myself make no secret that I do not believe in a metaphysical force, or the soul as classically understood. Yet, I do believe in a concept of the Force; the connections we have with our world, and how our actions have consequences and how we ourselves cannot escape the force of History, and what the past has set in motion.

I lost friends due to the war on terrorism, and I have lost friends to battles with disease and mental health. Death to me is just a stark reality, it is not something I fear; if anything, it motivates me to try and make what I can of life itself. However, at times like these it is hard not to contemplate death and the inference of the Jedi Mantra. Several years ago,I wrote the following on the line "There is no Death, there is the Force."

"Death is both a beginning and an end, the end for the person whom has died and a beginning for those left behind. I shall opt to avoid discussion of the metaphysical and the afterlife in my discussion of this part of the code. I feel to do so cheapens and trivialises the true impact this idea that there is no death, there is only the Force can have. Though this is only my own feeling on it.

I have dealt with the death of close friends in my life and each time it never becomes easier, because each loss is

fundamentally different. You will never talk to this person again, you can never again seek the comfort or challenges being with them presented. There is an ending there, they will never make choices again, they will never directly affect this world again by choice. They have faced their end.

Yet in a way they remain a part of the people they influenced. How having these people in your life will have shaped you somehow, made you the person you are. Ultimately here in lies the beginning I mentioned earlier. If the memory of the person remains, they will always have an impact on our actions and our behaviours. They live on in the fact they shaped the person you are, and in turn the lessons they imposed on you, you shall pass on to those that come after you.

If the Force is simply life, then we ourselves are part of the Force and carry the legacy of those before us. They are not gone in the sense we are products and proof of their existence and the impact of that existence. Our decedents will in turn be the same.

Thus, the line "There is no death, there is the Force" is a reminder to us of our responsibility to life, and to preserve it. It is not a dismissal of the weight of death, or the certainty of the end. Rather it is to remind us that death is not an end, but part of a universal journey, one death does not end reality.

Thus, death is not an end or beginning, it is a transition. There is a time someone does not exist or live, then they do, and then they don't again. They return to a state of nonexistence." – Keith Williams (2014)

It is this idea that people remain with us, even if they are bodily gone, which informs my understanding of the Jedi Mantra, and the Jedi approach to death. If we remember people, and continue to interact with their memory, they continue to live in some manner. Similarly, I feel that the code serves to remind us to not have an egotistical view of death; our own death will come, and for us it is a terrible thing. We shall no longer exist, but what matters is what we do now, and the impact our actions have on the future. Our death in itself is an act, which will leave its mark, and thus a Jedi considers deeply the question of how we die as much as how we live. What will our life say about us after we die?

As Jedi, it is important we consider how we approach death, and in the coming weeks where we are surrounded by reminders of death, I think it will be important to remember death. To celebrate, and remember those who have gone before us, and to perhaps consider how we wish to be remembered. Once we are gone, we are gone, but that which we leave behind remains.

Defining the Light

What is the Light?

What does it mean to be an adherent of the Light?

A conversation that has happened in our hang-outs is an attempt to define the Light without reference to the Dark. Personally, I do not believe anything can be successfully defined without reference to the context within which it exists. All words function as a sort of exclusion: a word expresses what something is not as much as it describes what something is. To paraphrase Alvin Ward Gouldner: "Context is everything."

Thus, when we discuss the Light, we automatically assume an understanding of what it is not, and its fundamental opposites: thus, the Light is not the Dark. We automatically exclude the Dark when we say Light. Thus, the Light cannot be defined without an understanding of what it is not. It cannot be described in a vacuum. With this simple issue of logic out the way though, we can now discuss what the Light is.

The Force is a word we use as Jedi to discuss the fundamental connection we have with all that is around us. The Macrocosm within which we exist, and which affects us as much as we effect it. It is the reflection of the Objective Reality that we all share: when something is done there is a reaction and consequence to it. As either metaphor or a literal interpretation of a shared spiritual energy: Jedi believe

we are bound to each other through our actions, and that our actions are the foundation of our connections to others.

Yet, I fear this answer neglects a truth that speaks to the heart, to the mind, and the spirit. The Force is not something disparate from ourselves: we are part of it. The Force is a lived thing: it is both without and within us. As Jedi we learn to dissuade ourselves of the notion our actions and our thoughts can be removed from one another: that we may keep secret thoughts. What we believe, and what we value or do not value, is reflected in what we do and say. Thus, who we are, we look to reflect in how we live.

To reference Viktor Frankl and Logotherapy, and Humanist Therapy in general, the greatest happiness is the living of a life with meaning. The poet Goethe expressed the belief that true happiness is achieved by experiencing the happiness of others as your own. This is were we find the Light: it is to find meaning for your life, and through it to find and enjoy the lives of others. It is to recognise the gift of the universe that is your life and the life all things.

To quote the late Carl Sagan: "The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies were made in the interiors of collapsing stars. We are made of star stuff."

Now, we must beware descending into metaphysical biology, because that is when we enter into the danger of Universal Energy Fields and creating a deist interpretation of the Force that is no different from panpsychism: the Universe as its own conscious entity. No, rather, I quote Carl Sagan to put the words of Allan Watts and Eckhart Tolle into perspective:

"Through our eyes, the universe is perceiving itself. Through our ears, the universe is listening to its harmonies. We are the witnesses through which the universe becomes conscious of its glory, of its magnificence."

– Alan Watts

"You are not IN the universe, you ARE the universe, an intrinsic part of it. Ultimately you are not a person, but a focal point where the universe is becoming conscious of itself. What an amazing miracle."

– Eckhart Tolle

That is ultimately the Light to a Jedi: this understanding that we are a part of the greater whole. That we exist is a spectacular thing, and because we exist, we have a potential. This is where the earlier talk of causality becomes relevant. Causality, in the context of being a Jedi in said universe,refers to the principle of cause and effect where intent and actions of an individual influence the future of that individual.

In applied terms: actions which are performed with a creative intent and with a growth mind-set, will lead to things being created and positive outcomes being achieved. However, if we act with destructive intent, or we allow our selves to be controlled by regressive thinking, then ultimately, we can only find destruction and failure. The Light is to seek creativity in all things, and if we work towards creative aims, then we can create for ourselves meaning and positive outcomes.

For a Jedi, the Light is this connection, and it gives us hope. The Light is remembering that so long as we are part of this whole that we can effect change, and so long as we can

affect change we have meaning. It also reminds us that all actions have a value and can have a value: the smallest act of kindness matters. No good act is unimportant.

The Ages of the Jedi

There is a tradition in the Dark Aspect of the Force Academy to describe its various incarnations as dynasties. They tend to build their understanding of their history around the key personalities of each period of the Dark Aspect, and how these key characters shaped the structure, ideology, and framework of the Aspect. Dynasty is also a suitable word for each later leader, in most ways, has justified their perpetuation of the Aspect under their leadership with an appeal to their involvement in the prior.

An interesting aside is that many well-known figures of the Sith movement have also been entwined in the Force Academy's Dark Aspect. The first leader of the Dark Aspect styled himself as Darth Moor, and though the Aspect was titled Dark Jedi in its earliest incarnation, it was shaped by the Lore of the Sith. Arguably, the Dark Aspect was the first real Sith group. Several Sith have led the Dark Aspect: Khaos, Darth Draconis, and for a brief period Luciana. Other leaders have been the students of Sith, or affiliated with the Sith, in some manner. The dynasties of the Dark Aspect are a veritable who is who of Sith personalities, even if that is no longer true since the return of Satelle. A leader who favours a different flavour of philosophy.

As those who are members of the Jedi Monastery may know, I recently posted a link to an article. The Jedi Community: History and Folk-Lore of a Fiction-based Religion (Davidsen, 2017) was the article in question. Written by Markus Davidsen, of the Leiden University Centre for the Study of

Religion, it is a compelling read about the formation of Jediism and Jedi Realism, and which places the Path within the context of emergent religion and folklore. As an outsider view it is compelling and well worth studying.

However, what caught my eye and what led to todays article was where Davidsen discusses Opie McCleod's begrudging placement of the year 2000 as the Zenith of the Jedi movement. It led me to reflect on how the Dark Aspect, and in turn, the Sith have always mythologised their history. Yet rarely do you see a view of history that is rose tinted when you read these interpretations of the path of Dark Aspect. It also made me reflect that even if we wished it would be impossible to describe the various iterations of the Jedi Movement as Dynasties: no one could claim an unbroken lineage from one period to another. A boon and a curse of the Jedi community is that we consistently lose members and gain members: we spend as much time reinventing as we spend engaged in forward progress. As we lost the masters of the first generation, we gained new masters of the second, and yet few of this second generation could or would claim to have inherited the mantle from their predecessors. A trend that has continued until today.

The Force Academy Light Aspect has produced one unbroken link from those heady days of 1997 when the Force Academy came into being. Caledvolc, an early master of the Light Council, trained Loremaster who in turn trained Paladin Draconis (Vandor/Nidan). Paladin Draconis was the teaching master of Setaneako (Alethea Thompson): The co-founder and vice-president of Armonia Seminary, and Head of Education for both the Light Aspect and Jedi Federation. The Light Aspect has a record of producing twenty-nine knights in

its history, of which sixteen became masters, but only seven of which came through the Padawan-Master model. Furthermore, only the line beginning with Caledvolc is still involved in the Force Academy.

This is not a trend unique to the Force Academy and the Light Aspect when it comes to the continuity of knowledge and authority from one generation to the next. Most Jedi, if they looked to their direct lineage, would probably discover their teacher was the founder of their branch of Jediism or Force Realism or a direct student of the founder. If not, that they earned their rank through means such as a training program and had no personal connection to the earlier generation through mentorship.

Yet, despite this lack of continuity in general, I believe we could ascribe a certain pattern of history to the Jedi Community. To do so, I have broken Jedi history down into several ages which I shall explore below and discuss my reasoning. This week, let's talk about the "Dark Ages"

1987-1997: The Dark Ages

- October 1987: Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game Published.
- 1988: Mythologist Joseph Campbell tells Bill Moyers that he considers Star Wars to be a modern myth.
- March 1994: Jedi Search Published (First book of the Jedi Academy Trilogy)
- July 1994: Dark Apprentice (Second book of the Jedi Academy Trilogy)
- September: Champions of the Force (Final book of the Jedi Academy Trilogy)

- December 1995: the Jedi Praxeum is created by Kharis Nightflayer
- April 1996: The Jedi Academy Sourcebook published.
- August 1996: Tales of the Jedi Companion published.

Some might be surprised to see me use a date as early as 1987 when talking of the history of the community and might also be surprised to see me use a date as late as 1997 to make the end of the first age. To those who know that the Jedi Praxeum of Kharis Nightflyer is often considered the de facto start point of the community, then the inclusion of 1995 in this period might seem strange. Yet, I shall explain.

In 1987, the Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game was published and within was a guide on role-playing as a Jedi and flavour text on the Force. The 2nd Edition can be found through this Link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sGuSzqcWC3crvYrTpYdQ4t9FuQO_1GBg/view. This Year marks the first-year people could role-play as Jedi, and the place of role-play in the formation of the Jedi Community will become clear later. It also gave us a key document that is still integral to the Jedi path to this day: The Jedi Code.

As early as the release of Star Wars, people were discussing the mythos of Star Wars, and discussing its religious and mythological content, yet by the eighties, and after the involvement of Joseph Campbell, these discussions took on greater weight. In an interview, the ever-familiar Joseph Campbell stated the following: "I've heard youngsters use some of George Lucas' terms. The Force and the Dark Side. So, it must be hitting somewhere. It's a good, sound teaching I would say." (Campbell and Moyers, 1988).

I describe this period as the dark ages because we know the ingredients that would lead to Jedi community were present. People were playing the role of Jedi, even if at a table with their friends, and through the power of imagination they did so in a Galaxy Far, Far way. People were discussing the themes of Star Wars and engaging with language we now take for granted, but they yet to take it to the stage where it was taken as anything but tongue in cheek reference. People were doing what led to the community, but we have no records of how: we are ignorant of how little or how much this period really informed the formation of the Jedi community and that includes the Jedi Praxeum. The Praxeum is the first evidence that we have of people blurring the line between role-play and real application and finding real lessons in the teachings of the Jedi. Indeed, it is a place that people state introduced them to the idea of applying Jedi philosophy to reality, but I would argue it did not help a community form. It was a web page, but it had nothing that truly created the community: it lacked a forum and interaction between those who enjoyed and were influenced by its content. People were still effectively in the dark about one another, and one could not build a community without interaction.

1997-2001: Genesis and Schism

- 1997: Jedi Alliance message boards created (Role-Playing)
- June 1997: Jedi Lore Created
- 1998: The Force Academy is Founded
- June 1998: Jedi of the New Millennium Founded.
- December 2nd, 1998: The Jedi Academy (Baal Legato) is Founded.

- December 1998: Jedi Alliance becomes The Jedi Council (Jedi Realist)
- March 21st, 1999: I'm a Cynic who has hope for the Human Race published in the New York Times.
- Apr. 18th, 1999: Of Myth and Men published in Time Magazine.
- April 25th, 1999: The Skywalker Code is published in I am a Jedi.
- July 1999: West End Games lost the Star Wars RPG license.
- August 6th, 1999: The Jedi Council becomes Jedi Creed.
- November 2000: Wizards of the Coast's Star Wars Roleplaying Game published.
- 2000 (1): Schism at Jedi of the New Millennium. (JotNM)
- 2000 (2): Creation of Two Sites for JotNM.
- 2000 (3): One JotNM Site becomes Temple of the Jedi Arts under Koren Jay.
- 2000 (4): Mi-Zhe Fu joins Temple of the Jedi Arts.
- April 2000: The Apocalyptic Cosmology of Star Wars published.
- 2001 (1): The Jedi census phenomenon. Over 500,000 identify Jedi as their religion.
- March 6th, 2001: The Gospel according to Luke Skywalker published by the BBC.

The year 1997 is when the community truly started to form. In 1997 the Mos Eisley Cantina chat had become very popular as a Role-Playing platform, and a Jedi who went by the name Tionne was a regular of the Mos Eisley chats. Tionne was one of the first to apply some of the more practical lessons of the fiction to life, and she was one of the first to have a Jedi master to help her progress. Her Master was Gedi and he

shared his knowledge in a way that appealed to him, and how he shared his knowledge was through Jedi Lore.

Like the Praxeum before it, the lessons were grounded firmly in the fiction. They were presented through Role-Play, and through the medium of stories grounded in the Star Wars fiction. Yet, it also leaned on what is often termed the fourth wall (The barrier between the fiction and reality: out of character and in character), and even thoroughly broke it. Lesson Five of the Knowledge of the Force was titled Reality and posed questions directly to the reader about applying the lessons of the fiction to their own life. In this way the spark of the idea of Jedi realism began with the Jedi Lore and the teachings of Gedi and Tionne.

Yet, I would not credit it with the formation of the community: the technical limitations of the site of Jedi Lore, like the Praxeum, meant it was not an ergonomic place for community to form. One could e-mail those who ran the site but that was it. The idea might have taken shape via Jedi Lore, but the idea alone. Instead, we must look to the Jedi Academy of Baal Legato and the first online discussion forum for Jedi Realists that came with it. Jedi Academy set the tone for what would become the natural habitat of the Jedi until the creation of Facebook Groups and Discord: the online forum. With that said, the Jedi Council too, deserves some credit as though it evolved from role-playing, it is development from a Rope-Playing forum into a Jedi Realist forum was within the same period as the Jedi Academy. After this year, all Jedi communities would be built around online forums in some manner. The Force Academy and Jedi of the New Millennium, despite being founded before either the Jedi

Academy or Jedi Council, would have discussion forums by 1999.

This period was one where communities came into being, and it was also a fertile time for ideas which are still with us now. A new generation had been introduced to Star Wars through the 1997 theatrical rereleases of the original trilogy, and of course the 1999 release of Star Wars: Episode I: The Phantom Menace. With the release of the prequels a new version of the Jedi appeared in the fiction, and a new deluge of writing about the Jedi Knights began. The so-called Alternative or Skywalker Code came from the book I am a Jedi, by Marc Cerasini and we were given a sense of how the Jedi Order had once been run: a council, the padawan-master relationship, and the ranks and responsibilities they carried which existed for the Jedi Order. The Jedi realist movement swiftly adopted: the council structure; the apprenticeship model became the de jure as well as de facto method of instruction; and rank was used as both a gatekeeping system and an organisational structure. The concept of a Jedi code became common knowledge through its mention by Obi-Wan in Episode I: an otherwise throw away line that was otherwise informative for the Jedi Realist movement. Where before the Code had been an informative piece of writing hidden away in role-playing sourcebooks, it now became akin to a sacred text in Jedi Realist circles.

Yet, the Jedi community did not borrow from the fiction entirely: it was not a simple imitation. Indeed, study of Buddhism, Gnosticism, Stoicism, Taoism, Mysticism, the values of Chivalry and Bushido, and Judeo-Christian Ethics were prevalent at the time. Indeed, the Syncretic nature of much Jedi philosophy is the legacy of this early period. It is

not a symptom of people looking to the sources of Lucas' fiction, and drawing from Joseph Campbell's monomyth idea when they discover Campbell's influence. Rather, the Jedi community brought together people who found the language of Star Wars, and the archetype of the Jedi, communicated ideas they were already exploring and trying to share with others.

The Jedi did not simply borrow ideas either. The Force Academy and the Temple of the Jedi Arts both came to use of Light and Dark as a means of orientating different teachings very quickly. Something borrowed from the fiction but divorced from the notion of good and evil to a great degree. Dark was not seen as inherently evil: just dark. Not unlike the Right-Hand Path, and Left-Hand Path in Western Mysticism: The right (Light)) is selfless and the left (Dark) selfish. Yet, from this the idea of a middle path appeared and Koren Jay founded the Gray Jedi Path at the Temple, and Shinobi founded the Shadow Aspect at the Force Academy. Though, that original Gray Path now lies buried beneath the weight of History, the Shadow Aspect is still with us. Similarly, that early idea of what constitutes Light and Dark is still regularly appealed to in the community.

But why have I used 2001 to mark the end of this period of the Jedi? Well, first I would like to clarify that I use the early half of 2001 as the end of this period. However, with that said, I shall outline the basic reasons:

A. This year marks the beginning of the end for most of the pioneering communities of Jedi realism. Many of the sites that began prior to 2001 would not make it past 2002.

B. The Jedi Census Phenomena and a BBC article that was a result of it would end Jedi realism being an underground phenomenon. Although a fraction of the 500,000 plus individuals who claimed Jedi as their religion were Jedi, the article (The Gospel According to the Luke Skywalker) would directly mention the existence of Jedi Creed and thus bring to the public eye the existence of the online Jedi community. Some cite this public exposure as the death knell of Jedi Creed.

C. The latter half of 2001 would see a real division between Jedi Realism, and the emerging Jediism movement, occur with the founding of churches. The early half of 2001 would mark the final days before this division in the community occurred.

D. By 2002 internet saturation in the United States would reach 50%. Between 2002 and 2007 internet saturation in most developed countries would reach over 50% thus exposing access to the Jedi Communities to a much larger population. This would lead to Jedi Realism and Jediism becoming an international phenomenon rather than largely restricted to the United States, dramatically affecting the character of the Jedi Path from its first period of 1997-2001.

Lastly, however, the Jedi community from 2001 onwards was incredibly creative. Unity projects, new churches, and groups seemed to appear every year. No matter the groups lost a new one seemed to rise in its place. Names came and went at an astonishing rate. Key documents such as the 21 Maxims, 16 Basic Teachings, and the Jedi Circle, which are still used or influenced later documents were created and published. The first offline groups came into being along with

the first Jedi Gatherings, which changed the Jedi Community into an offline reality no longer constrained to the internet. The Jedi Path from 2001 onward was inherently different to what came before it.

2001-2008: Jediism and Force Realism

2001 (1): Jedi Knights Website Created by Mi-Zhe Fu.

2001 (2): Jediism: The Jedi Religion founded by David Dolan.

2001 (3) JEDI founded by Relan Volkrum (Initially the Jedi Organisation)

October 2001: Christopher Chanada creates the 21 Maxims of Jediism.

2002 (1): Jedi Praxeum becomes inactive.

2002 (2): The Jedi of the New Millennium becomes inactive.

2002 (3): Jedi Creed becomes inactive.

7th August 2002: Power of the Jedi Sourcebook published.

2003 (1): Jedi Academy becomes Forsaken Jedi (Role-Playing group.)

2003 (2) The Jediism Way Founded by Xhaidan.

2003 (3): Jedi Sanctuary (Initially Jedi Fellowship) Founded by Kidohdin.

2003 (4): Jedi Church (New Zealand) Founded.

2003 (5): 16 Basic Teachings of the Jedi created by Kidohdin.

2005 (1): The Temple of the Jedi Arts becomes inactive.

2005 (2): Jediism: The Jedi Religion becomes inactive.

2005 (2): Jedi Knights online discussion forums created.

2005 (3): Jedi Knights changes name to Real Jedi Knights.

2005 (4) Temple of the Jedi Order founded by Br. John (J. H. Phelon)

11th March 2005: Christian Wisdom of the Jedi Masters by Dick Straub published.

31st May 2005: Komali's Jedi Order founded by Komali.

25th August 2005: The Jedi Circle by K. S. Trout published.

December 25th, 2005: Temple of the Jedi Order awarded Tax-Exempt status in Texas.

2006 (1): Jedi Academy West becomes inactive.

2006 (2): JEDI (The Jedi Organisation) becomes inactive.

2006 (3): Chicago Jedi Founded (Offline Group).

2006 (4): Ashla Knights Founded.

2006 (5): The Great Jedi Holocron compiled by Adam Yaw.

2006 (6): Censuses in Australia and New Zealand show drop in numbers of those identifying as Jedi compared to 2001.

2006 (7): Finding the force of the Star Wars franchise: fans, merchandise, & critics published. September 2006: Komali's Jedi Order becomes inactive.

2007 (1): The Jedi Sanctuary becomes inactive.

2007 (2): Institute of Jedi Realist Studies Founded (Initially the Jedi Academy).

2007 (3): Church of Jediism (United Kingdom) founded by Daniel Jones.

2007 (4): Jedi Academy Online/Jedi Foundation founded by K. S. Trout (Now Jedi Living)

2007 (5): Temple of the Jedi Force Founded.

2008 (1): Jedi Mythos becomes inactive.

2008 (2): Maryland/Virgina Jedi Founded (Offline Group).

2008 (3): Order of the Jedi (Canada) Founded.

8th January 2008: Tenebrae Surgunt founded by Jesse Bendyn.

1st October 2008: Jedi Church (The Original) Facebook Group Created by Jedi Church (NZ).

As mentioned, prior, the Jedi community from 2001 onwards was incredibly creative. That, I hope has been shown by the number of events of interest outlined that happened during this period. Even still the list is shorter than it could be. It has not outlined the existences of the Earth Jedi Order, the Gray Jedi Order, The Christian Jedi Order, and the various attempts at Jedi Unity and Umbrella Councils from this period such as Jedi United. The exact dates for these groups have been lost in the miasma of internet history. Yet, the exact information we have is enough to paint a picture of a fractured, but incredibly creative and energetic Jedi movement.

The most important element of this period is the creation of the key documents that have since influenced the community. The 21 maxims of Chanada have continued to be

used by The Temple of the Jedi Order and the Temple of the Jedi Force. The 16 basic teachings greatly influenced the movement at the time, and again continue to be utilised by the Temple of the Jedi Order and Temple of the Jedi Force. The teachings are also central to the works of Matthew Vossler: one of the first authors from the community to publish a manual dedicated to the Jedi Path. The Jedi Circle, as created by K. S. Trout, was also originally published as an online document during this period, before later becoming the object of study of a manual published by Trout. Adam Yaw also compiled the Great Jedi Holocron, a PDF document, holding all the documents published by the Jedi Community, about the various topics considered important at the time. A veritable time capsule of Jedi teachings from 1998-2006: it has come to be a fundamental reference document. However, all these documents greatest influence has come from the weight they have all had in the discussions that would lead to the seminal 2015 document the Jedi Compass. Produced by a veritable who is who of the Jedi Community, and a document influenced by most of the Orders, Churches, and Groups extant between 2013-2015.

Yet, for the time itself these documents represented something else. It was evidence that Jedi had begun to engage in self-identification and self-definition. These documents are a leap in ideological thinking from reliance on Star Wars documents and simple emulation of the fiction's Jedi formula into actual applied practice. They are the beginnings of the now accepted notion of Jedi Realism and Jediism being lived paths and practical philosophies inspired but distinct from the fiction of the Jedi.

These documents, however, serve almost as bullet points in the emergence of identity politics in the Jedi community. In this period came about the division between Jedi/Force Realism and Jediism. Some consider the above documents to be Jedi teachings, where as others consider them exclusive to a Realist or a Jediist. Some consider there to be profound differences between the two, while, others consider the notion moot. There several key differences, but the key difference lies in ambition. Jedi Realism sees the Jedi path as a practical guide to living a meaningful life, and thus its ambitions lie in applying what is useful from Jedi thinking to real life. The yard stick on what is useful is still very different from Jedi Realist group to Jedi Realist group. Jedi Realism is thus defined by orthopraxy: it is what you do as a Jedi that matters. In contrast Jediism, although equally deontological in its outlook, is focused much more on orthodoxy: proper doctrine and cohesivity of thought. Its focus is on the establishment of church and a community built around shared belief. How these differences manifest is best shown in a table format (Davidsen, 2017):

	Jedi Realism	Jediism
Force dynamology	Animism	Animism and Dynamism
Relation to Star Wars	Purist or Syncretic	Syncretic
Self-Categorisation	Philosophy/Way of Life	Religion
Rituals	Meditation, Initiation.	Meditation, Initiation, Prayer, Sermons, Rites of Passage.
Institutional Model	Academy (Praxeum)	Church/Temple (Including aim for Legal Recognition)
Non-SW Sources of Inspiration	Eastern Religions, New Age Religions	Christianity, Eastern Religions
Paths	Light, Dark, Gray, Sith	Light
Main Groups (Active)	Force Academy, Institute for Jedi Realist Studies, Jedi Living	Temple of the Jedi Order, Temple of the Jedi Force, Jedi Church, Church of Jediism
Main Groups (Inactive)	Jedi Academy, Jedi Creed, JEDI (Jedi Organisation)	Jediism: The Jedi Religion, Jedi Sanctuary, The Jediism Way.

The table, I would argue, is not entirely accurate. Yet, it does provide us useful talking points regarding how the two approaches differ.

Let us consider animism as a point of comparison. Animism is the attribution of a living soul to plants, inanimate objects, and natural phenomena. That a power of some form organizes and animates the material universe. That is a firm description of the basic notion of the Force as an energy field

that binds the universe together and what everything is a part of. Yet, here Davidsen identifies dynamism as a characteristic of Jediism. Dynamism is the theory that all phenomena (such as matter or motion) can be explained as manifestations of force. In a sense, Jediism supposedly argues that everything is an expression of force, or the Force, if we take the attribution of souls and thus energy to everything literally. Yet, this concept is in no way alien to Jedi Realism, and indeed, the cosmology of the Force varies from Jedi Group to Jedi Group and then from individual to individual Jedi. Some interpretations of the force may better be described as panpsychism or panentheism, and some Jedi use the Force as nothing more than a metaphor for the connections all individual parts of existence have to each other through being part of a shared, objective, reality. However, with that said, Jediism encourages a path towards truth claims about the universe and existence that Jedi Realism discourages or at least considers a matter of personal faith that is secondary to the Ethics of being a Jedi.

The notion of relation to Star Wars is a fascinating one, and although Davidsen discusses the nuances in his article, they are missing from the table I have presented. It is also important to discuss what purist and syncretic mean within the context of being a Jedi. In this context it comes from the use of source material: does the individual use only Star Wars sources, for example the RPG sourcebooks, or do they employ a variety of sources from various traditions. This distinction emerges from the discursive tactics used in the Jedi community to justify Jedi belief. Appeals to tradition are easier to make when one can show parallels between Jedi practice and the practice of established spiritual traditions.

As such, many pioneers of the path readily adapted the practices of other traditions into the emerging Jedi path. Similarly, others came to the Jedi community with a religious heritage or spiritual identity that they then integrated into the Jedi Way, as they saw the parallels and through a Jedi identity kept what they liked but could discard what they disliked.

Jediism from its roots was inherently syncretic: its first key document, the 21 Maxims, was based upon the Chivalric code, and those who set the foundations of Jediism readily appealed to the past for antecedents for Jediism. In contrast, Jedi Realism has been both puritanical and deeply syncretic in its approach. However, while syncretism is used in Jediism as rich source of inspiration and affirmation to create a new religious identity, in Jedi Realism it is a tool of showing religious pluralism. Jedi realism is not held to be the sole and exclusive source of truth, it accepts that religions regardless of exclusive truth claims are all valid and promotes the understanding that the exclusive claims of different religions are variations of universal truths of the human experience.

Yet, some Jedi Realists reject syncretism in any form, and argue for the use of Star Wars only sources of direction. K. S. Trout is perhaps the longest standing of those who hold this approach, and even he proposes an extensive reading list which is dominated by non-Star Wars materials. Mi-Zhe Fu too, was a proponent of using the films as the gold standard for what a Jedi should aspire to be, and even he employed his experience of Tae Kwon Do and Qi Gong, as well as his Christian background to influence his approach to the Jedi Way. I suspect one can argue for the Purist approach but living in the real world as a real person means understanding

real philosophy, and methods. One inherently carries the weight of their past into their approach to the Jedi Path.

Self-Categorisation is an interesting one admittedly. You will find people who refer to themselves as Jedi, but reject the word Jediism, who still adhere to the Jedi Way as a religion. Those who have a religious identity but are involved in the Jedi path are more likely to identity it as a philosophy that informs their life, but not as their Way of Life. Those who are best described as Secular or Humanist Jedi would identify it as their Way of Life as it is the primary authority of their life-style. Furthermore, there are those who are primarily involved in the Jedi Community through Jediist circles but whom consider it a philosophy and not their religion. With all the above said, Jedi Realism is a philosophy first and foremost, and Jediism is a religion when all is said and done.

Rituals is not so black and white as this table might make it appear. Many Jedi Realists engage in prayer, and there are several esoteric traditions such as Qi-Gong, Reiki, and Magick that are thoroughly ensconced in the Jedi community. There is also the Labyrinth tradition within the Mystic Path devised by Alethea Thompson and Gabriel Calderon which are readily used in a religious context but are not exclusive to either Jedi Realism or Jediism. The giving of sermons is a distinct element of Jediism, however, it comes from the traditions of Jedi Lore of a master giving a lecture to his student.

Institutional model is rather self-explanatory, and I honestly cannot add anything to it. Jedi Realism still employs the traditional academy model, while Jediism has long modelled itself after the church environment. The line has become

blurred by seminary groups whom instruct topics relevant to both Jedi Realism and Jediism, but the line still exists largely.

Non-Star Wars sources of inspiration goes back to the prior discussion on syncretism and relation to Star Wars. I would largely disagree with New Age Religion being predominantly Jedi Realism, and Christianity predominantly Jediism. Both have tangled with Judeo-Christina morality, ethics, and culture since their respective beginning. The Jedi community has after all been spearheaded by populations from nominally Christian or what can be described as Post-Christian countries. The distinction is that Jedi Realism does not derive structuralism from a traditional Christian church as Jediism does. However, many of the inspirations are functionally the same. Wicca, Heathenry, Thelema, and Neopaganism are as well represented in Jediism as Jedi Realism when it comes to dialogue on spirituality. Both also make significant use of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism to equal measure in most respects. Then we must consider the influences of Stoicism, Chivalry, and Bushido. As such, the materials used for syncretism and which shape the Jedi Community are functionally the same regardless of Jediism or Jedi Realism.

Finally, the paths. It is true that in Force Realism you have the Shadow Path, and the Dark Path but neither would identify as Jedi or consider themselves Jedi. Shadows are Shadows, and Sith are Sith, as such I would not include them as part of the continuing Jedi movement even if they began as part of it back in the late nineties. There are of course those who identity as Gray Jedi to this day, yet, in the Jedi Realist and Jediism communities the notion of Light is increasingly moot making such a distinction moot too. Jedi communities focus on what is Jedi-Like and believe that is good, and what is

not-Jedi like and believe that is bad for a Jedi. Yet, Jedi do not make a truth claim about absolute good that the concept of a Light side of the Force implies.

Main Groups active, and inactive, I would like to think speak for themselves. Yet they serve as a useful closing point for this part of the discussion, and a useful start for the next. The period between 2001 and 2008 would see the evolution, and end, of several of the founding efforts from the late nineties. The Jedi Praxeum, Jedi Lore, Jedi of the New Millennium, Temple of the Jedi Arts, Jedi Creed, and The Jedi Academy would all be gone by 2004/2005. Jedi Creed would become JEDI (The Jedi Organisation) and would serve as a central hub of Jedi Realism until 2006, but its extinction would mark the end of Reklaw's involvement in the community along with his closest peers. The remnants of Jedi Academy would create Jedi Academy West and Jedi Mythos, but their efforts would de facto come to end by 2006, although Jedi Mythos as a website would linger until 2008 before its de jure end. Only the Force Academy would survive as the lone group founded in the nineties. This situation left open the opportunity for a new generation to take the helm, and for Jediism to come into its own.

This period marked a veritable golden age for the Jedi community if one was to look at it and discuss obvious progress, and energy in the community. It marks the beginning of the offline gatherings back in 2002, and the formation of the first offline groups. Chicago Jedi in 2006 is the oldest I can verify, but there were individuals gathering before then on a regular basis, and there is evidence of a Texas group in 2005 due to them showing interest in helping with the Katrina Emergency in New Orleans. I have found no

further evidence of their existence, but it suggests 2006 might be a late start for offline groups forming even if it is the first year we can confirm. The forum format also meant that many groups were forming online, and some with very high energy and interest, such as Real Jedi Knights. Some were even distinctly national in outlook. Jedi Church was distinctly of a New Zealand bent reflecting its founder's nationality. Church of Jediism founded by Daniel Jones was distinctly aimed at bringing Jediism to the United Kingdom. Order of the Jedi (Canada) placed emphasis on its Canadian roots. These groups were as much online entities as offline and yet they put stock on national lines. Jediism: the Jedi religion also took the Jedi Community in another direction than it had begun, aiming to model the Jedi Path after Western concepts of organised religion. Jedi Sanctuary (Founded 2003) was another early group that embraced the concept of Jediism, with its founders initially being members of Jediism: The Jedi Religion, and Jedi Sanctuary is noteworthy for having members that secured ordination through the Universal Life Church as well as being the origin point of the Sixteen Teachings of the Jedi. Jediism: the Jedi Religion stayed the focal point of Jediism until 2005 but inevitably ground to a halt, and Jedi Sanctuary never truly exceeded their first successes. However, a successor in Br. John and the Temple of the Jedi Order took up the baton. His success in achieving tax-exempt status for the Temple in Texas was an incredible step forward. Although members of the Sanctuary had achieved ordination, this was the first group that could claim to be a legal church. These successes also meant that by 2006, atheist groups were warning people to not place Jedi as their religion in censuses because Jedi was gaining traction and notoriety as a sincere belief system. Several

Academics also began to look at Jedi Realism and Jediism as authentic examples of a New Age Religion or a New Thought Movement and began to publish on the Jedi, and in 2005 Dick Straub co-opted the image of Jedi to communicate Christian teachings through his book Christian Wisdom of the Jedi Masters.

Ultimately, 2001-2008 marks the high energy point of the Jedi movement, and marks its transition from an exploration of an idea to an assertion of a self-identity. As with all these things, it created a variety of identities, but all were ultimately Jedi. Jedi that gathered offline, and who asserted they had a right to express Jedi as their religious identity.

Yet, 2001-2008 also marks the golden age of the internet forum as the natural habitat of the Jedi. It also marks the beginning of the division between Jedi Realism and Jediism, which is a rift which is only slowly being bridged now. However, after 2008 things would begin to change: Jedi would find new habitats. The existence of Facebook would change where Jedi chose to gather online. Podcasts and YouTube would change how Jedi would communicate lessons to one another, and how they communicated to the outside world. Jedi would also begin to publish books about themselves rather than have books published about them. The impetus on the formation of groups would also be away from the digital world, and instead, the offline world.

2009-2019: Controversies, Censuses, and Compasses

2009 (1): The Jediism Way becomes inactive.

2009 (2): Knights of Awakening Founded. (Podcast team with Force Realist focus)

2009 (3): The Washington Post reports that Jedi is the tenth most common self-identified religion on Facebook.

2009 (4): Jedi Manual Basic: Introduction to Jedi Knighthood published.

September 2009: Daniel Jones, Founder of the Church of Jediism (UK) removed from Tesco Supermarket over a dispute about his wearing of a Hood.

2011: Censuses in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The number of self-identified Jedi once again dropped from the prior 2006 census in Canada and the UK but increased in Australia.

21st June 2011: Tenebrae Surgunt becomes inactive.

2012: California Jedi Founded (Offline Group).

2012: Meditation Journal for Force Realists Published.

2012: The Jedi Circle: Jedi Philosophy for Everyday Life Published.

2012: Jediism – Philosophy and Practice Published.

2013 (1): Work begins on the Jedi Compass.

2013 (2): The Jedi Religion: A 21st Century Search for Spiritual Answers Published.

2013 (3): The Jedi Academy Online Presents: Exploring the Jedi Lifestyle Published.

2014 (1): Ashla Knights becomes inactive.

2014 (2): Heartland Jedi Founded (Offline Group)

2014 (3): Setanaoko's School for Jedi: The Uninitiated Published.

2015: Jedi Federation Founded.

2015: Jedi Federation launches the Holocron: a digital quarterly for Jedi.

2015: Publication of The Jedi Compass: Collected Works of The Jedi Community.

13th May 2015: First Release of Discord: digital distribution platform that specializes in text, image, video, and audio communication between users.

If 2001-2008 was the age of the Forum and the Offline Gathering for the Jedi, then 2009-2015 onwards marks the age of Multimedia and Offline Chapters. 2009 was the first year of the Knights of Awakening Podcasts, which although a Force Realist group including people who self-identified as other than Jedi, have had an important influence on the Jedi. It led to other Jedi making use of YouTube and Podcasts to communicate the lessons of Jedi Realism and Jediism to others. Even today, groups tend to make use of YouTube as the platform of choice for video lessons. Podcasts also are still the platform of choice for hosting discussions intended for distribution to the wider community. A significant move away from the strictly text-based approach that dominated for a decade from 1998 to 2008.

The first Facebook group dedicated to the Jedi Religion: Jedi Church (The Original) was also created in 2008, and from then on, many Jedi groups have followed suit by having a presence on Facebook. The presence of such groups on Social Media also changed the nature of the Jedi Community.

Faces and Names, Nationalities and Races, became part of the discussion: Jedi were no longer hidden behind online pseudonyms. By 2009, Jedi was the tenth most common religion on Facebook. How seriously one takes most claims is up the individual, but Jedi were now part of a digital space that they did not create themselves. Jedi Realism and Jediism have since become part of people's social identities. Again, a shift from the seclusion and anonymity that dominated the first decade of the Jedi movement.

Jedi also began to publish books about the path, instead of having books be published about them. The nature of writing changed in the community from brief lectures and essays, to comprehensive books and courses of work. Jedi began to put a value on the teachings, a monetary value, which did not exist before. Another step-in self-valuation of the path, and self-identity. It argues that the Jedi Path is worth something, and that something can include monetary compensation.

Jedi Chapters also became the most energetic part of the movement with regards to the formation of groups. From 2008-2014, three of the four chapters, that eventually founded the Jedi Federation came into being. The Jedi Federation is also a very distinct Unity movement in that it is arguably not a Unity movement. One can look at the processes of Jedi Federation and argue it is a loose confederation of Offline chapters who have a great deal of autonomy. Yet, the existence of the Federation shows how many offline groups now exist: The Federation exists due to the need for it to exist.

Finally, however, we have the most important document of the Jedi Movement come into existence between 2013-2015:

The Jedi compass. It was contributed to by a significant segment of the Jedi Community; indeed, one can argue almost the entire community:

Contributing Orders/ Organisations

1. Jedi Federation

2. Temple of the Jedi Order

3. Temple of the Jedi Force

4. The Force Academy: Light Aspect (Armonia Seminary)

5. Real Jedi Knights (Jedi Knights)

6. Institute of Jedi Realist Studies

7. Ashla Knights

8. Jedi Living

9. Arkinnea Jedi Order

10. Jedi Church (New Zealand)

Other Contributors

1. At least Three offline groups

2. Knights of Awakening: A Radio/Podcast platform made up of a loose connection of individuals

3. Former members of Coalescere Enclave

4. A representative of the Church of Jediism (United Kingdom)

There are of course some exceptions, such as Order of the Jedi (Canada) who were still active in this period, however,

the number of groups not included are few and far between compared to majority of the community that was involved. One will also note that Jedi Realist and Jediist groups contributed to the Compass, and though all the groups keep their own heterodox approaches, and there do remain divisions between Realists and Jediists: The Compass sets out the shared values that make a Jedi. The Compass can be argued as the outline of the Orthodox Jedi Path. An agreement on what it means to be a Jedi: something that had been lost to the community since 2001.

For all these triumphs though, there must be controversies. Daniel Jones, founder of The Church of Jediism, was famously kicked out of a supermarket in 2009 due to refusing to remove his hood while in the store. Some thing which was against the store's policies, yet, Mr Jones claimed it was his religious right to wear a hood as a Jedi. From this emerged the debate as to whether Jedi was a valid religion, and in their response to the allegation of bigotry, the store even referenced how the Jedi of the Star Wars films regularly went without a hood. To refer to the films to denigrate the matter of the Jedi Path still is a favoured tactic by third parties.

2015 thus ends this age as it marks the beginning of the sealing of the rift between Jedi Realism and Jediism, but it also marks the end of the themes of the age. The emergence of the Jedi into the world of multimedia, and the emergence of Jedi as a self-identification in the real world and in social circles that were not strictly Jedi. 2009-2015 is the proper end of the Jedi as an online phenomenon with dalliances with the real world.

2016-Present: Set Backs and Seminary

2016 (1): Temple of the Jedi Order applies for legal recognition in the United Kingdom as a charity. The Charity Commission concluded that the TotJO was not set up for exclusively charitable purposes and was not satisfied that Jediism is a religion under charity law.

2016 (2): Order of the Jedi (Canada) becomes inactive.

2017: The Movie "American Jedi" Released.

30th December 2017: Armonia Seminary launched.

February-May 2018: First Twelve Armonia Seminary Classes Launched on Openlearning.

29th May 2018: The Jedi Navigation System (JNS) Published.

3rd December 2018: Labyrinths of Jediism Published.

21st December 2018: Heart and Soul – To be a Jedi Broadcasts.

21st January 2019: The Spiritual Art of Meditation Published.

23rd February 2019: The Jedi Code: A Jedi's True Ally? Published.

11th March 2019: The Force: Beyond Star Wars Published.

If 2015 saw the start of the healing of the rift between Jedi Realism and Jediism, then 2016 was perhaps a brutal revelation of how moot the notion of Jediism being disparate from Jedi Realism is. In 2016, the Charity commission of the United Kingdom rejected the application of the Temple of the Jedi Order for charity status in the UK, on the basis that TotJO did not exist for charitable purposes but more importantly to this discussion that Jediism was not a religion.

Expects in the UK, when determining religion, have taken to using the Wittgenstein inspired model of family resemblances, and judging emerging religious movements against extant ones. Jediism does not have a model of proctology: it has no belief structure explaining the existence of the Universe, and why it exists. It has no model of eschatology: Jediism does not concern itself with what happens after death, whether there is judgement, and what the final destiny of the soul and of humankind is. Jediism does not discuss nor have a doctrine of salvation: Soteriology. Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shinto, Sikhism, and the various Ancient Mystery Religions which have inspired Neopaganism and New Age Religion address these matters of theology and make assertive truth claims. If addressing the concept of religion through the lens of family resemblances, then Jediism as best resembles a form of secular Buddhism or Daoism. It has the trappings of religion, but it is not a religion.

This could all be explained by the problem of discursive reasoning within the Jedi Movement. We appeal to tradition and parallels, but we do so on matters of form rather than substance: Meditation is used in various religions, but it is part of their doctrine of salvation. Jedi do it for various reasons, and some do so for a deeper connection to the Force, but it is done as much for the health benefits. We appeal to science but that turns the matter into scientific debate: what does a concept of the Force grounded in a metaphysical understanding of Unified Field theory say about the destiny of mankind? The appeal to experience is no more valid in proving validity for the religion of Jediism than any

kind of self-help program. Self-report is not enough as a model of discourse.

Jediism has not matured itself to the point of bearing a resemblance to extant religions. If anything, it is simply Jedi Realism, but models it structure after the Judeo-Christian Church tradition. What differentiates it is that the leading group for Jediism, The Temple of the Jedi Order, offers degrees in divinity and ordination in what is arguably a form of Religious Humanism. Something that most of the Jedi Realists groups do not.

This debate being reopened has also marked a spike in interest in the Jedi Community. American Jedi, a movie, made by independent film-makers was recorded and released in this period. Many Jedi argue it says very little about the Jedi, and more about the three Jedi the film resolves around, but it nonetheless is an important marker in time where the spotlight was placed on the community by outsiders. A much more nuanced and balanced view of the Jedi community was broadcast as part of the Heart and Soul series, called To be a Jedi, and though reaching a smaller audience gave a much fuller view of the community.

Armonia Seminary also marks a change in approach to teaching and reaching students again. It has experimented with Openlearning as a platform, but has now extended to distance learning workbooks, and is integrating its approach with the Jedi Federation and others. Again, marking another step in a new direction in the Jedi community.

*(since this piece, we have moved the entire OpenLearning platform to the FA Academy)

Earth Day

Sunday 22nd, 2018, was Earth day. Earth Day was first started in 1970, and in short, has had a tremendous impact on awareness of environmental issues. Indeed, the issues that were championed by Earth Day, such as Climate Change, now far outstrip mentions of Earth day in the media today. In most respects, Earth Day is now obsolete, as since 2006 annual mentions of Climate Change have exceeded 200,000, and since 2014, 400,000. In contrast to the issues it championed, and increased awareness of, Earth Day rarely exceeds 25,000 media mentions. Similarly, mentions of climate change are often balanced with significant discussion, whereas, Earth Day's media mentions are very much a case of; "Earth Day was Today, and it has come and gone".

Also, in the grand scheme of things; conservation and ecological friendly activities are a day to day reality. You either live that way, or you do not. To those truly invested in such living, Earth Day is just a passing fad. Similarly, one can argue that the Green Industries have crossed a tipping point. In the United States alone, 8% of electrical energy was provided by Solar and Wind Sources in 2016. Also, global investment in green industries is in the billions, rather than the millions prior to the new millennium. In some ways, a single day does not really matter anymore. Yes, there are many climate change deniers, and if we are honest with our selves, some of them are truly in dangerous positions of power. However, as with most matters of a changing human world; it is the species that is going extinct that makes the

most noise. The general trend is that we are on the right track regarding the issues of the environment.

However, it is not the Jedi Way to sit back and accept that things are going right, and that we can leave it as is. Earth Day still matters in many ways, and still serves as a rallying point, and day of symbolic and meaningful gestures around the world. Politicians still use it as a day to discuss environmental issues, and though the media representation is skewed the fact the day is still acknowledged is a sign of its continued importance. Also, just because things appear to be moving in the right direction, does not mean that is the natural course of matters. It is because millions of people are doing something to facilitate this change.

Thus, the question I want to explore now is why should Earth Day matter to Jedi specifically? Pragmatically speaking, what are you standing, or sitting, or laying on right now? Once we remove all the between answers, we get to one single answer; Earth. 2020 will be the 50th Anniversary of Earth day. The most pragmatic projections state that humanity needs to reduce its emissions to 0% within 40 years, or the 100th Anniversary of Earth Day is more likely to be a Memorial Day than a day of activism and awareness. As Jedi, we recognise the impact our actions have on our environment, and vice versa, the way the environment affects us. Our path has a moral imperative that we monitor and adjust our behaviours according to outcomes; if our behaviours are contributing to the quickening death of our species, and the extinction of other species, then if we are sincere in our Jedi spirit then we must adjust these behaviours. Similarly, if we surround ourselves with items, and so forth, which make these

destructive behaviours the easier, and convenient choices, we should do away with them.

This, however, is basic logic. It should not be revelatory thinking to any Jedi reading this. Thus, I want to discuss the barriers to ecological living, and what I would ask Jedi to do with Earth Day in mind.

Most individuals presume ecological living to be expensive. This is due to organic foods, and fair-trade items, and so forth being relatively expensive compared to other products. Similarly, the initial investment in ecological living can be expensive. Solar panels and so forth are not the cheapest items in the world, especially depending on your property.

However, that it must be expensive is a relative myth. There are accessible ways; for example, solar panel chargers for cars will not break the bank. Now, I cannot give a list of ways, because depending on where you live this will vary. However, I can give examples of my own efforts. I live in a town which has several community plots that operate on a first come, first serve basis, and are relatively cheap. I have taken advantage of that to maximise my self-sufficiency regarding food production. I focus vegetables which are fairly low maintenance, so if I drop by in the morning or the evening, before or after work, each day or every other day I can be fairly reassured they will be fine. I also take advantage of a local "Ugly Food" shop which accepts vegetables and fruits which were rejected by the supermarkets and have very reasonable prices. I also try to make use of end of day cafés and other similar ventures which are designed around using up food that would otherwise go to waste. I have also set up devices to collect, and filter, rain water so I have a ready

supply of water that is off the grid. Going back to the solar chargers; I have several designed to charge different batteries around my home, to power different devices. I only rely on a mains supply for my computer due to my reliance on it for work. I also try to live a zero-waste life-style; I avoid non-biodegradable packaging where I can, and I maintain a compost heap to get rid of bio-degradable packaging in a controlled manner. For example; when I drink tea, I only use loose leaves rather than tea bags. Tea bags are often underestimated for their contribution to landfills and the like. Now, you may not have these options available to you, but I did not find them until I actively searched for them. You might find more opportunities for ecological living than you thought.

Now, another barrier we can find is a lack of support and assistance, and this is where as Jedi we can help each other and our wider communities. Online, we can share ideas and resources, about more ecological living. Offline, we could come together and work on projects. For example; the allotment I discussed. What is to prevent a group of Jedi getting together, working on a shared allotment, and sharing the end results? Very little, beside the fact many Jedi lives tens or hundreds of miles apart. However, it is not an unfeasible idea. As Jedi, we often discuss how we as Jedi can help others. We need to be wary not to forget the idiom; "'Physician heal thyself". If we as a community are not helping each other to rectify the damage we do, then we are ill prepared to help those outside our community.

Sometimes, we can also struggle to find the language to be critical in a growth orientated way. Sadly, speaking of our own attempts at ecological living can seem like preaching, or come across as an attitude of superiority. To those who do

live an ecological way; you should remember you have been given opportunities, and time to do so. Please do not forgot the hard work it takes, and remember it takes hard work. Those who feel defensive about not perhaps being as ecological as you could be, try to get past feeling attacked. Your fellow Jedi are not criticising you by pointing out ways you could live more effectively; they are trying to help you.

This post will of course have missed Earth day itself, but I would like to ask readers not to forget Earth Day and it's meaning in the coming weeks. I would like to ask readers to set themselves some challenges with regards to Earth Day:

1. Keep a diary of your waste. What is the actual damage you are doing? When you get this in descriptive figures it can be an eye-opening experience.

2. Research the ecological living options available to you. Are there solar power options you have not considered? Are their self-sufficiency possibilities you have not considered? Do you keep a recycling bag, and is there a place where you can get reimbursement for handing in plastic bottles and the like?

3. Rectify the lazy behaviours. Are you using plastic bags, and containers, when you could use a reusable bag or container? Are you being careless with electricity, and leaving lights on and so forth? Are you failing to recycle even with the option open to you?

4. Be self-critical, but also do not be afraid to speak up to your other Jedi when they are failing but support them in rectifying their behaviours. Nudge, and offer advice, rather than demand and denounce. Also, be open-minded to the

criticism others offer you; there might be jewels of wisdom you can take advantage of.

Now, I wish to state why I believe Earth Day is important to Jedi. It can be a day of reflection, and a day of action. We can look back over the year and ask ourselves, how did we care for the Earth this year? We can then look to the future, and ask, and find answers to "How could I do better?". That, is why it is important to Jedi. It can be a book mark in our calendar, but much more than that. Every day should be Earth Day to a Jedi. The Official date of the 22nd April, though, should serve as a time of reflection and dialogue between us all. How have we served the Earth, and are we doing it well?

Trusting blindly in the Force is not the Jedi Way

"Trusting blindly in the Force is not the Jedi Way. Good Judgement and Wisdom must temper that trust." - Jaric Kaedan One is not given to quoting characters from the fiction of Star Wars, and especially not the more fringe and unknown sources, but this is a statement that struck me when I played through the Jedi Consular Storyline of The Old Republic. Even in the fiction, where the Force is a present and demonstrable Divine Power (Or Quasi-Magic Scientific fact), its most devout adherents, The Jedi, did not give themselves wholly over to unthinking piety. Rather, and we see this elsewhere in the fiction, they treated unusual trends, visions, and unlikely circumstances as things to be reflected upon and viewed through the lenses of introspection, wisdom, and most importantly: the Jedi Code. As the Jedi Path came into being in the real world over two decades ago it was birthed into a space of alternative religion and magical thinking. It had its genesis in spaces where people were discussing ideas contrarian, different, and, on times, decidedly antagonistic to traditional religion and mainstream thought. It was a fringe movement, grounded in what has become termed hyper-real religion: an imitation of religion created out of appropriated popular culture assets which provide inspiration and a source of beliefs. For Jedi, this appropriated popular culture asset was our namesake: The Jedi of the Star Wars Universe. Carried forth from this popular culture, and an artefact of the New Age influences of

times past, has been a belief in following the Force or the Will of the Force. Indeed, the term Force Realism implies the idea that the Force is real, and that the philosophies that engage in Force Realism do so by treating the Force as a concrete idea relevant to living. This, however, is not entirely true and one would direct readers to the Jedi Compass, and writings on the "Ineffable" that precedes and prefaces what follows. That is not a matter within the scope of this essay. What is sufficient to say is that among the Jedi there are those who consider the Force a term for the objective reality we all exist as part of, a connection to others we are an immutable and indivisible part of, and there are Jedi who believe in the Force as an actual, binding, energy field common to all life. Neither of these beliefs are mutually exclusive but neither are they always intrinsically accepted by all Jedi. For the purposes of this essay, we are dealing with the idea of the Force as a presence that exists and can be interacted with. For today I wish to discuss what I call the Inductive Model of Jedi Rationalisation. This name derives from the fundaments of inductive reasoning which are the foundation of this model. There are two broad definitions of Inductive reasoning: 1. A method of reasoning, also called bottom-up logic, grounded in generalising, or extrapolating from specific cases or evidence to general rules to reach a conclusion. (Jan, 2019) 2. Where an individual interprets experiences and observations, their own and others, to produce a conclusion from inferred premises. (Rainbolt and Dwyer, 2014) Ultimately, inductive reasoning always leads to epistemic uncertainty in conclusions reached: deficiencies caused by a lack of knowledge or information. As inductive reasoning does not follow exclusively from premises/evidence, but rather utilises reasoning grounded in probabilities, it allows faults in

interpretation to be carried forward and false and uncongent conclusions to be drawn from them. The fault in this is hopefully self-evident, and what is clearer is that we all engage in inductive reasoning regularly during our day to day lives. As human beings we live through reasoning based on premises grounded in our personal, empirical, experiences each day. We draw many conclusions from our own interpretations, and often with great ignorance of many complexities, or acknowledgement of fault in our reasoning. Quite often because we get through life, day to day, without our inductive reasoning failing us profoundly or to a troubling, and disastrous degree. However, as Jedi, we are called to the task of objectivity. Similarly, if we are to help others most fully, we must most fully understand their circumstance. Recognise our inductive reasoning is but our own understanding of life, and through communication and reflection, come to a mutual understanding of the situation. Hence, it is important to be mindful of the evidence presented to us. To act in a manner whereby we eliminate, and confirm, what is presented to us in a critical manner. Although, inductive reasoning can aid us, and indeed inductive reasoning can lead to enumerative induction, it is fundamentally biased and capable of arriving at certainty only in rare instances. A margin for error is always present, but when dealing in the lives of others, we have a responsibility to reduce it as far as we can. Our intuition is a tool like every other tool. It is here I now wish to arrive at the flaws in the Inductive Model of Jedi Rationalisation. What I mean by the Inductive Model of Jedi Rationalisation is a broad stance towards decision making is a model based largely on two truth claims: 1. That our actions are intrinsically guided by The Force: We are extensions of the Connected Universe.

That the Force is a power that trumps and supersedes mere human authority. 2. We can rely on intuition and can appeal to experience as a revelatory authority by which to make decisions: including information gained by visions or dreams. There are several intrinsic flaws in this model of thinking, and arguably, ideas that go against the teachings of the Jedi Code. The first premise is flawed in that it allows appeals to a silent witness. It appeals to an authority that does not speak for itself, but rather through whoever places themselves as spokesperson. Furthermore, it creates a circumstance where the word of the Spoke's Person can be argued to be more important than guiding documents and agreed rules and ethics. It allows the person taking this stance to exonerate themselves of the authority of ethics, and to abdicate their personal responsibility to matters to The Force and its Will. The second premise is similarly flawed, and for the primary reasons that inductive reasoning is flawed: biases distort the application of inductive argument, thereby preventing the forming of the most logical conclusions. Similarly, to paraphrase Hume, inductive reasoning draws conclusions that appear correct, but which are far from certain due to being based on limited experiences. Compared to deductive reasoning where the truth value of the conclusion is based on the truth of the premises used to justify it. Both forms of reasoning have faults, and it can be argued there is an inevitability to our use of inductive reasoning in day-to-day life. However, there is a difference between accepting the inevitably of reasoning faults and considering them incidental and doing nought about them. Overall, an inductive model of rationalisation given over to the Force, and a personal relationship with this concept of the Force present several issues in actualising ethics and morality. They present

barriers to collective action, and to accountability. This is why the Way of the Jedi is concerned with Deontology and Orthopraxy: ethical guidance we can all study and recognise as a collective. The Codes, Creeds, and the Compass give all Jedi guidance. It gives us a set of definitions regarding Jedi Like, and Non-Jedi Like behaviour. We can all look to these ideas, these premises, and we can adjudge whether our actions have emerged from following said premises. We can have objective discussions about behaviour, outcomes, and intents through a dialogue grounded in well-understood language. Such a means of evaluation appeals to an authority we can all challenge, we can all speak from, and make meaningful conclusions. It also makes us responsible to an idea: it transforms the word Jedi into a Mantle. It gives us our personal, and collective, mandate. Neither model is perfect or ideal. We all rely on inductive reasoning, and discussion about codes is also subject to bias. We must beware the issue of human error, even in a robust system. However, appealing to an unknowable authority and sources of information known only to the decision maker, is not a means of working with others: it is an act of egoism. It makes one unaccountable to others, and it is reasoning that allows one to self-justify through self-appointed authority. Only through an authority we can all know can we all engage in being Jedi together. Thus, the importance of the Jedi code, but more importantly: responsibility and accountability to something other than yourself. Responsibility to your connection to the Universe: Your connection to others and your fellow Jedi.