

Disaster-ly Blessings

“There is no disaster that can’t become a blessing, and no blessing that can’t become a disaster.”

I was re-reading Richard Bach’s 1988 sci-fi/fantasy/metaphysical novel *One* when this quote caught my eye because I had marked it on my first reading decades earlier.

In a previous *Sunday with Sensei’s Journal* article, [Everything Flows](#), I made a point that situations, whether good or bad by our own evaluations, tend not to endure. In essence, the theme of that article was “This, too, shall pass.” But Bach’s maxim is a little different. It suggests that silver may be the lining of the darkest cloud and stormy may be the backdraft of the warmest breeze.

These two themes are, or at least can be, related. There is an old Chinese story of the rich farmer whose horses fled after a barn fire. The town folk came to him saying what a tragedy it was. He simply said, “We’ll see.” His son had managed to find the horses and, capturing the lead stallion, led the herd back to his corral. The town folk came to him saying what a boon it was. He simply said, “We’ll see.” When the son was thrown from a horse and broke his leg, the town folk said what a tragedy it was that the man’s only helper was unable to work. Again, he said, “We’ll see.” When the government sent representatives to draft all the able-bodied young men to fight the war, they rejected the injured son, thus keeping him working on the farm.

You understand the rich farmer’s wisdom as Richard Bach evidently did. How difficult it is, however, to lose an important position, a large investment, or one’s significant other, and not see it as a misfortune. A few such losses, over a short time, feels like tragedy. Enough losses like these and one finds it forever difficult to see silver in the clouds or recognize warm breezes when they come.

My last article suggested we see mistakes as [unexpected learning](#). I am no Pollyanna and certainly do not want to reframe everything as good when clearly we can be negatively affected by many events. If, however, we are to adhere to the Asian adage, “Fall seven, rise eight,” we must recognize a reason to rise.

Luckily, the average martial artist, training in the dojo, does not deal with getting fired or losing his retirement savings. Training losses are much less severe, but seem more negative than they need to seem, probably because they have to do with one’s sense of self. Did you fail to pass your last exam? Use it as an unexpected learning experience and an incentive to double down on your efforts. Think of how rewarding will be the achievement of a higher rank when you worked hard to earn it rather than showing up and just having it dropped in your lap. Your sense of self will become more positive knowing that you overcame adversities to earn your rank.

Keep losing sparring matches? Feeling overwhelmed by the difficulty of an important kata? Finding the aiki curriculum challenging? See the above paragraph.

Traditional martial arts are intended to change your life in the process of training your body. Your art and your instructor may decide the means by which your body is trained, but only you can decide the direction toward which you wish to guide the resulting mental change.

If you see scoring on a sparring partner or earning a rank as a way to pull yourself out of your tendency to see storms and disasters (instead of warm breezes and blessings), you should know that those positive feelings will fall flat the next time someone scores on you or passes you in rank.

If, on the other hand, you see storms as storms that will pass, and if you take advantage of the silver when it shows, you are seeing your training as an **on-going process of self-improvement** with which you would have a powerful buffer against the storm.