

## *Teaching Toward a Sense of Joy 2*

Edward Hallowell's *The Child Roots of Adult Happiness* suggests that happiness in the personal growth of a child has five repeating steps. At BUSHIDO-KAI, the "child" may also be an adult going through similar stages of learning: **connection, play, practice, mastery, and recognition.**

### **Mastery**

Because Hallowell's steps are cyclical, his "mastery" is not an ultimate achievement but a signpost on the road up the mountain. In fact, in any competent learning system, proficiency at lower level material will approach mastered as one arrives at a higher level. With the exception of skills that may decline with age or infirmity, mastery becomes cumulative as well as refined.

Initially, a level of mastery is achieved when one can teach the technique, drill, principle, etc. to another person as yet unexposed to it. Beyond that, the level of mastery expected at any rank is measured by the examination.

Examinations cannot measure all aspects of mastery nor are they a foolproof method, but a well-designed exam goes a long way toward determining whether a student has mastered skills well enough to move back to the beginning of Hallowell's cycle, **Connection** with the dojo environment.

I believe an exam should encompass a selected review of previously learned material as well current material. Few students will have perfected every aspect of the required material, but a well-designed exam takes this into account and builds in fail-safes so that large errors do not go unseen and smaller errors will not keep the student from passing. At BUSHIDO-KAI, experience has helped us design exams that spot-check previous material, fully observe current material, and use a marking system that makes higher-level exams ever more difficult. Our grades are not Pass-Fail, nor A, B, C, but a system of my own creation: **P = pass**, **P- = pass** with a small exception (but no penalty), **p/b = pass/borderline** (3 of these grades equal a B or borderline), **B = borderline** (that is, almost failing; 3 Bs equal an exam failure), and **F = fail or "to be re-examined"** (1 F = an exam failure). The practical result of this system is that it is fairly easy to pass a low-level exam that has only a dozen requirements, but much more difficult to pass an exam that has three-dozen requirements.

Commonly, we use three examiners, averaging the student's grades or giving the student the benefit of the doubt if there is not a clear majority. The final grade is then presented to Sensei who decides to award the rank or not depending on his review of the exam. Sensei typically does fail a student who has passed on paper, but he can withhold a rank until a specific skill is mastered to a higher degree. If Sensei does not pass a student who is on rank-withheld status, that student is always free to take the next exam at no charge. This insures that the student always knows what he/she did well and not so well, and that he/she will not be advanced in rank before it is time to take on new material.

This system has proven to be fair and well received by students. The only challenge occurs when a student has unrealistic expectations of his or her own abilities. Although the exam is designed so that one person cannot control the final grades, some students will work hard to find the flaws in the exam system rather than finding the flaws in their own training. In this case, the only recourse is to go back to the Connection, Play, and Practice levels.

### **Recognition**

In traditional Japanese martial arts (and in many others), a new belt publicly signifies achievement. Certificates of rank, passbooks that register rank, public ranking ceremonies, and special award dinners support recognition. More importantly, rank is recognized by the greater status and responsibility the student assumes in the dojo. Newly minted green belts help instruct white belts during class and are eligible to remain for the more senior classes. New brown belts take responsibility for guiding all the lower ranks and are often asked to assist black belts in their instructional duties. New black belts help with the all-important teaching of initiates. And the cycle goes on.

### **Summary**

Although Hallowell's steps of Connection, Play, Practice, Mastery, and Recognition were intended as a summation of what makes a developing child happy, they have an indissoluble correlation to the human learning process. Learning is what a child does naturally. If Hallowell is correct, it seems reasonable that good learning, both for children and adults, incorporates these same steps.

Many martial arts "schools" are "boot camps" or "gyms" in which drilling is primary and learning takes second place. BUSHIDO-KAI puts learning in the forefront and therefore endeavors to comport with a process that makes the learning joyful.