

BUDO, BLOGS & POEMS

A New Recipe for Ideas

Drawn from Japanese

History



Culture

& Everyday Life

WILLIAM REED & HUGH PURSER

INTRODUCTION

Those of you who have followed my blogs on a regular basis, and have perhaps seen the evolution of my earlier websites, will know that I have been seeking to deliver my messages in a new way: what I call the *Way of the Business Artist*.

The common theme of my blog draws on lessons from Japanese history and culture, sometimes dating back hundreds of years, as well as more recent experiences from everyday life.

Clearly there are many ways to express oneself, and I have used prose, video and audio to bring these subjects to life.

Now I have gone one step further. Teaming up with one of my old Aikido students, Hugh Purser, who now lives in England, we have combined the prose of my blogs with calligraphy and poetry. We call this ***A New Recipe for Ideas***.

We share in common a conviction that all of this ancient Asian wisdom somehow has immense practical application and relevance for us in business in the modern world.

Great works are born of collaboration. It is proverbial that two heads are better than one.

I met Hugh Purser in the late 1980s, when he was working at the *Rothschild* Japan Office. Hugh visited my Aikido dojo, which he discovered through one of my books on Ki and Aikido, and we became instant friends. Hugh began studying both Aikido and Shodo with me, and his interest and involvement has deepened over the years.

We believe the combination, as well as being artistically interesting, provides a powerful medium to reinforce the underlying lessons which each subject seeks to put across. We hope you enjoy them.

William Reed, January 2009

POWER IN YOUR RITUAL



ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE



TOFU WARS



BAMBOO PRINCESS



NANBA SECRETS



POWERFUL PERSEVERANCE



HITTING IS NOT STRIKING



THE WAVE OF OPPORTUNITY



WHY AM I HERE?

Power in Your Ritual

Can Fibonacci Numbers put power into your physical training ritual? From my experience, the answer is a *resounding* YES!

The simplicity of the formula is remarkable when you see how it occurs over and over again in nature, in the form of proportions of spirals from flowers to galaxies, in population growth with rabbits, in masterpieces of art such as the Greek Parthenon, and in Geometric sections such as the pentagram. Fibonacci was an Italian who lived in the 13th Century, and is famous both for discovering the sequence of numbers which occurs in nature and art, as well as for introducing the decimal system.

So how can Fibonacci numbers improve your physical training ritual?

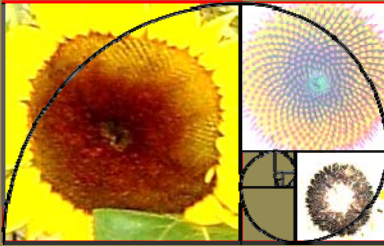
This idea was discovered by Joseph Mullen, a practitioner of fitness and holistic wellness, and described in his book *The Da Vinci Fitness Code*. While I don't subscribe to his particular approach to fitness training, I found his idea of applying Fibonacci numbers to physical training rituals to be extremely helpful.

In a nutshell, you establish your exercise routines based on repetitions or numbers of minutes, always working with Fibonacci numbers. As a practical matter, you are most likely to work with numbers in the sequence up to 89 or 144.

The way I use it in my daily physical routine is to practice Nanba exercises in 3 minute lengths, Bokken (wooden sword) cuts in units of 55 each side, Zen Meditation in 8 or 13 minutes and Breathing in sets of 13 or 21. If I lose concentration and go over the Fibonacci number, I simply continue until the next Fibonacci number, which can be a daunting challenge, if you shoot past 89! You can expand or contract your practice session by selecting larger or smaller numbers, and you can be quite flexible by applying the number either in counting repetitions, or if you prefer using a digital timer to count minutes.

Is this approach superstitious? Perhaps. However, if it is good enough for Mother Nature and the masterpieces of Genius, then I think it is at least worth a try! Though belief is also an enhancement, I have found in practice that it *doubles or triples my energy* to perform physical training rituals, and makes the discipline much more engaging and fruitful. My exercise routine is based on Nanba and Aikido, whereas Joseph Mullen takes the approach of Western body building. However, I see no reason why you could not apply this approach to Yoga, Running, Dance, or any form of exercise that you prefer.

Power in Your Ritual



Fibonacci numbers: the sequence begins with 0 and 1, and continues indefinitely by adding the last two numbers together.

0,1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34,55,89,144,233...
And it continues to grow exponentially from there.

Leonardo lived eight hundred years ago,
Better known then as son of Bonaccio;
From Pisa he brought to the world new numbers, though,
A sequence called Fibonacci: starts with 0!

Next comes one, together one and two make three,
Accumulating them, that makes five you see;
Applications range from the life of a bee,
Natural patterns, spirals, to artistry.

Now I want to ask you this, pertaining
To your regime of daily training;
Can the magic numbers help in gaining
Improvements in physic sustaining?

Practice Nanba in 3 minute lengths astride,
Bokken cuts in units, 55 each side,
Through Meditation in 8 or 13 I glide,
Breathing sets of 13 or 21 I tried.

Is this approach superstitious? Why?
Good enough in Mother Nature's eye,
Masterpiece of Genius do rely;
Then I think it's at least worth a try!



Attitude of Gratitude

To read the economic news is like watching an approaching storm. Sub-prime meltdown, collapse of household name companies, government bailouts, falling stock values.

As the bad news unfolding over there starts making its way in our direction, you see the results in terms of cancelled contracts, forgotten promises, corporate restructuring, price competition, and lots of finger pointing. Since economies are so closely interconnected, it affects all of us.

If everyone else is to blame, then who is really at fault? They certainly aren't stepping forward to admit it, and in a sense everyone bears some of the responsibility, if not for the problem, then *definitely for the solution*.

To appreciate what is happening, you need flexible focus.

What would change if, instead of blame and shame, we took an *attitude of gratitude*?

In Buddhism, the principle of gratitude starts with kindness or benevolence, looking at your situation with gratitude for what you have, and making the most of it.

If you look honestly, you may be surprised at how much wealth you already possess, but had not fully appreciated or utilized properly. Wealth comes in many forms, health, relationships, talent, knowledge, timing and location.

Rather than regretting the inconvenience of changing circumstances, why not seize the day (*carpe diem*), by taking advantage of what you already have, better integrated and better appreciated?

This is not naive in any sense. Rather, it takes maturity, awareness, and persistence to demonstrate gratitude in action. Moreover, it is noticed by the people around you, and returned to you many fold when your actions result in practical support for others around you who need your help.

Attitude of Gratitude



In Japanese the principle of gratitude is written with the character 慈 (*Itsukushimi*), shown here in my calligraphy done for the Carre MOJI exhibition.

The exhibition is was held for two days (Nov 23~24 2008) at the Carre MOJI Gallery in Omotesando.

We are caught in the centre of the storm,
Financial and economic typhoon;
Where is the light that may end our plight?
Or should we just hibernate in our cocoon?
Life as we knew it, no longer the norm.

Contracts are cancelled, promises forgotten fast;
It seems everyone else is to blame,
It's their fault; in our own innocence exalt!
It's now just a finger pointing game,
As we look for other targets to lambast.

Everyone bears some responsibility;
So what would change if, instead of blame
We adopt an attitude of gratitude?
Kindness or benevolence bears no shame,
Surely it's a mark of our civility.

Not problem but solution we should seek,
Accept your circumstance with gratitude;
Wealth comes in many forms, even in the worst of storms:
Health, relationships, talent, aptitude
Are more important than things to keep.

Seize the day, take advantage of what you've got,
Maturity, awareness, and persistent thought,
A positive mind, the best way to be kind,
Returned to you many fold when you give support
To others around you who need help a lot.



Tofu Wars

In the current crisis people in Japan are actually fighting over Tofu, one of Japan's premier soybean products, in what might be called the *Battle of the Bean Curd*. A search in Japanese for the words 豆腐激安 (*tofu gekiyasu*, or *drastically discounted tofu*) brings up nearly 350,000 sites!

Tofu comes in various price ranges, a small block retailing for 160 yen might be a typical price, but some supermarkets are offering Tofu blocks for as low as 29 yen. Since they are estimated to be purchasing the product for around 36 yen wholesale, this is clearly a loss leader, designed to draw customers into the store. And it works, according to interviews featured on a recent newscast, as shoppers get more and more price conscious to save money wherever they can.

This is great news for consumers, but it is killing the specialist Tofu producers, who depend on this single product and its variations for their livelihood. Tofu makers pride themselves on maintaining quality, and also producing original tofu products through variations on a theme.

But the price difference between the Tofu specialty shops, and the supermarkets who are almost giving it away, is so significant that it has decimated the specialty shops. In some areas, the number of specialty shops surviving is down to one in ten from its former level, a disaster by any measure.

It may take a stretch of the imagination to connect *melodious beans* to abundance, wealth, and richness, but it is a happy image, and *abundance* is different from the scarcity mentality which leads to *winner-takes-all* competition. If you live in Japan, it might be worth visiting a Tofu Specialty Shop, and ask them the difference that makes their products better than the discounted Tofu slabs sold at supermarkets. Supermarkets need to attract customers too, but do they need to focus on a single product as a loss leader, to the point where they decimate the neighbourhood specialty shops?

Why not rotate among different products to reduce the damage, and still provide consumers with an incentive to shop for bargains? Specialty shops for their part, would do well to educate consumers online about what makes their products special, and worth the difference in price.

Can you think of other examples where superstores are flattening local producers because of a similar price war?

As a consumer, do you think about the consequences of your purchases when you fill your cart with low-priced items?

Food for thought.

TOFU WARS



The character above is the word for *Abundance* (豐 *yutaka*).

Interestingly it is made of two radicals, the upper radical meaning *melody* (曲) and the lower radical meaning *bean* (豆).

Alas poor Tofu! I knew her my friend:

A fellow of infinite tastes, of most excellent flavours:

She has satisfied my stomach a thousand times;

And now how outraged she must be

As customers fight over her at 29 yen, or 15p.

Here hung those lips that I have tasted with I know not how oft;

Where be your recipes now? Your gourmets? Your woks?

Your flashes of masterly cuisine,

That were wont to set the taste buds on a roar?

Not one now, to mock your own selfish want

Quite crest fallen as this tofu war rages on.

Now get you to my lady's larder, and tell her:

The tofu producers will soon be swept away

In the supermarket frenzy, unless we can save the day.

To this favour she must come

Lest the future of these melodious beans be undone.

No deceased court jester this,

A culture rather, at the edge of abyss.

(with respect to Act 5, Scene 1, of Shakespeare's Hamlet)



Bamboo Princess

One of the oldest folktales in Japan is the Tale of the Bamboo Cutter, the story of *Kaguya Hime*, the Bamboo Princess. Discovered inside a stalk of bamboo by a bamboo cutter and raised as a beautiful child, the Bamboo Princess was never completely of this world. She longed for her real Heavenly place of origin, and her eyes filled with tears whenever she gazed at the full moon, which is also a symbol of Truth in Japanese legend.

In the story 5 princes seek her hand in marriage, but not wanting to marry in this world, she presents each of them with a task to bring her something so rare and genuine that it is almost impossible to obtain. The stone begging bowl of the Buddha, a jewelled branch from the island of Hourai, the legendary robe of the fire rat in China, a colored jewel from a dragon's neck, and a swallow's seashell treasure. The princes fail one after another by attempting to deceive the Princess with a fake substitute. The princess wants the real thing, so hard to find in this world.

Eventually she even turns down an offer of marriage from the Emperor of Japan, and returns to the Moon from where she came.

I can't help but think of this story watching the stream of news about deceptions and fake substitutes for the sake of profit at other people's expense. A few recent headlines would be seem to be enough to keep the Bamboo Princess from ever coming back.

- Police arrest 4 bogus doctors *The Asahi Shimbun*
- 7 arrested for trading counterfeit brand-name products in Yamagata *The Japan Times*
- Scandals in food industry shatter safety myth *The Japan Times*
- Judge arrested for allegedly stalking woman *The Japan Times*
- Japan construction scandal widens *BBC News*

These deceptions are scandalous because they are being perpetrated by doctors, retailers, food manufacturers, court judges, and architects, who you would hardly suspect of being the scum of society. And they are doing it purely for profit, for as long as they can get away with it, without any regard for the dangerous consequences of their deceptions for unsuspecting consumers. Under the circumstances, it would appear that business people and professionals could do with a little moon gazing.

Bamboo Princess In Search of Truth



The character for Truth (真 *makoto*) was originally written as a pictograph of a kettle, or container with legs, which held something of value.

Today the character *makoto* means *sincerity*, as well as truth.

The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter tells us this,
That as he cut through the stalk he found true bliss,
A beautiful child he uncovered inside,
Whom he then raised as his daughter, filled with pride.

Bamboo Princess came from a heavenly place,
She longed for home as she gazed on the moon's face;
Princes came from afar to seek her hand,
Instead she gave them all a task to land.

Something rare and genuine they must obtain
Before her lifelong partnership they could gain;
Old Buddha's bowl, a jewelled branch from Hourai isle,
Perhaps the Fire Rat's robe, would make her smile.

Or maybe the swallows' treasured seashell
Or a precious gem from the dragon's lapel;
But none could find the original one,
And proffered only a copy, or none.

Surrogates were delivered to her side,
The real thing just too hard to find worldwide;
To the Emperor's offer she turned her back;
To the silver sphere travelled a hurried track.

The moral of the tale we should take care,
Makoto means truth, sincerity: it's rare;
The news is full of headlines of deceit
Stories of fakes and substitutes repeat

To all those perpetrators of these crimes
And all of us, yes, taken in sometimes,
Gaze on the moon tonight, don't do less,
Remember the Tale of Bamboo Princess.



Nanba Secrets

Nanba is the Art of Physical Finesse, and Nanba Walking is a fundamental way to practice it. Nanba is found throughout the Japanese traditional arts, and has applications which range from martial arts, to music, to physical exercise, and daily movement.

The benefits of Nanba Walking are increased energy, increased efficiency in performance, greater awareness and enjoyment of body movement.

We conduct training each month in Nanba Movement, where you can meet and learn directly from the founders and chief instructors in this method. Check the calendar in the left hand column for announcements of the next monthly Nanba training session.

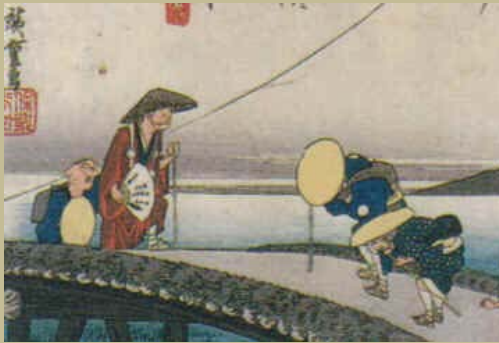
Although Nanba movement is natural and sustainable at any age, it is an art which is easier to learn when you follow certain fundamental principles. To make Nanba easier to understand and practice, I produced an article which summarizes the [Seven Secrets of Nanba Walking](#), which you can download from the website.

At Toho Gakuen, where we teach Nanba movement, we created a video which demonstrates Nanba Walking, and to which I added captions to illustrate the Seven Secrets. I posted this video on YouTube, which you can watch to better understand the principles in the article. The music was improvised on the piano by a student at Toho Gakuen, where we apply Nanba Movement to music, dance, and martial arts.

Nanba Secrets



*Nanba runner as the logo for
Sagawa Kyubin*



Hiroshige woodblock print



Renaissance nanba man



Nanba is a movement filled grace
Which runners used for increased pace,
Samurai would train to perfection
So to disguise their own protection;
Dancers too, and farmers toiling
Save energy from over boiling,
Artists, craftsmen and merchants too
Improve their services to you.

So let me whisper to you here
If you would kindly lend an ear,
Some secrets of the Nanba way
Which you can practice every day;
With this you will soon increase
Your physical moves with ease,
Release the tension as you move,
With finesse you can hit the groove.

Turn your body without a twist,
Keep all together, foot to wrist,
Shoulders should be aligned with hip;
And please don't let you posture slip,
Step with hand and foot together,
Break the old habit forever,
Right foot forward, with palm to floor,
Foot rises, palm turns up once more.

Connect your body high and low,
Many don't so it breaks the flow;
Movement connected as a whole
Gives grace and power, that's your goal,
Step forward softly and with speed,
Be supple like a cat, take heed,
Keep relaxed and make no sound,
You'll find new energy abound.

Our bodies full of natural rhyme,
Breathing, heart beat all keeping time,
The way we walk, talk and behave,
Energy emits in a wave;
Let music dance in your feet
Blending to a natural beat,
Small steps show an elegant gate
To move at pace, so never late.

These are the secrets to success
To give you poise and great prowess,
Stimulating body and mind
In activities of every kind;
Try hard to practice when you can,
Poor habits from your routine ban,
In daily life and martial arts
Improve your style in all these parts.

Powerful Perseverance

As we batten down for the strong winds of change in a stormy economic climate, navigation becomes a survival game. As the future looks less and less like the past, it is difficult to know whether to base our business decisions on gut feeling or numbers.

As Malcolm Gladwell points out in his book *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, *intuition* can be incredibly right, or wildly wrong. Similarly, we need a dashboard of indicators to see how we are doing, but even for the experts numerical forecasts can be little more than educated guesses. To overly rely on one side of the brain is to turn a blind eye to the other side.

In a stable world experience is a reliable guide, because what happened in the past can be a good predictor of what will happen in the future. However, rapid change can play havoc with guidelines, at least until things stabilize again after people get readjusted. This can get very confusing, unless you change your focus.

Powerful Perseverance is a mindset which is more reliable than either gut feeling or analysis alone, and can actually integrate the two. Japanese executives often make reference to pragmatic philosophy in the form of 4-character sets, which come from the Chinese Classics. The literal translation of these phrases can sound as trite as the advice on a Chinese Fortune Cookie. In my view, these are mostly bad English translations of sometimes profound ancient wisdom.

With *powerful perseverance* as your navigational mindset, you don't abandon ship when the pressure is on. You stay with your business, maintaining a firm hand on rudder and steering wheel, keeping your bearings and your wits about you.

This enables you to navigate both with gut feeling and logical analysis. Certainly we need all of the help we can get, and a whole-brain approach will serve you much better than a half-brained attempt.

The media provides plenty of fuel for panic, and little for inspiration. As you navigate your business into new waters in 2009, cultivate this mindset and you will see that there are many opportunities that go unreported and undiscovered.

This is one entrepreneurial mindset which will serve you well.

Powerful Perseverance

一積
貫極

The literal translation of the 4-character set 積極一貫 (*sekigyoku ikkan*) might be: *stay positive, or never give up.*

The first two characters are usually pronounced *sekkyoku* (positive), but in this case the reading is *sekigyoku*, which has the added meaning of *accumulate mastery* (極みを積む *kiwami wo tsumu*); and the second two characters meaning *throughout, or ceaselessly.*

The literal translation contains too many redundancies to have impact in English, so I have translated it simply as *Powerful Perseverance.*

From the foredeck you can sight
The captain on his bridge,
Before his instruments alight,
As he charts the course of voyage.
Hatches battened firmly down
As the wind begins to rise,
Strong currents are renown,
Stars are hidden in the skies.
The wheel is his intuitive guide,
Steering rudder left and right;
The compass his analytic side,
Giving bearings in the night.
Both in harmony he uses well,
Not on one or other alone;
History cannot the future tell,
His skills together he must clone.
Mastery accumulates in time
Over many years at sea, afloat,
Maturing, blending like aging wine,
The finest skipper of any boat.
Ceaseless attention at every hour,
Navigators mind, positive force,
Pitted 'gainst the elements' power
Focused on the task, the future course.
Powerful perseverance abound
To finally land us safe and sound.



Hitting Is Not Striking

Miyamoto Musashi (1585-1612) is not only Japan's best known Samurai, but his classic martial arts masterpiece *The Book of Five Rings*, is also frequently studied for hints on business strategy.

Within the text there is a passage that cautions that, *hitting is not the same thing as striking*.

Many people assume that the result (hitting) is an indication of ability to perform (striking). However, in many cases the result such as succeeding in business, may be a very temporary phenomenon, having more to do with circumstances than with ability.

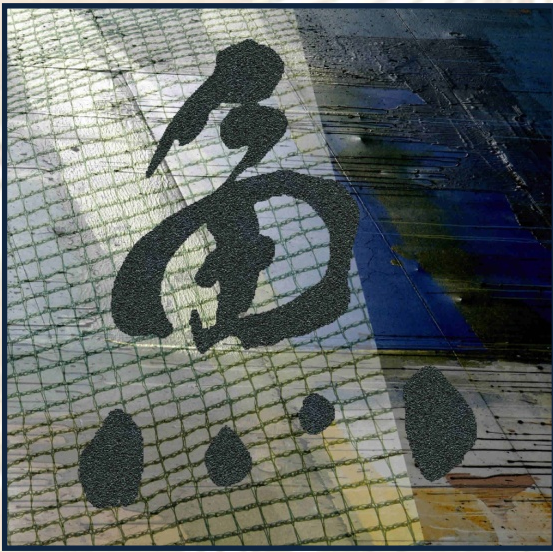
The current financial crisis triggered by the disastrous effects of the subprime mortgage system has brought many apparently successful companies to their knees.

In Musashi's terms, the success that they had previously enjoyed was fleeting, because it was based on circumstances or luck, rather than ability. This is why they lost control so easily when the circumstances changed.

The keys to *striking* are practice and intentionality. In the martial arts this is done by the continuous practice of *kata*, or forms.

In business, it is done by the continuous refinement of best practices.

This is covered in more detail in my chapter entitled, ***The Small Fish Swallows the Big Fish***, published in the recent bestseller, ***Guerrilla Marketing on the Front Lines***.



Sakana (fish)

Musashi's *Five Rings* does reach around the world to teach
Lessons of the martial arts: survive and thrive in the face
Of superior strength, or standing at a disadvantaged place.

In the modern situation, we need the help of interpretation
To apply the sage's wisdom; and so to metaphor we turn
In order that his timeless lessons we can much better learn.

Born to this world as small fish, fearing to be another's dish,
We dream, take on the challenge and set our mission,
To apply his spirit to our study session.

Book of Fire shows use of swords, but no certain victory awards
By merely holding it in front; and that victory also may be won;
With empty hand - no weapon - may success still come.

The sword compared to minted coin, the same lesson we purloin;
Money thrown into marketing gives no guarantee of gain,
First invest in time, energy, imagination – it's plain.

In *The Ground*, Musashi says: study other weapons, other ways
"to know the smallest things and the biggest things," he doth write
"the shallowest things and the deepest things;" keep this in sight.

Build a better mousetrap, the world 'll come to you? The reverse is true;
For a sales representative knocking at a prospect's door,
Takes a score of visits, but years ago it was only four.

Too many options and demands, then *attention-deficit* commands;
So many technical and lifestyle changes: our TV screens were alight
With but a few stations; cable made it hundreds; the Internet, infinite.

Bombarded in a hundred way, even thousands of messages a day,
Spawn products and services for shrinking attention spans so fast,
Messages won't reach a captive audience; that's a thing of the past.

A coin dropped on the stony ground makes an intoxicating sound;
All passersby turned to see, is there a chance of profit there?
People notice what interests them, things for which they only care.

Miyamoto a master swordsman clear, indeed without a peer,
His flair at brush and scroll, verse and tea is well known;
To seek the warrior's way, depth and breadth of skill you must hone.

In *The Ring on Water*, we are told, in both daily life and fighting bold,
The spirit is determined but calm; successful people don't move
In hurried manner, nor speak in breathless tone – nothing to prove.

Seeming busy is not that state; truly busy – accomplishment is great;
But never lose composure; a person who complains of life's pace,
Achieves little for all the fuss, adds nought to the human race.

Small fish swallows big fish: the proverb's meaning you may cherish,
Beyond logical sense, Zen points to a higher meaning, you will see;
These simple words remind us: in a new dimension to think free.

We can become spirited enough to win, through thick and thin;
We need to come back again and again to find a way that works;
So it is that power can be found where perseverance lurks.



The Wave of Opportunity

One of the most famous Japanese images in the world is the Great Wave by Katsushika Hokusai (1760~1849), the immortal painter and printer of the Edo Period. This wave visually engulfs Mt. Fuji with ease. This is a trick of perspective or if you will, an *act of flexible focus*. The wave more directly threatens to engulf the boats which ride upon it. Above all, it represents the threat and the opportunity of big change.

The image is so powerfully relevant today that one of Japan's major business magazines used this image on its cover to describe what is happening to the Japanese economy. Of course sensational news sells magazines (*I bought this one!*). The numbers within it are pretty persuasive and scary, that this time the recession could turn into a full scale depression.

Whether that then turns into a *mental depression* is entirely in the eyes of the beholder. It all depends on how you look at what is happening, whether you see it as a threat or as an opportunity. You could lament that the world we know is being swept away, and find plenty of statistical and experiential evidence to support your point of view. Or, you could say, *the rules are changing*, what can I do to prepare for the new paradigm? In practical terms, this is a far better question, and one more likely to lead to a survival solution.

Although you cannot deny the pain of the shift, and it hits some people and industries harder than others, there is also not much you can do to prevent its happening. It would seem that the smarter solution would be to change your perspective, and gain a *flexible focus* on what is happening to your business and your economic environment.

Rather than futile efforts to maintain the status quo, why not look for new opportunities in the changing economic environment? When you take this view, you realize that companies have good reasons for cutting costs, reducing their workforces, pulling out of unproductive projects, shifting to digital channels of communication and distribution, and seeking creative talent that can navigate well in this new environment.

Part of it is to survive, and part of it is to prepare for the new paradigm. What companies are cutting back on might affect your job, or your anticipated revenues as a subcontractor. But rather than getting relegated to the useless pile, why not make efforts to reposition, repackage, and represent yourself and your services to be more relevant and useful in the new economy that the big wave is bringing? Why not shift your perspective even further and look at the big wave, not as a destructive force, but as a *wall of money*, representing the shift in the flow of wealth and resources that is pulling away from the obviously bad investments of the recent past, and waiting for better opportunities in the newly emerging economy.

Why not be there and be ready? What new value will your talents and resources take on in the changing environment? How can you rearm yourself with adaptive tools and skills? Who can you realign yourself with as new partners, so that their business is completed or improved through your participation? Are you standing there waiting for the wave to come and pretending that it won't affect you, or are you preparing to *ride the wave of opportunity*?

The Wave Of Opportunity



Hokusai woodblock print



*Toyo Keizai used this image
on the cover of its
Nov 8, 2008 edition*

The Japanese word for crisis is
kiki (危機), meaning
dangerous opportunity.

Great Wave of Hokusai rises from the ocean bed,
It looks from far, Mount Fuji it could drown;
Today the blue gives way to black or brown,
And the whole economy is at risk instead.

Danger lurks all around, it is plain to see,
Yet opportunity is carried on that crest,
For all those brave enough instead to seek the best,
Who can from these current constraints now break free.

As familiar world and customs are swept away,
Shall we then just retreat and simply lament
The ending of something we thought permanent?
Can we rise to the challenges of a new day?

The rules are changing and we must prepare,
Adapt to survive, a willow not an oak,
Flexibility to change we must invoke,
Focus on the possible if you dare.

And like all those small boats bobbing and riding high
On the surface of swirling angry pools,
We too can surf upon new skills and tools,
The wave of opportunity, the mire defy.



Why Am I Here?

Not every action in life requires a sense of mission and purpose. Maybe you are just at the supermarket to pick up some things for dinner. But even these small actions, our daily rituals culminate in the life we live and the legacy we leave behind.

It is worth looking at our daily rituals, both conscious and habitual, *to orient ourselves in the greater scheme of things*, in the context of the day, the week, the project, the people you live or work with. People become disoriented under pressure, partly because they were not well oriented to begin with.

What were they thinking?

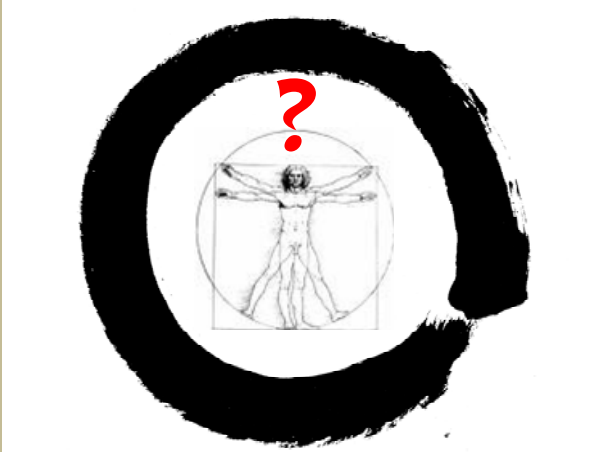
It can be both comical and tragic to watch how people behave when things are going badly for them.

Large companies in Japan are restructuring, cutting back jobs by tens of thousands of people, in an effort to dealing with sluggish demand in the current economic crisis. Some employees are offered a generous payoff of a year or two salary, in exchange for being cut loose from any future employment. While this should be a welcome cushion to make a fresh start, some people go into denial, continuing to put on a suit and tie every morning, *pretending to go to the office so that their family doesn't find out they have lost their job*, and spending the day hanging out in movie theatres or coffee shops until it is time to go home. This ruse doesn't last forever, because the family is bound to find out when the money runs out, or the conversation dwindles.

When I heard about this, I assumed it was a rare case. It certainly isn't typical or accepted. However, I heard from a friend who teaches at a major Japanese university, that it is not uncommon for people of various ages to appear in class, though they are not enrolled, and sometimes appear suspiciously out of place. When discovered, they are expelled from the classroom, but when questioned as to why they are there, it turns out that they are there for a strange reason. Not to study or learn, but rather *to pretend that they are attending classes at a well-known university*.

Whether student or company worker, the ruse serves no one, and is doomed to fail. While these may be extreme cases, they show what can happen to people who fail to ask or answer the question, *Why are you here?* If you can answer this question well, you will not be so easily lost or disoriented when conditions change.

Why Am I Here?



Your answer to that question reveals to yourself and to others your sense of purpose and clarity.

Ask yourself this question often, and you will find reasons that empower you with meaning and purpose.

Why? Why am I here right now,
At this time and location?
What trail must I plough?
Ultimate destination?
Rituals culminate, some believe,
In the life we lead each day
And the lasting legacy we leave:
'Manners maketh man', they say.
Conscious and habitual action
We need to practice, sometimes reverse,
To orient us to that faction
In the greater scheme of universe.
And when these habits are fully broke,
Job gone, money lost, no receipt,
Denial descends as a dark cloak,
Woven of falseness and deceit.
Time will uncover such pretence,
The ruse serves none, doomed to fail;
Answer these questions, present tense,
And answer them often; please prevail.
Empower with meaning in your life,
The purpose you seek amidst such strife.

