

Filling The Void

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For years, there has been discussion about *The Void* in martial arts. Much of what we study relates to filling the void during physical interaction. Once there has been physical contact between two people during a physical interaction, they become one physical entity. When contact is broken, a void is created between the previous points of contact. During much of my journey, I was under the impression that I needed to fill the void before my partner in order to dominate the situation. I was wrong!

I finally began to understand the concept of *Filling the Void* about one month ago; eleven months after my father died and over twenty-two years after I began martial arts training. The light bulb went off while in a counselling session when I was discussing the loss of my father. Yet another example of how the true study of martial arts is beyond the mats, and not just about physical drills.

During the conversation with my counsellor, I began to parallel physical interaction with relationships. When we care about someone, we create an emotional connection. This connection is similar to physical connection in the attacker-defender drills. When one of the people in the relationship is no longer present (break-up, death, personality change etc), a void is created. Once the void has been created, it needs to be filled. If it is not filled, the space remains empty. When thinking of the physical interaction, if the void is created and nobody moves to fill it, you're both stuck in place.

My father and I were incredibly close. I considered him my best friend, and we never struggled to find conversation. When he died, I was devastated. I had lost my best friend, my role model, my hero. This created a huge void in my life, and lots of intense, internal struggle.

My father died of cancer. He was diagnosed nine years before he died and really, he was pretty healthy for most of that time. As he got more ill, I found myself helping out more around my parents' home. When he finally died, I found myself taking on all of the maintenance responsibilities of their home, and also trying to be all things for my mother.

This created lots of internal conflict, because I was attempting to fill the void by being him. In some strange way, I was attempting to keep him alive by taking on his responsibilities. It was no longer a case of a child doing more for aging parents. It was me imposing myself as a surrogate. What made it even more difficult was that because I was so focussed on subconsciously keeping him alive, I was not working through my own grief.

Now, the void created by his death still needs to be filled. The question is with what intent. I've been filling the void, but in a very unhealthy manner. Now, I need to fill the void in a functional and healthy way. The way I'm doing this is by setting boundaries on my various roles in my personal life. Also when doing things my father normally would

have done, I ask myself if I'm doing it to be him, to be like him, or to be the grown child of an aging parent. I also try to focus on positive memories, and lessons learned from my father. All of these things help me to fill the void in a healthier, more functional way.

Now, back to the mats and our martial scenario. Someone has thrown a strike at you, and you've redirected them. In your redirection, your hand had contact with their shoulder, but your hand came away from the shoulder. You have also taken your partner from a place of balance to a place of imbalance. Several voids have been created, and those spaces need to be filled.

If you think that you must fill the void before your partner, you are more than likely filling the void in a destructive way. The goal is simply to be first which means you win, and they lose. If the partner moves first in an attempt to fill the void and you adjust to simply cause them harm/ imbalance, you've also entered into a destructive space.

The dilemma becomes intent. We must take into consideration why the void needs to be filled. What is the motivation? Is your partner filling the void to counter, or are they simply adjusting to retreat. If you harm someone who's trying to retreat, you've then become the negative in the interaction. Of course, it goes the other way too. Perhaps your motivation for filling the void is one of distance or retreat. If the idea is to neutralize and not destroy, the intent is positive.

When it comes to the voids in your life, you need to continually ask yourself why and how. Why am I trying to fill the void, and how am I going to fill the void in a healthy and functional way. Filling it blindly or ignoring it will create a state of imbalance both physically and emotionally.