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### **Kaizen: The Art of Continuous (Self) Improvement**

*Most people live, whether physically, intellectually or morally, in a very restricted circle of their potential being. They make use of a very small portion of their possible consciousness, and of their soul's resources in general, much like a man who, out of his whole bodily organism, should get into the habit of using and moving only his little finger. Great emergencies and crises show us how much greater our vital resources are than we had supposed.*

— William James

On long flights, the airlines suggest that passengers perform aerobic exercises in their seats—place your tray tables in the upright position and lift your knee to your chin. In addition to decreasing the incidence of untoward events from prolonged sitting, this is an approach to self-improvement under unusual circumstances. In the race to get things done everyday, the need to stick to the agenda of the here and now drives the need for self-improvement to the distant edge of consciousness. We lose who we are in what we do. Rushing from event to event keeps us on time, but rarely allows the kind of understanding that fosters personal growth and leads to fulfillment.

Waiting is rarely planned or pleasant. With so many things to do, it is a stressful annoyance which prevents completion of the appointed task. However, it can also be viewed as a time to reconnect and improve—a gift. This time is particularly valuable to step back and see if what we are doing is what we expected to do—a personal chi square. The moments spent waiting are very useful for letting this happen. Serenity and location may assist the process, but in this world of 24-hour travel and instant communication, the opportunities we need come in pieces—like bits of a jigsaw not in large, expansive blocks.

Some psychologists believe that the inner self communicates with the conscious mind at a rate of 800 words per minute. Brief moments can bring searing insights. People skilled in the art of self-communication can think over the meaning and value of their actions whenever there is a break in the action.

The busier we are, the more waiting we do, and the greater the opportunity for contemplation. In addition to the searing insights, contemplation provides the rudder needed to avoid the buffeting of outside opinions. It is helpful to know what others think, but it is important to know whether you think they are right. Introspection allows a comparison of views and permits the mid-course corrections to help us get from now to then.

Now place your tray in the upright position and lift, two three, lift two three, lift. . . .

**H. William Strauss**  
*Editor, Journal of Nuclear Medicine*