

INSPIRATION
OVATION

BY KAREN EDEN

**"PERHAPS
IF THE PAIN
OF OUR
DECISIONS
EVENTUALLY
OUTWEIGHS
THE PLEASURE
OF OUR
LIFESTYLE, WE
WILL THEN
ACTIVELY
PURSUE
THE RIGHT
JUDGMENT
CALL."**

Hot Cheetos

There's a snack that's rather popular out west, "Hot Cheetos," a spinoff of the well-known brand-name snack with added "flaming hot" pepper spice. As someone who has taught martial arts in the inner-city for years now, this is one karate master who hates those darn things.

A couple hours before my class, all my students are encouraged to eat a balanced, hot meal free of charge at the YMCA center where I teach. Yet, they come straight over from school seemingly starved to death and the first thing they rush to is the vending machine with the Hot Cheetos.

"Why don't you go to the dining room and get a hot, nutritious meal?" I would often ask.

"Cause I don't want a hot meal. I want Hot Cheetos," is the standard reply. Period. End of story.

Why do these kids keep making such poor nutritional choices? Because they're kids! The *real* question is, "Why do so many grown adults constantly make poor decisions in life?"

Ask anyone in the medical profession about it. They'll tell you that a large majority of patients who struggle with heart disease, diabetes or cholesterol problems will rarely make the right judgment calls that lead to a healthy lifestyle.

"Why is that?" I once asked my brother, who is a physician.

"Because ridding your life of the things that have always brought you pleasure is too great of a sacrifice," he answered.

Perhaps if the pain of our decisions eventually outweighs the pleasure of our lifestyle, we will then actively pursue the right judgment call. Even still, most people will *not* choose to forgo life's pleasures. For instance, many victims who have had a heart attack will once again return to the hospital suffering from a repeat heart attack in the future.

Thanks to the release of dopamine in the brain, we can easily become slaves to the things we perceive as pleasurable. Whether it's food, drugs, cigarettes or various activities, we are initially wired to enjoy the things that will help to preserve our species. The release of stress and/or the calming of our nerves that occurs when we enjoy these things cause our brains to believe our vices are preserving us, even when those things are harmful.

I must confess, I love ice cream sandwiches. The problem is, I can't eat just one. If I were to lower my guard and buy a box of these tasty treats, I would most definitely eat the entire box. So, like the disciplined karate master I am, I do the right thing and walk right on by the ice cream section at the market – well, most of the time.

My question is, "Am I able to do this 90 percent of the time because my martial arts training has helped me master my love for ice cream sandwiches? My students who were once addicts say they could not have gotten through their rehab experience without their martial arts training. I'm not a doctor, but my understanding from what they tell me is that the focus and discipline helped to retrain the way their mind operated while fighting addiction. As a karate instructor, you couldn't give me a more beautiful compliment.

And just so you know, I took that stupid snack machine out of the center. I figured if they were hungry enough, these students could go in the kitchen and eat something that was going to make them a better student. That wasn't a popular move, of course. But that's what you do when you're surrounded by young minds that can't make a good judgment call.

As for us older students, I can only hope that we learn to retrain the dopamine pathways inside of our heads. That way, we can become better students in life and a better example for all the young "Hot Cheetos" lovers watching us out there. I've always been an advocate: karate, to me, seems to be the real dope. ✨