

## Goal vs. Purpose

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*A goal is only a milestone. Martial artists should strive to develop a purpose.  
—Hanshi Richard Kim*

For decades Bushido-kai's application for dojo admission asked, "What is your purpose in studying the martial arts?" A separate question asked, "How long do you intend to study?" one of the multiple-choice answers was "until I make black belt." Many students get their motivating goals and their eventual purpose conflated. If you want to study martial arts so you can reap a physical revenge on a high school bully, perhaps a year of study will be enough. Of course by training in a traditional budo for a year, you might just discover that revenge may be a sourer crop than you wish to harvest. Training for an extended time instead may make one recognize the deeper values of budo training. If one wants to perfect a person, a training duration that approaches "forever" may be more appropriate.

I suspect that when Hanshi Kim suggested a purpose for each martial artist, he meant an individual definition of HOW a person would go about self-perfection, not IF he should. Admittedly, most people do not consciously study martial arts for the expressed purpose of self-perfection. To do so would be admitting they need to improve themselves, so instead people claim they are looking for exercise or an activity for a couple of nights a week. In other words, they substitute minor benefits for a big pay-off they may unconsciously seek. What if they *consciously* sought it?

In the process of self-perfection, they may pass a milestone like "confident that I have the ability to hospitalize Ralph Sarcastic, my high school nemesis" without having to meet Ralph on an abandoned athletic field and hand him his teeth. Milestones like these may serve as motivating goals, but if they are the end-goal, the larger purpose, they are not only morally questionable, but take a limousine (the traditional martial arts) where a bike ride (a weekend's training in how to swing a shillelagh) could have delivered them.

Because a goal is only a milestone, it can also be a millstone. What happens when you achieve your goal? Motivated to be a tough dude, you now feel that your arms are shillelaghs the sight of which would make Mr. Sarcastic ralph his lunch on the floor. True, you can beat your chest for a while, but then what? Will you set a new goal and a new means of attaining it? Perhaps you want to be able to carry a tune. To that end, you buy a karaoke machine and sing along until you can do a good imitation of Frank Sinatra's cousin Guido. Fine. Now you move on to cold calling for Jimmy Fund donations so you won't get your buttocks in a bunch every time you call a woman for a date. There is nothing wrong with little goals adding up to a bigger person—but that's the point: these smaller goals imply a bigger purpose, and that purpose is self-development. The easiest way to develop oneself is (a) to be aware of the mountain you are climbing, and (b) to choose a path that is challenging but accessible.

Your goals are the visible outcroppings like green belt, brown belt, your first tournament, mastering that kata that always gave you trouble, kicking more than twice without falling down, etc. Your larger goal may be stated as “a master’s title” but in reality what you mean is that you have the unstated purpose of “goaling” yourself into being better. One can be better than one was before, but can never be better enough. Nevertheless, one tries. And that’s the purpose of training.