

## Lost Grandeur?

The years go by and now the boy is twenty.  
Though his dreams have lost some grandeur coming true,  
There'll be new dreams, maybe better dreams and plenty  
Before the last revolving year is through.

--"The Circle Game", Joni Mitchell

Do you remember when you dreamed about becoming a black belt? You'd be the envy of your friends, feared by your enemies, and easily be able to defend your family from masked assailants and the honor of your auto from those who wish to filch your parking spaces.

Some of you had even loftier dreams of becoming an instructor, or a master, or a master instructor. Many of us have achieved our dreams, framed our certificates, and through many training sessions seen our black belts turn to gray then white, along with our hair. At the same time, we have seen other martial artists do the same and realize that although the man- or woman-on-the-street could not have done what we did, what we did was not rare—somewhat uncommon perhaps, but not rare. In realizing that, the grandeur of achievement is lost to some extent, so we reset our sights on grander goals.

When you arrive at your new goal, you realize that you are now part of a smaller, but still not so small, community. Let's say you become an instructor and, with a *sandan* rank, open a branch of your main dojo. The thrill of being the head honcho is intoxicating for a while until the reality of the job sets in and you realize that being responsible for a half-dozen to several score students is not just a matter of standing in front of the class counting in an Asian language (something you already could do pretty well as a training assistant), but a matter of worrying that you are serving your students the correct cup of tea and doing so elegantly, honorably, and honestly. You get to know other instructors from your federation or from other schools in your area and think how much better a job you are doing with so much less self-aggrandizement. You see other guys of your rank back in the old dojo, not having to bear the burdens of instructing except for an occasional class when sensei is away, now ready to take their next exam because they have had the time to train for it and the partners with whom to train. "Hey," you say to yourself, "this instructor stuff is not giving me the bennies I had expected. Those guys are going to pass me in rank pretty soon and there is not a darn thing I can do about it." Time to set another goal.

You figure out a way to teach your classes, take a lesson once a week at *hombu*, and get your next couple of ranks in near-record time. But something doesn't feel right. You are not quite as excited about your potential achievements as you were about receiving your black belt or being an instructor. It takes more work than you thought and there is less adulation from others, less feeling of accomplishment, less sense of...grandeur.

Do you think that campaigning to be a candidate for President of The United States is compensated by the fun of the job? Do think that once president, you get to be adored, envied, and carried around each of the

fifty states on a palanquin? In fact, you work hard and bear ridiculous hardships in order to have a job in which you work hard and bear ridiculous hardships. You don't do it for the grandeur.

We can't return. We can only look behind from where we came  
And go round and round and round in the circle game.

After you've lived your life in budo, you realize that grandeur was an immature goal. It is only after looking at what you have done with yourself over the years that you are certain you would not have changed your initial path. Budo provides the goals. Having a goal helps with achievement. But achievement is not valuable for its grandeur. It is simply a way to live your life that demands little of others while interacting productively with them and working toward goals that the famed psychologist Abraham Maslow might have called self-actualizing. Living up to your potential is not arriving at some sort of grandeur. Aiming toward some sort of grandeur allows you to live up to your potential.