

## *Measuring One's Goal of Perfection*

A lot was made in latter twentieth century society of relativism. Since Einstein (even now the emblem of the ultimate genius) let us know that “everything is relative”, we have managed to sneak the concept of relativism into every aspect of human society. We have relativistic ethics, relativistic scoring of kids’ recreational games, relativistic success, grading on the curve, relativistic promotions in school, and relatively gourmet foods (among other things). Perfection, since it is, almost by definition, unachievable, has endured the same barrage of relativism. People are afraid of any “absolute” standards because, gosh, they might actually not measure up. Of course, to the extent that perfection is twisted and turned into the relativistic mode, it can mean almost anything and is therefore no longer worthy of aspiration. The problem with perfection is that it has no definition. The problem with relativism is that the definition of quality changes all the time.

If you say you train for perfection in the martial arts, you have to define what you mean. If you want to make the definition relative to age, injury, or ability to obtain quality instruction, okay, but please redefine what you mean, at least *for now*. There may be no objective state of perfection in human endeavor, but let us at least, point to some levels to which we want to aspire, relative to where we were. The tried and true areas tend to be the Physical, Mental and Spiritual. Okay, good start.

### PHYSICAL

Do you want to be in shape for your age or able to kick head high while sparring two Celtic centers both carrying 8-foot staves? (The first is a Relative Measurement, the second is fanciful but more Objective.)

Does it matter that you can do 50 push-ups and 15 chin-ups, or will 20 and 3 do? Do you have to be able to run 5 miles or will walking 2 suffice? (Objective Measurements), or is okay to do 90% of the national average for your age? (Relative Measurement.)

### MENTAL

Is your goal of perfections to know something about every martial system on the planet, or maybe just every style of your specific art (Objective Measurement)? Or just to know more history than most people your rank (Relative Measurement)?

### SPIRITUAL

Do you want to be able to meditate for an hour (Objective Measurement), drawing strength from the Tao (Relative Measurement), or do you want to know that your spirit cannot be brought down either by challenge or adversity (Objective & Relative Measurement)?

I do not have to indulge in too many more examples before you get the idea. We try to train for perfection, but perfection is ours to define, qualify, quantify, or describe. In other words, all ideas of perfection if they are to be measured objectively, must be defined subjectively. All ideas of training toward perfection, even

when objectified as much as possible, will change as our age increases and our situation is modified. To maintain achievement, one must be inspired. To be inspired, one must feel one can achieve! So, we approach the ultimate goal of perfection by achieving lesser, more relativistic goals.

I do not support the idea in society that EVERYTHING is relative. It gives people no incentive to perfect themselves and too much incentive to fool themselves into thinking they have achieved. But I do understand and support the use of smaller, relativistic goals to propel one along the road to mastery while one's eyes are on the unattainable peak. Think about those goals in your own school. The curriculum sets rank goals for you, but you set intermediate, sometime relative goals for yourself. The school awards you with the objective goal of black belt or teaching credential, but you set additional relative goals of being incrementally the best you can be — whether or not to achieve perfection.

*NEXT TIME: The OTHER field of measurement — The Social.*