

Now What Do You Have?

Assume, for the sake of this exercise, that you are at the end of your martial arts career. You are now 107 years old and your family and friends have gathered round to hear your final wisdom.

They talk to each other about everything you have accomplished in your 90 years of budo training and teaching. You have earned eleventeenth dan in several arts, written umpteenth books, and promoted to the level of master more students than freckles on Ms. Maudie McMurphy's mother. But that is not what *you* are thinking about. Those are accomplishments, signifiers to the outside world that someone of note has been there. Internally, however, you are reviewing just what you have *become* having done the martial arts for so long.

First, you note to yourself, "I have been in good health most of my years. I have become a healthy person." That must be due to regular exercise and a devotion to personal training rather than just making others perspire in the dojo.

Then you have become a lot less aggressive and angry than you used to be. "I have become a warmer, friendlier, more tolerant person." With nothing to prove, you felt the world would be better if people kept their swords sheathed and diminished the rattling, too. You have had an opportunity to meet all sorts of people in all sorts of locations and, to the best of your ability, made friends with those you respected.

You have learned how the human body works, albeit in a non-medical way, and your knowledge has kept you from making bad exercise choices and has helped your students over minor injuries. "I have become a good source of information that benefits others." You have shared your knowledge with others so someday they can surpass your knowledge and pass on the wisdom. Teaching was your way of paying it forward. "I have become a grateful, appreciative person."

True, if you had not become a martial artist, perhaps your personality would have driven you to similar characteristics in whatever area you chose to concentrate, but the arts were a terrific tool to express your personality, benefit yourself while benefiting others, and do so honestly and respectfully.

Your friends and family are with you to hear old war-stories, dirty little secrets about the famous martial artists you have rubbed shoulders with, and to pat themselves on the back for having been associated with such an accomplished fellow. It is difficult for you to explain to them that that sort of self-aggrandizement by association is an immature phase that some martial artists never rise above.

How can you make them understand that martial arts as self-development is not the same as winning trophies, gaining ranks and titles, or even getting a book in print? There is nothing wrong with any of those achievements, but recognition for its own sake can be like the inverse of what the scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz* experienced. The Wizard's conferring on him a Doctorate of Thinkology

gave Scarecrow the confidence to realize his own intelligence. Outside of Oz, many people believe that the recognition by some external source is the same as the achievement itself.

In your 90 years of martial arts, if you win your eleventeenth dans by dubious means, have Speedy Copy print your umphteen books so you could call them “published”, and confer certificates of mastery on freckled faced students who were more motivated by recognition than achievement, what has the martial arts really done for you?

The martial arts per se do not impart personal benefits; rather, you personally draw benefits from the potential of the martial arts. You can use budo to be a big shot to yourself or even to become a *meijin* to others. In either case you satisfy your need to be recognized. At 107 years old, it won't matter how big a fish you were or how big was your pond unless you are satisfied that you did the best you could do with the tools you had.

More next week.