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Why do we persist in respecting hard work, but continue to be fascinated with and pay more attention to what is perceive as Natural Talent?

Awe is the reaction we feel when we *cannot* explain something. Because I prefer to explain everything I teach so that the astute student can replicate it, eventually if not immediately, any respect I may have won seldom turns to awe. My “sufficiently advanced technology” having been explained, it no longer appears as magic but as the result of my hard work.

Why do we seem to prefer that emotional state of awe? I have previously stated that awe can inspire further effort on our part, something to which to aspire, but I suspect there is another reason that we are loathe to admit, and that surreptitiously opposes our supposed respect for hard work.

When we hold something, some person, or some goal in awe, while at the same time using it as an inspiration for our further achievements, we imply that we are willing to work *without knowing how to proceed*. We have a goal but no means or no path leading there. We imply that our blind following of the training regimen will eventually bring results in ways we cannot name nor understand. Certainly, students have experienced this in the past. They have become much better at their art than they were previously simply by training diligently, but they cannot say how they arrived at their newfound success. Following one’s instructor with blinders on is a heck of a lot better than not having anyone to follow or wandering in the martial wilderness, but at some point, blinders become tedious and keep one from seeing both the benefits and deficits of things along the road.

Why would a student settle for a destination but no map to lead him there? Is it too difficult to fashion one’s own map? Perhaps, so we use our schools’ methods as maps. That makes good sense, especially early in our training. What map did our school (and our instructor) follow? Obviously, he followed his instructor’s map. If his instructor had been so amazing at his art that we hold him in awe, perhaps astutely working on his curriculum is exactly the way for us to go. But what if we hold him in awe only because he is our instructor’s instructor? Does he then exemplify the qualities that we supposedly hold in awe? Or would we rather hold distant masters in awe and remain in the dark about how they achieved their awesomeness?

I suspect that more people favor the latter. By holding a goal in awe and not knowing how to accomplish it, we have a built-in excuse for failure. Sure, we know that constant training will make us improve, but we needn’t be concerned with improving to that level we hold in awe. After all, that martial luminary was *naturally talented*, so how could we expect to equal his prowess?

Without neglecting the importance of natural gifts (flexibility for kicks, leg-strength for straight-line attackers, or quick reactions for self-defense aficionados), holding someone else’s natural gifts in awe means we might have to try twice as hard as they to achieve the same results. Not knowing exactly what to try twice as hard means we cannot be blamed for not achieving that result. Awe implies mystery—a lack of understanding.

We hold “natural talented” people or “geniuses” in awe because it is a respectful way to take it easy on ourselves.