

HERO

The Path Through
Jiu Jitsu and Life

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Hero: The Path Through

Jiu Jitsu and Life

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INTRODUCTION

On Jiu Jitsu Revisited

I wrote *On Jiu Jitsu* in the winter of 2017, a book about how Jiu Jitsu impacts our character and the process by which that development transcends across the entirety of our humanity.

The readership since publication reveals what I have long thought: that our community has little desire for any further written instructions on the application of techniques. Our instructors and YouTube more than meet that need. What we want—what we tacitly seek—is an explicit narrative of what Jiu Jitsu is in the context of our lives.

On Jiu Jitsu has been my most read book and has the least to do with the actual practice of Jiu Jitsu. I believe this is because we are becoming increasingly aware of the problem we face and the solution we've discovered.

Life has become too easy to make us hard. Jiu Jitsu serves as the foundation upon which we grow in the ways our modern

environment does not demand, by creating the resistance which develops our virtues and pacifies our vices.

Survival in the gentle art requires an adaptive response to the resistance the environment creates. All facets of our being are trained—body, mind, and spirit—often without our conscious intent. It is the implicitness of that which is trained which explicitly demonstrates a need unmet.

Society serves as the foundation upon which the individual confronts his or her inherent weakness and the challenges of his or her environment. But when a society protects the individual from the struggles of nature, the easy access to primary needs results in a lack of adaptation, the adaptation which the individual uses to ultimately revivify and improve that society.

The ease of our living makes for the difficulty of our development. Our communal successes have sacrificed inner development at the altar of our comfort.

Jiu Jitsu is the antidote to the shortcomings of our environment. Success in this discipline requires the development of transdisciplinary skills and character traits which permeate into the rest of our lives. We are training our most fundamental self, the “I” with which we act out the various roles of our lives. Should we proceed properly through the resistance we encounter, we must let go of that which does not serve us—our vice—and acquire modes of

behavior which lead to success in this discipline and therefore all disciplines—our virtues.

For many of us, Jiu Jitsu is the only avenue in which we consciously pursue the development of virtue outside of our religion. Religion offers a clearly articulated ideal to strive toward, a judge with which you measure the quality of your behavior, strengthened by the shared pursuit the community of the church offers.

We find something very similar in the Jiu Jitsu academy occurring with an uncommon sincerity. We pay attention to our thoughts and actions and judge ourselves according to a worthy ideal. We purposefully aim up, and it is this development that leads to the growth of our teammates.

We are only as good as the people we train with; therefore, when you develop your abilities—and your capacity to articulate the knowledge you have acquired—you become more valuable to your group. You allow your development to inform their own, embodying the role of the guide as you share your discovered truths with your teammates.

We embody the same process off the mat, albeit more discretely. We tacitly share the development of our character with all whom we interact. You may not bring your guard passing into the office; but you bring the sincerity, attention, and humility you cultivated in the attempt to learn that guard pass.

In *On Jiu Jitsu*, I described this progress along the continuum of virtues and vice with three fundamental pairs: humility and pride, resolve and weakness, efficacy and ignorance. When the positive aspect of these poles is practiced and improved, its accompanying negative aspect is invariably lessened.

“Really, the fundamental, ultimate mystery—the only thing you need to know to understand the deepest metaphysical secrets—is this: that for every outside there is an inside and for every inside there is an outside, and although they are different, they go together.”
- Alan Watts

When a student wants to understand how to better defend leg locks, often his best path forward is to learn how to attack with them. This principle holds true in physiology, as a sure-fire way to increase flexibility of a stubbornly tight muscle is to activate its antagonist.

In the same fashion, if you seek to pacify your consuming pride, focus on the cultivation of humility rather than the removal of the vice. Virtues, like leg locks, are skills—habits of action, a process—and rather than changing a bad habit directly, we are far more likely to succeed should we seek to develop its counterpart.

Jiu Jitsu addresses our first pairing of humility and pride because everyone knows something we do not, and though we may be senior in rank relative to our teammate, we may be junior in our understanding of a position, technique, or

concept. Humility frees us of our self-imposed limitations by helping us repeatedly find value outside of ourselves, coming to an awareness that if we are to achieve anything, our success is due to all those who cross our path.

Our teammates are embodiments of the unknown, that mysterious other which possesses the key to our continued evolution. We are confined to a perpetual process: as we confront the unknown and acquire new skills, we stand on the foundation of our knowledge and can now see a greater horizon of ignorance. An increase in education, when viewed through the proper phenomenological lens, should be accompanied by an increased understanding of one's limitation in an ever-increasing unknowable plane of existence.

The only way to progress through Jiu Jitsu is to fail repeatedly and with each failure come to a better understanding of your own limitation. By feeding your humility, you starve your pride.

The second pairing of virtues and vices is Resolve and Weakness. Whether you are a steward of your abilities, or actively stifling your potential, depends upon where you lie on the resolve-weakness continuum. Our highest selves are found on the far side of a lifetime of choosing continuous effort in the face of resistance.

The resolve which we show in Jiu Jitsu, leading to our unique form of mastery, is the same resolve which allows us to

achieve skill in any other area of our lives. Our opportunity for success in grappling reveals an opportunity for success in all activities. *I'm not good at that.* Nonsense. You require a high number of repetitions to achieve mastery, and you have yet to achieve that number. Meet that number and you'll find your skill.

But in the skill of living we possess no commonly agreed upon metric for success. Our values are uniquely our own. There is rarely observable punishment for weakness in adult life. The real cost comes at the loss of life we will fail to live, the potential we squander—a missed opportunity due to an improper use of finite time and attention.

This is codified by the final pairing of Efficacy and Ignorance. This is the measure of all skill, the ability to create what is intended. I never realized how inefficient I was until I began my study of Jiu Jitsu. The organization of this practice revealed how haphazardly I had pursued everything else.

“There are remarkable people who come into the world from time to time, and there are people who do find out over decades long periods what they could be like if they were who they were. If they spoke their being forward.”-Jordan Peterson

This is the goal of this book—to efficiently speak that being forward. To offer the reader a simple schema through which to interpret his or her training that allows for the continual adaptation our progress requires. Picking up where *On Jiu*

Jitsu left off, we are going to explore the best path forward through Jiu Jitsu: to embody the behavioral process of the archetypal hero.

Jiu Jitsu is a vehicle for immense personal development. We've all experienced this. The following is an attempt to understand this process clearly—to make its constituent elements explicit and semantic—so that we may manifest this development as efficiently as possible.

To do so properly, we must define the terms.

Defining Jiu Jitsu as a Vehicle for Personal Development

I have been writing about using Jiu Jitsu as a vehicle for personal development for years, and the furthest this articulation has gone is to define Jiu Jitsu as an environment which demands adaptation, specifically the development of virtues and removal of vices. This description is lacking.

Jordan Peterson contends that you cannot remember what you do not understand. If we do not clearly articulate what “vehicle for personal development” means, we cannot truly understand it, and this absence of knowledge makes us more liable to get knocked off the straight and narrow path when life’s obstacles inevitably arise.

Jiu Jitsu has given me a basic lens through which to interpret my experience and act in the most productive way, whether in my writing, business, relationships, or health. But how? What is Jiu Jitsu—in its essence—which creates such all-encompassing growth?

The Competence Hierarchy and The Hero

Jordan Peterson has argued against the post-modernism attempts of equality of outcome, citing that nature’s most fundamental form of organization is competence hierarchies. Animals, humans, and organizations compete within a fixed space for finite resources. This competition breeds winners and losers, as those most suitable for success in their

environment ascend their hierarchy and enjoy greater opportunities for continued advancement.

Ascending one's hierarchy of competence comes with perks: financial gain—as an increase in skill within one's field makes one more valuable to the marketplace, and therefore able to charge more; relationships—having become more valuable, you are more desirable to potential mates; business advancement—the ascension of the hierarchy increases access to resources and raises your peer group, providing access to others of similar success and allowing for increased potential business opportunities.

Perhaps even more important than those immediate opportunities are the skills one cultivates during his or her ascension. IQ is a form of general intelligence, an indicator of cross-disciplinary success. The higher one's IQ the more likely they are to achieve success in alternative domains. A form of intelligence, and I am beginning to believe what is the most important type of intelligence, is the ability to ascend competence hierarchies.

Each hierarchy is governed by the specifics of that arena—consider the differences in skills between a chef and a plumber—but the underlying principles of competence (and the cultivation of further competence through skill acquisition) are the same.

The development of skill-acquisition is of primary importance for the individual aspiring to elevate the quality of his or her life.

Jiu Jitsu is a vehicle for personal development because it is a hierarchy in which ascension requires universe skills that translate across disciplines. It is the ability to pay attention, face resistance head on, and repeat this process that we learn on the mats which makes us better everywhere else. By climbing the Jiu Jitsu hierarchy, you learn the mode of operations which climbs all hierarchies.

“Master one thing, master all things, because you’ve mastered yourself.”

This is simultaneously master over one’s self and one’s environment, but we must pay that environment its due. It is the environment which makes such mastery possible, as the competence hierarchy breeds masters through a Darwinian selection. It is only after this selection that the rest of us struggle to codify those constituent elements of success which made such advancement possible and then embody those attributes ourselves.

Jordan Peterson described this process while on the Joe Rogan podcast, stating that over the course of history, humanity has watched the successful among us climb these hierarchies and told stories of their virtue, and through this narrative created the concept of the hero. We’ve watched the successful among us and abstracted out the commonalities

between them, using this amalgamation to determine what is meta-admirable, the ultimate hero.

But heroes come in so many different forms—Harry Potter, Achilles, Michael Jordan, and the single mom who works two jobs to support her family. What is it that exists across these heroes and domains which unites them? What is the fundamental characteristic of the meta-hero?

In mythology, the hero is the one who goes out and kills the dragon, gets the gold, and returns this treasure to his people. The hero is the one who protects his homeland when the strangers invade. The hero is the one who through revolutionary adaptation revivifies his dead culture through the spoken word. The hero is the one who stabilizes the community brought into chaos through natural disaster.

The meta-hero, then, is the one who voluntarily confronts the unknown (or chaos, or evil, or entropy) on behalf of the Good.

Mythology, Literature, and Religion have implicitly codified the aim of personal development, told through the heroic narratives passed down through generations. Thinkers like Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, and Jordan Peterson have taken these foundational aspects of phenomenology and made them explicit. It is the semantic representation of the wisdom of these stories which can provide the proper valence to optimize our actions in the world.

Clichés aside, we are the heroes of our own story, each encountering difficulty in our environment. Though the personal aspects of our experience are unique to us, the act of facing such resistance is universal.

We are subjective creatures heading toward a goal encountering novelty. There are countless unseen variables met along the path. We are too limited to consciously and fully grapple with potential. Our ignorance far outweighs our knowledge, and we are often paralyzed by choice as a result.

But the understanding of the behavior process of the archetypal hero frees us from such paralysis. The environments change but the meta-action remains. This schema provides sufficient information to act properly—at least to the degree that is possible—independent of circumstance.

I believe Jiu Jitsu is the environment which cultivates the development of these meta-skills, the constituent elements of transdisciplinary mastery, which are the source of universal success. This is the focus of this book, to allow the wisdom of the humanities to guide our optimal development in Jiu Jitsu, and in so doing, the rest of our humanity.

To the degree that we embody the behavior patterns of the archetypal hero, we will make our will manifest in the world as we ascend the competence hierarchy of Jiu Jitsu and develop the abilities which make for success across disciplines.

It is an adoption of responsibility to view one's self as the hero, to take complete ownership for the particulars of one's experience and respond to your environment in the most productive way.

This is our adventure, and we begin this exploration with a look at the trait all heroes share which informs their legendary actions: vision.

I

PAY ATTENTION

Clear Vision

“Without vision, the people perish.”
- Proverbs 29:18 KJV

Mythology has been attempting to convey the importance of vision from the beginning. In the Mesopotamian creation myth, the Enuma Elis, the God Marduk has eyes that go all the way around his head and he speaks magic words, as he constructs habitable order out of chaos by catching Tiamat, the goddess of destruction (chaos, the unknown) in a net (a conceptual framework) and cutting her into pieces to make the world.

Thousands of years later, this need for vision becomes more explicit with the well-known Egyptian God Horus, the falcon, represented with the eye with the open pupil. Predatory birds have the best vision on the planet and thus have represented

this paramount virtue cross-culturally, holding prime real estate in the symbolism of mythologies across time.

A leader is one who has a clear vision. People will only follow you if you know and clearly articulate where you are going—*if you have eyes that go around your head and the ability to speak magic words*. The first skill of the hero is to embody this process, to see clearly as he pays attention to the unfolding story in which he plays a part.

The leader must codify the desired future and the means by which he and his community will make this utopian dream manifest. This relationship between the hero and his culture is symbiotic. Society must support the development of the individual, fulfilling the necessary needs at the foundation of Maslow's pyramid, so that he may strive toward self-actualization. The hero's task, once standing on the foundation that culture provides, is to pursue that actualization through voluntary encounter of the unknown, in which he acquires something new and revivifying to the culture which made his pursuit possible.

It is the open eye, vision, that knows what part of society is dead—that knows what part of the unknown must be encountered to acquire what his people need, with an understanding of how to bring this anomalous information back.

Paying attention is not analytical thinking. Paying attention is observation—for entropy, malevolence, or novelty—which

informs future action. Our collective wisdom understands this. Our symbols have been striving to make this knowledge articulate. You may need look no farther than your pocket.

Reach into your wallet and take out a dollar bill. Look at the back. Notice the pyramid with the eye at the top. This eye—clear vision—that rests at the top of the pyramid is that which allows one to transcend that pyramid.

At the top of the pyramid is something which is not beholden to that pyramid. At the top of the hierarchy is something which transcends that hierarchy. Demonstrated in a literal sense, the higher you climb an actual pyramid the farther you can see; the horizon (possibility, knowledge, opportunity) expands as you ascend any given pyramid (hierarchy, domain, skill).

The same is true abstractly: it is the vision which allowed your ascension in your given domain which you bring with you into all other domains; the attention I acquired and practiced in Jiu Jitsu is the same attention I use while writing these words.

The hero watches and allows his observation to inform his actions. His eyes are open, constantly. He is perpetually facing a changing landscape and voluntarily confronting that change to transcend it, incorporating what experience has to teach to inform future action and increase the odds of future success.

The hero's vision is the prerequisite for progress. He must understand where he is, with an honest assessment of his lot and that of his people, and then aim at a distant vision of the future deemed more worthwhile/meaningful/stable than his current experience. But the articulation of the goal is no easy task:

“Vice in abundance is easy to get
The road is smooth and begins beside you,
But the gods have put sweat between us and virtue
and a road that is long, rough, and steep.”
-Hesiod

Though there are infinite interpretations to be made of a given landscape and the subsequent path which runs through it, there are only a handful of viable options—often only one option—which leads to your desired future. It is the goal which determines the path.

It is your goal that determines what you see.

How We See

Jordan Peterson has taught a sound tripartite structure through which to interpret experience: we are somewhere, we have a vision of a somewhere which would be better than where we are, and we have an idea of how we should act to make that desired future manifest.

Though our lives appear different on the surface, at their core we each inhabit this shared structure. We are goal-oriented creatures always striving toward a goal with a plan of how to do so.

We do this on the mat. *My guard passing is terrible. I want to pass the guard as well as Professor does. I am going to watch Professor train and mimic what he does in order to do so.*

We do this at home. *My wife and I are bickering a lot lately. I want to live in a state of familial harmony. We should sit down, talk through our problems, and come to a resolution that makes manifest our desired experience.*

We are always doing this. We know we are doing this. But if we do not clearly articulate this process, we will do so inefficiently. It is highly unlikely that we will achieve an implicit goal—there are too many potential outcomes, all more likely than our pursuit of our personal paradise, vying for manifestation.

We each have our own reasons for training Jiu Jitsu. The particulars of our experience determine the lens through which we interpret our training, as our goal beckons us forth. It is that goal which gives valence—be it positive or negative—to all our experiences in the academy.

If my goal is to win the local NAGA in two weeks, then the twenty-something ex-wrestler is the exact training partner I

need to create the competition-like experience that will improve my chances of winning. But if I'm a forty-something father of two, just trying to keep my cholesterol down, the scrapes and bruises that I get from this same training partner impede my ability to look professional at my board meeting tomorrow.

Said training partner is interpreted phenomenologically. It is our goal which changes what he is, though he remains unchanged in his essence. Being a goal-oriented creature (and we are always a goal-oriented creature) divides the world into three camps: tools, obstacles, and that which is irrelevant. This is what allows a tool for one goal to simultaneously represent itself as an obstacle for another.

We act in the following manner:

We begin at status quo (what is), we know where we want to go (our desired future), and we implement a process to manifest this transformation. But along the path, we encounter novelty—something we did not expect, or if we did, something we did not define. If this person, place, or thing is irrelevant, meaning that it does not affect our movement toward our goal, we rarely see it. Much of our experience falls into this category. What we do notice is that which either aids or impedes our movement toward our goal, and it is this relationship to our goal that gives something positive or negative valence, causing positive or negative emotion.

The twenty something ex-wrestler has not changed. He just wants to come in and train hard. It is your goal, however, that changes what he is *for you*.

The world unceasingly manifests itself in relationship to our goal. If we are to navigate our experience in the most productive way, we must have a clearly defined goal which will provide the valance—positive and negative attribution—that turns objects into goals or obstacles on the way toward our desired future.

Articulate the Goal: The Mountain

Formulation of one's goal is difficult. We are complex creatures, consisting of many impulses and drives which do not often act in harmony. As each desire simultaneously vies for attention and expression, they work at conflicting purposes with one another, causing immense intrapsychic friction.

This is the source of the failure we experience when our New Year's resolutions don't come to fruition. There is a part of us that wants to go to the gym. There is another part which begs to sit on the couch and relax. These desires are forces acting upon us, and until we properly articulate their nature, they will continue to act upon us and we will call them fate.

To find the optimal path forward, we must understand toward what all those sub-personalities aim, and then having clearly articulated the purpose of your total self, arrange your inner drives so that they run parallel with one another, in pursuit of a single goal as a widely flowing channel of will.

Having established that heading, a concise axiomatic vocabulary must be created so that we can properly navigate the incessant bombardment of choices which meet us each day. Neil Gaiman described this in his commencement address, *Make Good Art*, labeling his distant goal as a mountain. And when the many opportunities of success came knocking, he would guide his decisions based on whether they were taking him towards or away from his mountain:

“I said no to editorial jobs on magazines, proper jobs that would have paid proper money because I knew that, attractive though they were, for me they would have been walking away from the mountain.”

This is the value of a clearly articulated goal: the profound ability to make difficult decisions amid conflicting motivations in accordance with your truest path. This mountain is an ideal—judging all your potential futures with a wisdom you can’t consciously articulate.

Once our soul defines the mountain, we have access to a GPS which tells us how to get there. Socrates called this his daemon, believing that he was different from other men because he unfailingly acted according to its dictates. We all

have such a voice. Our conscience. The faint whispers of which become the audible screams of chaos when left unacknowledged.

You know the voice. The one that encourages you to eat the salad, read the book, and run the hill. The one that tells you to stop that habit—maybe drinking, smoking, or too much Instagram before bed—that impedes your ability to achieve your potential. That voice directs us toward our mountain by directing us away from our vices.

We are a collection of many selves, and until they are aligned in accordance with our highest values, we will continually impede our own path forward. We think of discipline as a matter of will. *I did not achieve my fitness goal because I'm undisciplined.* This is too myopic.

I believe discipline is more a result of adherence to a clearly articulated goal, an adherence made possible by aligning those subpersonalities toward a single end through a hierarchal structure. Discipline is more properly considered a matter of intellect and attention—a purposeful organization and adherence to a hierarchy of values—than it is of will. If the intellect clearly defines the mountain and therefore the valence of all potential actions, brought forth through axiomatic aphorisms which can be called upon each time novelty is encountered, there will be a high likelihood of advancement toward our goal.

The clear articulation of one's mountain makes such discipline possible. It was the study of Jordan Peterson and Carl Jung which revealed the best means of doing so.

How To Know It's Your Mountain

“You can use meaning to orient yourself in your life.”

This is the conclusion Jordan Peterson came to at the end of his 2017 *Maps of Meaning* lecture series, an exploratory process which sought to understand the belief systems that drive individuals and nations. Echoing the sincerity of thought that Nietzsche described as thinking with a hammer, Peterson found himself unable to refute his conclusion. A conclusion he came to, in part, thanks to Carl Jung's archetype of the Self.

The Self is an archetype of wholeness; it is what you would be if you sorted yourself out completely. It is that distant mountain that beckons you forward by speaking as your conscience today. Perhaps it is better said: your mountain is what you would make manifest in the world if you made your Self manifest within.

You can tell you are moving toward your mountain when you experience meaning. Meaning is that sense of being in the zone—one foot in order and the other in chaos—when time ceases to exist and hours pass without your realizing.

During this time, “you” aren’t exactly there. Having immersed yourself in a medium, you have lost yourself as you allow your deeper Self to come forth. This is when you are moving toward your mountain. This is when you know that the path you walk is the one that was meant for you.

Sometimes you will feel you walk many paths at once, as you strive to progress in business, family, and personal pursuits. This complexity is managed by aligning those paths with what rests at the top of your value hierarchy. When we have sorted ourselves out, we see commonalities that exist across our many endeavors which unite them in an over-arching pursuit.

Abstracting Cross Disciplinary Meaning From Your Mountain

I have found great meaning in my training of Jiu Jitsu and my study of the humanities. Driven by something which transcends willpower, I was pulled to spend most of my hours in these disciplines. There was no push required. I’ve been caught in the undertow of meaning which sweeps me toward my mountain.

Jiu Jitsu and the humanities seem different on the surface, but to provide one soul with such meaning, they must share a common aim; a meta-pursuit, holding primacy over the vehicles through which such meaning is manifested. There is

a deep need seeking fulfillment through these disciplines, which transcends these disciplines.

For myself, I believe training Jiu Jitsu and reading great works are expressions of my personal myth, as I strive to embody the archetype of the hero by voluntarily confronting the unknown.

My obsession with guard passing has been no different from my compulsion to study Jordan Peterson: each is an attempt to make habitable order out of chaos so that I can improve my circumstance and the lives of those around me. This is my *modus operandi*, the basic schema through which I interpret all experience when I am acting according to my deepest values.

This is my goal, my mountain: to become a man who has lived his life voluntarily confronting the unknown on behalf of the Good.

The tangible manifestations of such will vary—from profession, family, and personal pursuits—but fundamentally all endeavors will serve as vehicles for the fulfillment of this calling.

Voluntarily confront the unknown on behalf of the Good is a powerful phrase, derived from Peterson, which must place special emphasis on *voluntary*. Our nervous system responds differently when we confront something as opposed to when

we are confronted by it. It's the difference between responding to an event as predator or prey.

We must inevitably confront that which we fear, so we might as well be proactive: meeting that challenge on our own terms, embodying the process of the archetypal hero who confronts the dragon in his lair before the dragon confronts him at home.

Our unconscious possesses this wisdom. In dreams, when you run away from the monster he grows as you shrink. But when you lean into the problem, when you voluntarily face the dragon, the beast shrinks as you grow. To voluntarily confront the unknown is to actively pursue that distant mountain rather than waiting for the mountain to come to you.

This process of exploration is what I exercise through my training in Jiu Jitsu. Beyond all the fun, community, and intellectual intrigue, my grappling is a vehicle through which I exercise the most fundamental part of my being. This understanding gives my training ultimate meaning, allowing for the enthusiasm to continually pursue this art to the degree that I am capable. My continued development becomes a must, not a should, because though I am passing the guard on the mat, I understand that I'm more deeply passing beyond what I am to become what I might be.

This clear articulation of my goal makes me impervious to the weaker aspects of my humanity (those aforementioned sub-personalities) and the many distractions of modern living. I

simply have too much invested in my training to allow myself to wander. I understand that Jiu Jitsu plays an integral role in the advancement toward my mountain.

Grappling serves this function in all our lives, as shown through the meaning we experience during training and the sacrifices we make to be on the mat. It is this clearly defined goal and the acknowledgement of meaning that allows us to do what all great heroes have done.

With clear eyes, we can truly pay attention.

Pay Attention

Once we have articulated our goal, we are provided a system of values that tells us what brings us closer to and away from our mountain. This ability to navigate our experience provides us with the best chance of fulfilling that goal.

We use our words carefully. We “pay” attention. We pay with our limited resources of energy and time. When we choose to go down one road, we do so at the sacrifice of all others. Such permanent and difficult choices are made possible by a clearly articulated goal that properly orients our attention.

Since I started leading warm-ups as a blue belt, my goal was to get paid to teach Jiu Jitsu—to leave the traditional world of employment behind, spending my days on the mat with people I love. This was the mountain which formed the schema through which I interpreted my experience. It revealed the obstacles: pursuing immediate financial gain or late nights with friends that decreased my time on the mat. It showed me the tools: learning the cues of the class warm up so I could adopt more responsibility, watching my instructor to understand the syntax, cadence, timing, and tonality of good teaching, and simply the invaluable pursuit of acquiring as much technical skill as I could manage.

These tools will aid us on the path to the degree that we pay attention. Consider technical development:

You want to develop a world-class triangle strangulation, so you find every single person in the room who is better at triangles than you. You pick their brain and listen closely to their words. You practice the technique with them, feeling their triangle and all the subtleties that you lack.

Then you implement the triangle in your training. Watching closely mid-roll, you look for opportunities to implement the technique, noticing when it works and when it doesn't; diagnosing your successes and failures, as you strive to learn the principles of a strong triangle.

You are careful with this study, so you take notes, recounting what you experienced in training and then re-reading them prior to your next training session.

Maybe the attention you pay transcends your time on the mat. While doing your triangles you notice that you feel some internal resistance in your hip. You just can't seem to pummel that leg in over your partner's neck fast enough. So, you hop on the foam roller and work out the kinks and then stretch the muscle to allow for full range of motion. Now you can wrap that shin around their head like it's nobody's business—actually, it's your business, that's why you've paid such close attention.

Now you've been working this triangle in training for months, and those senior students or teachers whose brains you once picked now don't know any more than you do.

But you still don't know enough.

You explore YouTube and watch the greats in competition. You are, just like every athlete does, watching film. You are paying attention to how they set up the triangle, the maintenance of position against a flailing opponent, and how the finish is achieved. You watch closely and gather information. Having done so, you return to the laboratory, testing your hypothesis as you train and watching what happens.

Through this whole process, whether it was talking, training, foam rolling, or watching YouTube, you exercised the skill of paying attention to direct your actions and improve your knowledge. It is the universal skill that makes everything better, and yet, is that which our modern environment directly opposes.

Obstacles

We live in a double tap, swipe left, scroll down world. Social media is training our brains to need constant new experiences. Tapping into the mammalian neurochemistry that allowed our distant ancestors to forage for food, we forage for information—often with little discernment for the quality of the information.

Biology usually wins. Your genes are begging you to keep going and our technology makes doing so accessible. We are training our minds to be discontented with the present moment and require constant stimulation.

The last time you watched television, were you scrolling through your phone at the same time? Thirty years ago, we were mesmerized by our static-laden 19" television. Now our 60" high definition televisions lack the excitement to hold our attention.

Kids walk into my academy with their eyes glued to iPads, playing games which fuel their dopamine addiction. ADHD

is on the rise, partly because our technological devices have hacked our physiology, making extended concentration a rare feat and heavy price we too seldom pay.

We must combat these temptations by adopting tools that steer us in more worthwhile directions. For me, my primary tool of attention has always been a notebook. For the first eight or so years of my training, I brought a notebook with me onto the mat for every training session. The notebook acted as a review before practice—pre-framing the training session to have a singular purpose (an articulated goal) which guided my training, and then serving as one more rep of attention as I recalled the events of the practice with a post-mortem.

Every training session is an opportunity to learn a previously undiscovered truth. Every mistake is a teacher. We mustn't try to avoid making mistakes; that's impossible. If you are not making mistakes, you are not stretching yourself beyond your current abilities, spending too much time in the known and slowly dying of stagnation.

If you are not failing, you are failing.

With one foot in order and the other in chaos, you must stumble. The real trick is to only make a specific mistake once. Having digested the lesson, you stand on that foundation to make new and better mistakes, rather than stay in the cyclical wheel of repetition without progress. This

requires great attention and holding one's self to a high standard.

Learning From Repeated Themes and Honest Self-Assessment

Carl Jung believed that the journey of personal development was not a linear, uphill trajectory, but rather a spiraling in toward the Self—much like the path of water flowing down a drain. He dubbed this cyclical journey toward the Self, circumambulation.

This process of spiraling inward toward the Self repeats certain themes, as if life continually tries to teach us the same lesson in different forms. If we examine our lives closely, we are likely to find the same problems manifested in different forms, the many guises of one vice that echoes throughout our lives.

Life will continue to give us opportunities to transcend our weakness, but often through stubborn blindness we fail to acknowledge our shortcomings until they grow too large for continued omission. I speak firsthand, as I have continued to over-value physical pursuits while neglecting my health—a foolish consistency which almost destroyed me. We will discuss this adventure later.

Our task is to learn from the lesson, assimilate what it has to teach, and become something better as we travel toward our goal. Our training will repeat certain themes, but we must

make sure that with each cycle we come to a deeper, richer understanding of the craft. Our rolls tend to stay in specific areas of grappling. There are only a finite number of mistakes to be made.

Sometimes these mistakes repeat certain themes, albeit manifesting with increased sophistication. As Hermann Hesse described in his novel *Siddhartha*, when the protagonist comforts his friend complaining of making no progress:

“We are not going in circles, we are going upwards. The path is a spiral; we have already ascended many a level.”

It is this ascension which opens our eyes to our own blindness. We are quick to comment on the shortcomings of others while remaining ignorant of our own. A life of advancement toward the Self continually illuminates all that is not in accordance with our highest ideal.

To transcend your own subjectivity and natural defense systems, an exercise in detachment is necessary. In *12 Rules For Life*, Jordan Peterson's second rule is *Treat Yourself Like Someone You Are Responsible For Helping*. By imagining that we are assessing someone else rather than ourselves, we turn off our drives of self-preservation and objectively assess what we are in relation to our ideal. This third person perspective frees us of emotion and the attachment to our

personal story. From that bird's eye view, it becomes easier to determine the optimal path forward.

You must lead yourself. You cannot rely on motivation and positive thinking. You are the hero of your own story, but you are also the guide. Stepping out of the muck and mire of daily experience, an objective look at one's self allows for honest self-assessment.

Our depths possess the wisdom we seek. Our lives are already juxtaposed to our ideal. Peterson suggests sitting at the edge of your bed at night and asking yourself what stupid things you are doing that twenty years from now are going to really wreck your life. Your conscience (the Self) will respond to this question. Your mind will become flooded with all the sub-optimal paths we choose by way of sloth, comfort, and downright self-sabotage. This honest quest for self-understanding is a form of prayer.

“And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” – Jesus, Matthew 7:3-5 KJV

Our success in personal development is in proportion to our ability to forget the neighbor and search desperately for our own shortcomings: every piece of wood, starting from the top down, logs to specks, must be accounted for.

The pursuit of an infinite ideal is endless, as the Self recedes in response to your advancement. This is a source of

inspiration, not desperation, as there are endless improvements to be made and the world will improve alongside your development.

Watch yourself closely. This attention reveals where the dragons are, the things you don't want to address which your path demands. Once acknowledged, we embody the second heroic habit that all heroes of mythology possess. When the threatening unknown beckons, we voluntarily confront the dragon that stands between us and our mountain—a beast, when faced courageously, which provides the treasure we seek.

II

FACE THE DRAGON

The Heroes' Standard

Men and women of excellence, of mythology and history, stand apart from their contemporaries in action. They perform great feats of voluntarily confronting the unknown and revitalizing their culture through their personal sacrifice. A hero must act, but to examine only these actions would be to miss out on that which makes such action possible, the personal standards of the individual—the vigilant commitment to a noble ethic.

Tony Robbins has many profound ideas for self-advancement, and all of which can be subsumed under a simple principle: raise your standards. We all meet our musts, he says, but we do not often meet our shoulds.

Shoulds do not inspire action. Shoulds do not push through the daily resistance of happenstance. Shoulds are a dream, not a plan. The quality of your life reflects your musts. We will meet our non-negotiable standards. They are the core of our

being, and human beings will go to desperate lengths to preserve their sense of identity.

To improve ourselves and therefore our lot, we must elevate our standards; with each new goal we set, our standards must rise in proportion.

I have had the fortune to be teammates with many world champions: Frankie Edgar, Ricardo Almeida, Gordon Ryan, Garry Tonon, and Tom Deblasse, to name a few. Beyond athletic ability, that which separates them most from their peers is their standard of daily improvement.

They do not settle for stagnation. Their standards are revealed through their actions. Frankie Edgar does not approach a fight with the mindset that he should be in good shape. He must be and his resume proves this. Gordon Ryan does not go into a tournament believing he should win, he has a deep-seated sense that he must win. And then he does.

I have been around many good Jiu Jitsu players, even black belts, who have no musts. They never fully develop to their potential because they were never willing to draw the line in the sand that made doing so a reality.

They should train six times a week—so they make it five. They should win this tournament—so they medal for third place. And the worst of all these: they should learn new skills—so they rarely do. They stick with what they are good

at, doing the same technique in training that they've done for the past five years, making no progress along the way.

We must not assume success today is success in accordance with our distant goal. This is too myopic. If you practice techniques which you have already thoroughly developed, you are not learning new skills and you may not even be refining old ones. Tangible success of submissions and sweeps in training are only successes at one level of resolution, of winning in that moment.

But what about the big picture?

If your goal is to develop as much competency in Jiu Jitsu as possible, you must constantly be on the edge of your understanding as you venture into the unknown to acquire new skills. You must risk failure if you are to achieve success. One cannot advance without risk and uncertainty.

Consider the attempted application of techniques as an environment. If you are well-adapted to thrive in that environment, you do not need to adapt further. It is only when you try a new technique, placing yourself somewhere in which you are not strong, that you are forced to develop new strength, to evolve.

If you are not evolving, you are not pursuing your potential—a sin of omission which is a great misuse of our finite time. You must commit to musts: having a purpose for your

training, holding yourself to a high standard, constantly challenging yourself to extend beyond your current grasp.

If you don't, you miss a great opportunity. You'll get a good workout, but you'll never master this craft. This is a folly whose reach extends far beyond the mat. Mastery of self must come through a discipline, and for just about anyone taking the time to read a book about Jiu Jitsu, it's a safe bet that most of your hours of personal development are spent grappling.

If we do not raise the bar here, how can we assume progress anywhere else?

The Hero is a Slave to Something

Nietzsche believed that you had to be a slave before you could be free, that a discipline was necessary to mold the individual and serve as the foundation upon which he or she could attain their true freedom.

The purposeful acquisition of chains frees us from our self-imposed shackles.

Jiu Jitsu has served this function in my life. Being physically demanding, Jiu Jitsu requires that I eat well and exercise daily. Its cognitive load constantly stretches the limits of my intellect as I seek to understand its depths. And the community it provides centers me in love as I strive to serve our students.

Jiu Jitsu demands virtue and leaves no place for vice. It's a source of great limitation in my life—a governor which continues to serve me.

“The Gods are just and of our pleasant vices make instruments to plague us.” - William Shakespeare

Jiu Jitsu does not allow me to give way to human weakness. I can't eat junk food that will impede my ability to train. I don't get to exercise sloth in thinking due to the complexity of the art. And the love for my students frees me of my natural inclination toward self-centeredness.

In all the ways I need, the confines of the gentle art free me from my own limitations.

The Jungian Self—who you could be if you sorted yourself out completely—is an object of wholeness, somehow existing both now and in the future, which beckons us toward self-actualization through the experience of meaning. Jiu Jitsu has been the source of such meaning in my life—as I imagine it has for you, the reader.

Jiu Jitsu gives us the opportunity to suffer toward a worthy goal as we pursue our highest selves, while giving us the support of a community the secular world so often fails to provide. Jiu Jitsu provides the environment—in body, mind, and spirit—which the Self requires. The meaning we

experience is the recognition of the validity of our path, a journey of restriction that leads to self-transcendence.

We are all slaves to something. So many choose the shackles of idle distraction. But we can be a slave to something far greater: our highest selves, our family, and our community. These are the chains whose limitations set us free.

The heroes of mythology possess such chains (and immense procedural wisdom). The heroes are often the strongest or bravest, the best with a bow or a sword, or sometimes simply the most articulate speaker of a community. Their skills come in countless forms, but their chains are one: the hero is a slave to voluntarily confronting emergent chaos, embracing the ambivalent nature of novelty in the most productive way.

The hero is a slave to civic duty, destined to perpetually face the dragon.

Face the Dragon

Joseph Campbell taught mythology at Sarah Lawrence College for nearly forty years and was considered the leading expert of his time. He had read more stories of mythology and religion than any of his contemporaries and is best known for drawing out the similarities of humanity's many hero myths.

He understood the behavioral process of the hero and echoed it beautifully in his now iconic phrase:

“The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure that you seek.”

Our fears are warranted. Beyond the safe confines of culture lies novelty, the ambivalent Mother Nature and her many offspring which offer both creation and destruction.

We are afraid to enter the cave because that's where the dragons live. Many cultures across generations and geography have a dragon myth, and yet dragons have never historically existed.

Dragons are not historically true. Dragons are phenomenologically and psychologically true—an abstraction with which we label a fundamental aspect of experience. The dragon is the amalgam of the predators of our tree dwelling ancestors: the serpent, the cat, and the raptor. The mythological dragon represents the imagery of each: a serpent, with four razor-sharp talons and teeth, capable of winged flight. A dragon is a "cat-snake-bird" as Jordan Peterson aptly described.

The dragon is that which eats you, capable of putting an end to your heroic exploration—whether through invasion of the safe confines of your home or lying in wait in a distant cave.

The story is a familiar one. The hero ventures off into the unknown, descends into the cave to fight the dragon and having done so, receives gold or a virgin for his efforts. This

imagery presents a duality between the danger and the reward, tacitly describing the two as separate aspects of experience.

I have not understood this fully, but I now believe that these are best viewed as a single process: not a dragon and gold, but rather dragon-gold.

It's often the thing you are afraid to face which directly yields that which you most need, rather than being an impediment to your acquisition of that desire. The dragon is the precursor to the experience of gold, is part of the process of gold, rather than that which stands in the way of gold.

The dragon stands in the way of gold in the same way a step precedes the step above it on a staircase; they are invariably linked and connected as constituent elements of the path. Not adversaries, not pros and cons, but a single ambivalent experience.

I realized this recently when I came to the difficult decision to remove a student from my academy. Though a great guy, I felt that his goals did not fully align with my goal for the academy, and after much thought, I concluded that it was best if he no longer trained at our academy.

I found myself apprehensive to have the conversation but knew that the fruit of the conversation would be the preservation of working toward my vision. The conversation was the dragon, his absence was the gold, and I understood

that these were much more a single process than two distinct entities.

The dragon is not the adversary, it is a necessary experience on the way to the procurement of your boon. To define the dragon as an obstacle to your goal, you tacitly describe the dragon's presence as a hardship, thus creating unnecessary internal resistance. A far more beneficial perspective is to see the dragon for what it is, an inseparable part of your goal. The dragon *is* the goal.

“When you have a goal, obstacles are actually teaching you how to get where you want to go—carving you a path.”- Ryan Holiday

Consider the experience of many: you recently graduate from the beginner class, and now with the advanced students, you shudder in terror every time someone grabs your legs in search of leg locks. You don't know enough about this dragon to properly confront it, and so out of self-preservation you tap long before you should. Or even worse, Medusa rears her many heads and like so many prey animals, you freeze.

The only way to confront this dragon is to dive into its lair: to immerse yourself in leg locks, to train with people who specialize in them, to watch film on them, and seek to develop the game yourself. You cannot truly learn how to defend something until you understand the mechanics of offense. You must make the unknown known, assimilate that knowledge into your procedural wisdom, and having done so,

are now properly armored to confront the dragon (or heel hook) next time it emerges.

When training with Garry Tonon throughout the years, I would willingly play the leglock game in pursuit of this knowledge. He is a master of the domain in which I was weak. He represented the dragon, a gift that could teach me more than the comforts of my current knowledge ever could. Through initiation with this novelty, I grew. I received the gold.

In mythology, the exploratory hero begins nestled safely inside the walls of his community, culture, the known. But he must leave this place of comfort to go on a quest for what cannot be found in the safe walls of order.

The hero is often apprehensive and for good reason: the safety and security of the known is comforting. With minimal risk of failure and death, he can maintain a healthy status quo and enjoy the comforts of his and his forefathers' previous explorations.

But if there is nothing to risk, there is nothing to be gained. We must, to use Peterson's phrase, make friends with what we do not know; because what we do not know always possesses that which will improve our current situation.

What you know got you to this point, but you will need to continually update your knowledge if you are to maintain order amid an ever-changing environment. The hero is not

concerned with mere maintenance. He seeks to revivify his dying culture through the creative pursuit of novel exploration.

He must go on a quest.

There is an old story that tells of King Arthur and his knights on a quest for the holy grail, in which they come upon the great Forest Adventurous. They thought it would be a disgrace to go forth in a group, so each knight enters the forest at the place where it is darkest to him, where there is no way or path. One must forge the path by walking.

There's an equivalent alchemical dictum: that which you most need is to be found where you least want to look. I experienced this firsthand in my Jiu Jitsu journey.

When I became a blue belt, I moved up to our advanced class. I hated it. I could not understand any of the techniques. I floundered about incompetently, chastising myself at every wrong turn, and I'd watch the clock, counting down the minutes until randori when I could finally just train.

I did not have faith in my ability to learn the techniques, and with each failure, my ego grew louder. I was not allowing myself to truly play the role of the fool. I was too ashamed. I did not realize that the only way to become the master is to first embrace the role of the fool.

There is much wisdom hidden in traditional imagery. The Taoist symbol of yin and yang, and the line that runs between the two paisleys, represents the "zone of proximal development." With one foot in order and the other in chaos, we are the process which mediates between the two, walking that razor's edge between the known and the unknown which leads to maximal development.

My initial foyer in the advanced class left me feeling like I had two feet in the unknown. Lost, I felt my reach had exceeded my grasp. That feeling of hopelessness was very difficult to experience, but it was a necessary requisite of the experience.

Sometimes in your training you are granted great opportunities: you join a new advanced class or maybe the competition team; you are cast out of the safe confines of your basic class and must fend for yourself. This fending results in much initial failure.

If you have a fixed mindset, this is usually when you stop training, deciding that Jiu Jitsu is not for you, as you rattle off the many justifiable reasons why something should now take primacy over your training.

For those with the growth mindset, however, they accept their lot; they understand that they are cast out into the desert and must survive through this stretch in chaos; they do so and become revived with new skills and a deeper understanding of themselves.

I stuck with that advanced class. And in a few years, I was teaching it. I was able to make this transition because after the initial frustration, I understood that this is the way of continued development, to always stretch beyond what you are to become what you might be. I understood that Jiu Jitsu was not magic; it is a skill that countless men have learned before me, and I being a man could learn it too.

In my clearer moments, I understood that this was an opportunity to exercise my core value—though I had not articulated this value at the time—that I was to voluntarily confront the unknown on behalf of the good. And as a 23-year-old blue belt, who wanted nothing more in life than to master Jiu Jitsu, there was nothing to do but immerse myself in the discipline and rise from the ashes of my daily failures.

I was surprised to find that the enemy to this progress was my own competence. I recently read a collection of essays from Bertrand Russell—one of the greatest minds of the 20th century—and in describing Russell's wide-ranging skills, the biographer said that his competence bored him. This struck me as a profoundly meaningful statement.

In academic psychology, the Big Five model is used to classify an individual's personality, with Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism as continuums on which we find ourselves.

The greatest predictor of life success is openness, general intelligence that allows for the solving of trans-disciplinary problems. Paired with conscientiousness, the innate standard that says these problems must be solved, one is practically destined for success.

Your success in Jiu Jitsu will be a direct reflection of your willingness to venture into the unknown and make friends with what you do not know, so you can become more than what you currently are.

Do not become the student who stays in his safe bubble of competence, actively resisting heading into the unknown. That one-trick pony will catch you on your first day of training, but his lack of adaptation results in stagnation and death. You will whoop him in perpetuity once he shows his hand.

It is the fundamental law of nature, adapt or die. Nature is that which selects, the everchanging environment which demands constant adaptation (revivification) of the species that is a requisite for the continuation of life. You must manifest such variations within yourself. Failing to do so results in your stagnation and ultimate demise.

The key is to pursue these adaptations voluntarily.

I've talked about this in previous books, but it bears repeating. I remember when I used to try to win each roll: I would try to be my strongest, and put my partner where they were

weakest, to collect points and submissions. If at the end of the roll I had more success than my partner, I felt I "won" the round. But winning the round is probably losing on the path; you are not supposed to exercise your strengths, they are already strong. You need to exercise your weaknesses.

When I understood this, I started looking at each training partner as a problem to solve, free of as much ego as I could muster. I would voluntarily confront my teammate's greatest dragon. Wherever my friend was strongest, I would purposefully place our roll in that arena, "and see if I could not learn what it had to teach."

If my goal is to win the round, then this is the least efficient way to train with the lowest probability of success. But in hopes of furthering my development, of winning the meta-game, this is the most efficient way to train and the highest probability of success; it is the resistance our partner provides that demands our adaptation.

The dragon is the gold.

You do this long enough, you become the best guy in the room. And once you have slain all the dragons, you either go out and find new caves, or you create your own.

You create your own by continually handicapping yourself so that you are always walking that Taoist middle way. You make a personal commitment to work on the things you are not good at, the places where you lack strength, and you work

diligently to ensure that no matter who you are training with, that partner will provide enough resistance for your growth.

We are as limited as Jiu Jitsu is infinite. We can always choose to find a new dragon to slay. Start passing the other direction. Play guard on the other hip. Work a new technique. We will never have a shortage of dragons to slay; the only shortage comes from ability to adhere to the heroic ideal of constantly confronting (and even creating) those dragons.

If you are truly challenging yourself, there must be a great opportunity to fail. In order to acquire the gold, you must be willing to risk death. You may lose the round. You may get submitted. You may get embarrassed in front of your peers and mentor. To continue on your path, this must happen.

You must die so that you can be reborn.

III

EMBRACE DEATH AND REBIRTH

Phoenix

There is a mythological motif of the phoenix, the great bird which consumes itself in flames and is reborn. This is a representation of the Self and the many transformations on the way to its fulfillment. When an aspect of your being becomes old and outdated, you consume yourself in flames, burning off what doesn't serve you as you are reborn anew. Reborn more than what you once were.

This is what happens when we venture into the unknown, when we pursue an area of Jiu Jitsu in which we possess no skill. We allow our old understanding to die off as we acquire a new one.

When it comes to the phoenix and Jiu Jitsu, there is no greater embodiment of this process than my teammate Garry Tonon. I have learned countless lessons from our training together, but the greatest impression he has left on me is from watching him train with others.

With no ego, with no concern for winning today, with an almost foolish desire to die in the moment, Garry constantly put himself in the worst positions possible in search of dragons. I would watch him get submitted repeatedly in training and then days later go win world championships.

He is the most recent manifestation of the phoenix, allowing himself to be vulnerable and risk submission to come back stronger, reborn and now harder to kill. He is fearless in this approach. That dude voluntarily confronts the unknown on behalf of skill acquisition, often with a sense of sheer curiosity and boredom.

One time after training, we went to a rope swing on the Delaware river. Led by Professor Almeida, we kayaked out to a secluded island, hiked a bit, and came to a clearing some thirty feet above the river, with a shoddy rope hanging from a branch on the precipice.

We each mustered the courage to hop on that swing and jump into the water. I was content with simply doing so and remaining in one piece. Garry was doing double back flips within the hour.

That is the fundamental difference between him and me, between him and most of humanity: he is willing to risk death (sometimes literally) in pursuit of being reborn. This mindset has been one of the major factors leading to his uncommon success.

Jiu Jitsu provides the opportunity for such daring without equivalent risk. Each training session, each moment, is an opportunity to venture out into areas of incompetence and risk failing. It is this opportunity for genuine failure which allows for rebirth.

When centered around a certain theme, these daily rebirths lead to an overhaul of your entire game. Continually searching out the deeper aspects of an idea or position, once we achieve diminished returns in a given field of study, we expand. Anyone who has been training for a while can look back and observe these epochs in their own progression.

I stuck to half guard in blue belt. Most of my purple belt was a Berimbolo-style game. When brown came around, I devoted myself exclusively to the Marcelo guards: butterfly, over/under, X. And then at black belt, I sought to see through the illusions of different guards, finding core principles that made up what a "guard" is, resulting in non-traditional hybrid guards.

At each deviation in my path, I practiced the discipline until I grew bored from competence or my efforts were met with stagnation. Each belt is a material representation—an acknowledgment by your instructor—of such evolution.

I recently promoted our first crop of home-grown blue belts and took the time to speak about each student individually in front of the group. Each conversation centered around the

personal transformation that each had manifested through Jiu Jitsu; the blue belt represented that they had leveled up and were now something different, something better.

The colors of the belt reveal a lot: a white belt is unblemished, clean, virgin. In contrast, the black belt is charred by the ashes from years of burning. I'm starting to think that even more than mastery, a black belt represents an embodiment of the phoenix, a willingness to die and be reborn and the history of having done so.

That is the most fundamental difference between a black belt and the other belts: it is not the skill or knowledge, it is something deeper. It is having assimilated the archetypal hero's story into your own being.

The hero is not a one-and-done adventure story. The hero is better understood not as a person, but as a process. When we see heroes in film, literature, or our daily lives, it is the actions that they repeatedly embody which make them heroes. The hero is a transpersonal phenomenon, a process embodied rather than an end attained.

The hero does not go on one adventure and then vacation on the beach drinking mai tais for the rest of his life. As Peterson says, that's not a goal, that's a travel poster. The hero continues to confront his own inadequacy (and that of his culture) as he or she constantly revivifies their knowledge (and therefore actions) through continual engagement with novel and difficult experience.

The true hero dies and is reborn in perpetuity—with a deep sense of identity coming from identification with the heroic process rather than the feats that ensue as a result of such repeated action.

The true hero, having returned home with the boon for his people, keeps going.

The Changing Landscape

Henry David Thoreau was a hero. The great transcendentalist thinker threw off the shackles of culture and sought a life of simplicity and communion with nature. He knew that the traditional life in Concord, Massachusetts was not for him and that his deeper meaning was to be found on the edges of Waldon Pond.

He deviated from the path. A constant adventurer, he was an explorer of the natural world, who marveled at the majesty of being. He aimed to “drink deeply” from life and was acutely aware of his limitations,

"I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience."

He understood what we feel but often fail to articulate—that we are a narrow channel and whatever knowledge we possess is far outweighed by our ignorance. We've only had so many

experiences and a limited framework through which to interpret them.

We see the world through the lens of our goal, and this limited framework makes our experiences intelligible by making most of it invisible. We can only see enough to inform action but no more.

Life is a perpetual experiment. We make our most educated guess, implement a plan of action, and collect data along the way. When the path ends, we find a new one. We are Sisyphus, rolling the boulder up the hill for all of eternity. As we continue to ascend that mountain, we grow stronger as a result of our labor. This new strength demands a greater challenge, so we posit a greater ideal.

The stronger you get the bigger the boulder becomes. And that's the point—the goal is not to be free of labor, it is to find the most difficult and meaningful labor possible. The greater a cross we bear the more meaning we experience, which acts as a bulwark against the inherent suffering of life.

The increase in strength resultant from difficult labor increases the likelihood of future success. We stand on the foundation of a previous goal attained, and from this new homeostasis, we confront a bigger and more worthwhile goal.

We are goal-directed creatures. We are always doing this. And if you are highly conscientious, your consistent experience of positive emotions demands it. Continual

evolution—death and rebirth—is the path of continued search for meaning. It is the path of the continued experience of meaning.

Kierkegaard said that though life is lived forward, it can only be understood backwards. A goal-directed life is a walk up a staircase, each step representing various stages of development with their challenges and victories. Though each step seemed to appear in isolation, together they form a causal chain, following a sequential path leading to what you are today.

When I reflect on my experiences in Jiu Jitsu, I have followed such a sequential, and in hindsight obvious, path. My progression from a first-day white belt to a black belt with his own academy has been punctuated by many clear transformations.

I began my training in the basic class, consisting of white belts with two stripes or less. I showed up each day and through attention and effort graduated to the intermediate class of three stripes and up.

My teacher's school had the belts hanging up on the wall. During every warm up and conditioning at the end of class, I would stare at my next belt, understanding that my effort would make my attainment of that belt manifest. I continued this habit throughout those seven months at white belt, knowing that a blue belt would allow me to join the advanced classes and MMA team—that the blue belt gave me access to

an environment that would demand massive adaptation for survival.

Having achieved that rank, I began assisting basic classes. I started by collecting the attendance cards. Then I was given the increased responsibility of leading warm ups. Not long after I was given the honor of teaching my own class, and shortly thereafter, opening the school and teaching all classes on Sundays.

Years later, I received the call of a lifetime. Professor Almeida gave me the opportunity to become the head instructor of his new school in Newtown, PA. I taught there for years, which inevitably led to my most recent step in this progression, opening my own academy.

I could not see it at the time, but my path was very much a staircase with clearly delineated incremental progress. I had no idea. I just showed up each day and did my best with the task entrusted to me. I'm reminded of Jesus's words from his Sermon on the Mount, "sufficient unto the day are the evils thereof."

I never dreamed of owning my own school when I was working toward that first stripe on my white belt. I simply worked toward what was next. And often, I did not know what was next, so I would ask Professor Almeida. His wisdom would reveal the next step in the path, and I'd work diligently in that direction.

I transformed through this exploratory process as I reached each benchmark. I was surprised to find that Jiu Jitsu did as well. What started out as a means of self-defense became a vehicle with which to suffer and mold my character, and only after years of this did I come to see the art as a means of serving others.

Through this continued development, I came to understand that with each death and rebirth, my goals had to continually adapt if I was to continue to climb that staircase.

There is an old story about a Zen master, his student, and tea:

“One day, the great Zen master received a visit from his most renowned student. Though brilliant and worldly successful, this student was bound up by ego and full of pride.

The master served tea. He filled his student's cup to the brim, and then kept on pouring.

The student watched as the cup overflowed, making a mess all over the kitchen table. Finally, he could no longer restrain himself as he yelled, “The cup is full. No more will go in!”

Calmly the master set down the teapot.

“Like this cup,” he said, “You are full of your own beliefs and opinions. How can I show you Zen unless

you first empty your cup?”

Life is that teacher. And the water is the experiences and lessons which inform our operating system. If we insist on keeping our cup full and not allowing new information in, we doom ourselves to stagnation. We stay on the same step. We must constantly revivify our knowledge to properly inform our action so that we may ascend. We must let go of the water we possess to drink deeply from the waters of life.

This becomes a question of identity. Do you define yourself as what you are, or do you define yourself by what you could be? The former makes you a tyrant, acting in self-stultifying preservation, the latter allows you the freedom to transcend what you are.

But maybe neither of these is right. Maybe, we should define ourselves as the process which continually transforms. We are not the student and the water we possess, we are not the student making room for more water; we are the process which continually regenerates our understanding of the world by repeatedly making room in our cup for more and better information which inspires further action.

This is the way of the mythological hero. This is the way of the world-class Jiu Jitsu practitioner. Our focus for our training must evolve alongside our understanding of the art, and with each evolution comes the opportunity to dive further into its depths. This is the way of progress.

I have derived much motivation over the years from Longfellow's poem, *The Ladder of St. Augustine*. There is a line in that poem that has given me more strength than any other:

“The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.”

Toiling upward. This is the heroic process—guided by the three habits of paying attention, confronting the dragon, and being reborn—in a nutshell.

Consider again Jung's idea of circumambulation and the spiraling in toward the Self. The nearer you get, the more the Self, an infinite and unobtainable ideal, recedes. This is the same process as the idea of Sisyphus on his mountain, the ladder of St. Augustine, and the aforementioned staircase.

The hero's journey is a process undertaken in perpetuity. We are all on such a path, in pursuit of our highest Self, striving to become someone uniquely our own to provide the world with a gift that only we possess. We intellectually understand this, but few are willing to voluntarily and intelligently pursue the many deaths and rebirths that transform potential into reality.

Such embodiment comes more from a clearly articulated philosophy than it does willpower. When you interpret experience and articulate your schema properly, you give yourself the opportunity to find the freedom that Viktor Frankl found in the Nazi concentration camps:

“We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.

And there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you would become the plaything of circumstance, renouncing freedom and dignity to become moulded into the form of the typical inmate.”

It is this freedom, when brought forth in the daily activities of the affluent west (an affluence that can’t truly be appreciated without juxtaposition to the experiences of such men as Frankl) that allow us to adopt Tony Robbins’ maxim that problems are gifts if we learn from them. Regardless of

circumstance, it is our choice to determine the significance of the events of our lives.

When life is viewed through the lens of the archetypal hero, your suffering is no longer personal hardship, you understand it as something far richer. Your struggle is simply the most recent and present representation of the heroic process. Your struggles with health, wealth, and happiness are the most recent manifestation of the archetypal dragon and its gold.

Your sufferings are opportunities to become what you could be. They are the necessary requisite to making your potential manifest in the world, calling forth your further adaptation.

When we embrace this philosophy—to the point of feeling it in our bones—we become as invincible (psychologically free) as a mortal being can become. Every experience immediately rejected due to difficulty and suffering is seen through clear eyes as the catalyst for further development.

The problems are gifts. They are precursors to the achievement of your Self, through enforced death and subsequent rebirth.

We must come to see this death and rebirth not as a part of life, but as the fundamental aspect of life. We are explorers, and as much as we are exploring the outside world or a skill, we are really exploring ourselves. And as T.S. Eliot said, we must not cease from exploration.

Life is going to continually give us reasons to cease exploration. Inevitably, many run out of the strength to keep responding to life's difficulty heroically. They can no longer see the gifts in the problems, and they lose that last human freedom. This is why we need a clear articulation of our purpose and schema, because a sound philosophy will get you through hard times; it is the immune system of the soul.

This understanding of the archetypal hero got me through the hardest period of my life, from July 2018 to today, March 10th, 2019, as I wrap up the final draft of this book.

I fought a dragon, one I never thought I'd encounter. And it almost broke me.

POSTSCRIPT

On Building An Arc

I ruptured both pectoralis major muscles in the summer of 2018. The tendons had torn off the bone and I was the most frail I had been since infancy. I have endured a good amount of physical suffering in my life, but none of which rivaled the discomfort of struggling to perform day-to-day activities—let alone run a Jiu Jitsu academy—without two working arms.

How'd this happen? There is a short answer and a long answer. Let's start short and then we'll run through the cliff notes of the latter.

The short answer: my current state was the debt paid from a lifetime of abusing my body. For as long as I can remember, I've lived by the Shawian maxim: *I want to be thoroughly used up when I die.*

I arrived at that destination about 70 years too early.

The longer answer: if I am honest with myself, and on most days I am, I realize that I entered most workouts with a tacit

sense of “not-enough-ness,” believing that if I struggled mightily toward a noble aim, I would become more worthwhile of Being for having done so.

I am not a high achiever, but I’ve tried to be. And to the best of my knowledge, most high achievers are driven by two deep impulses. The first is shame—a feeling that one is not enough as one is, but having attained a worthy goal, would become so. This western trap has robbed countless souls of the Eden we inhabit.

The other driving force is Love. Sometimes it’s love for a craft like Jiu Jitsu.

Much of my life has been guided by Love and the desire for truth, to determine the best use of my finite time and to build the structure and discipline that allows for such a life to be lived. I used Jiu Jitsu as a vehicle to pursue this path, understanding that the gentle art provided an environment which would force the continued adaptation of my character that I needed, which my experience had yet to provide.

My life has been this balance between Love and Shame. I have no tattoos, but over the years I’ve almost gotten two. The first is the Buddha under the bodhi tree, with each line drawn being small font scripture of the wisdoms of eastern teaching. The other was a song lyric, “Too much is not

enough.” Both concepts have provided me with great energy over the years, the two in conjunction properly exemplifying my cognitive dissonance.

When I was 29 years old, I felt a burning desire to return to Jiu Jitsu competition. I have never won anything truly notable, but I possess the skills to do so and felt burdened by the lack of fulfilled potential.

The last time I had competed, I found myself in an inside heel hook late in the round. A position and escape I had drilled countless times leading up to the tournament, but when the time came and I found myself in that familiar territory, I could not move.

I felt something—someone—hold down my shoulders, pinning me to my butt as we sat in fifty-fifty guard. I felt a calmness. I needed to experience what was about to happen. And though I did not surrender to the moment and offer up my knee ligaments to something greater than me, I understood that I was unable to move and watched the inevitable occur.

The competitor broke my grip, leaned back with an inside heel hook properly in place, and popped my knee. Before I even stood up, I knew my days of competing were behind me.

A few years of success in training and unfulfilled desires caused me to forget that realization. I began the path back to competition, including a strength and conditioning program.

One day in August of 2015, driven by a sense of incompleteness, I ignored the warning signs that something was not right. As I warmed up between pullups and bench press, I felt a growing pain in my left shoulder. I ignored the pain that I had felt so many times in the past, only this time with consequence. On the way down of the last set of my warm up while benching, I felt a burst of pain, feeling like lightning struck inside my chest. Part of the pectoralis major tendon tore off the bone and the bar came crashing down onto the safety racks.

“When you get the message, hang up the phone.”

-Alan Watts

In that moment, I had finally accepted my fate. I looked up at the sky as if to say that I understood. Jiu Jitsu competition—no, intense physical pursuits—was no longer my path. I had been down that road. I was indeed thoroughly used up. Life had thrown up a big detour sign with flashing bright lights, and I learned the lesson in the only way my stubbornness would allow: through catastrophic damage.

I rehabbed non-surgically (what I now believe to be a mistake) and felt fine for years. I continued to train Jiu Jitsu without limitation. This lasted until the day before we opened the Matakas Jiu Jitsu Academy. I was walking my dog—not a big dog, mind you—and she lunged at another, pulling my arm out to the side and part of my pec with it. This was my second major tear.

I again rehabbed non-surgically. What I am now certain was a mistake. My pec felt fine and I returned to both physical and Jiu Jitsu training. I was healthy just long enough to start to forget my frailty and then it all came crashing down.

I reinjured the arm doing some recovery work, and then continued to tear my left pec through daily activities. In talking to my fiancée's brother, an intelligent and highly educated physical therapist, he assured me of the body's adaptability and that the body would compensate properly. There was still so much the body could do, and considering my humble future goals, we concluded my compromised state could be addressed when my commitments at the academy would allow. Until then, I should focus on the donut, not the hole. I could still strengthen everything around the damaged area.

That is, until the flood came.

Jordan Peterson gave a biblical lecture series in 2018, detailing the wisdom of the biblical stories and their applicability to our modern lives in a way that most listeners had never heard. I watched each lecture several times, but one kept pulling me back in—*Walking With God: Noah and the Flood*.

In the book of Genesis, God had become displeased with man and opted to hit the reset button, washing away the sins of the world by bringing a great flood. He deemed Noah the savior of humanity—because he walked with God and was a just man—telling him to build an arc that would weather the storm, to ferry his family and the living creatures of the world to safety.

Noah built an arc to survive the flood. The message, Peterson tells us, is that the flood is always coming. Sometimes it is an act of God, more often it is a result of sins of omission, personal negligence, as chaos breaks through into our lives and consumes us. It is our obligation to ourselves and those around us to build an arc so that we may weather the flood when it comes.

If the previous pec tears had been showers, the Flood officially came late one night in early July of 2018. I was sitting sieza on the floor, writing with my laptop on the coffee table. I pushed off the ground to stand up and before I was

fully upright my body went into shock. I tore some more of my left pec, but worse, I had torn my right pec as well.

I rushed up stairs, took my contacts out before my arms became immobile due to swelling, and laid in my bed. My body violently convulsed for what felt like hours, as I lie there unable to move my arms, struggling to understand what had just happened.

Neither of my arms worked. And while I was in great physical pain, a calm came over me. I am not sure what it means to talk to God, but if I ever have, I did that night. I felt a presence in my bedroom, a peace. Uncertainty lay before me, and with something as fundamental as my health uncertain, I focused on what remained unchanged—the Self which existed across the transformations, across the pec tears.

I felt that same presence as I had in my last tournament and on the bench that day, now with me in my bedroom. Life, God, my limitations, all preached what they had always done, but that I could not fully hear until now. My path was not meant for physical pursuits.

I visited my parents the next morning. The moment I saw my mom and dad, I broke down. A crying that came deep from my soul welled forth. I sobbed like I had lost someone close to me. I had, an aspect of myself.

I called my fiancée that morning. Amber had been living an hour south with her family. I needed her. As the swelling set in, and the weakness became real, I had lost the use of my arms. The guy who had fought in a cage and ran a marathon without training for it, now needed help putting on a shirt.

A flood had come. But I did not sink for two reasons: the people in my life and my philosophy.

Amber put her life on hold to come take care of me. My parents opened their doors and gave us a room so that they could help with the driving to doctors' appointments, meal prep, and all the daily activities that I could no longer manage.

Amazingly, the Jiu Jitsu academy flourished. Our team of senior leadership rose to the occasion—became my arc—and began teaching classes. The community rallied behind my struggle. The parents were emphatic and understanding. The kids gave me daily sweet reminders that it was going to be OK, showing me the band aids on their brush-burned elbows as if to say, "I feel your pain."

My friends supported me as they always had. And as my body began to atrophy and became increasingly useless, Amber's love never wavered. It deepened. Her acceptance of my condition gave me the courage to accept myself. Her strength, her resolve, and her love kept me afloat when the flood came.

It was the people in my life who held me together. But with my arms stuck in slings—back living at home with my parents, unable to drive or even open most doors, and too depressed to reach out for social gatherings—I spent a lot of time alone. I was forced to sit in my condition and struggle to learn what it had to teach.

My loved ones were half the arc—the better half. There is no substitute for a community, a tribe of people who love you as you are and will sacrifice for you because you would do the same for them. It was people who got me through this. And it was my philosophy that took me the rest of the way.

My attempt at healing was a difficult one. I had two handfuls of surgeons say that they could not help. Appointment after appointment, I sat in the waiting room with a sense of hope. Maybe this was going to be the guy who was going to fix me. And each time, I was met with varying degrees of the same answer: *you are too far gone. I can't help you. There's nothing anyone can do.*

As the weeks passed and I struggled to find help, I filled my time with a lot of thinking. A lot of walking and a lot of thinking. My pecs continued to tear through daily activities, and each time a wave of depression came over me. Sometimes it was due to my thinking, but most of the time it was merely physiological—my body reacted as it were dying

because part of it was. I walked around with pain at a 9 out of 10, constantly. I struggled to feed myself, alternating the hand I was eating with because lifting the fork became too painful.

With time left for thinking, I sought to find meaning in the experience. This was an atypical situation that could yield atypical growth, if only I used the experience wisely. I spent time in reflection, coming to grips with the fact that a feeling of not-enough-ness led to the voluntary destruction of my body. I did this to myself. *I was finally paying attention.*

I adopted extreme ownership, accepting my fate. I worked through this deep-seated sense of not being enough and found a self-acceptance that I had previously lacked. And I had plenty of spare time to continue to do so.

I finally found a surgeon who could help me. A good man at UPenn who said he would perform the operation, doing both pecs at the same time to minimize downtime for recovery. The only caveat was that I had to wait a month to do so. No worries, I'd waited this long, I could sit in purgatory for another month.

This gave me more time for thinking, walking, and unfortunately, several more pec tears.

When that day came, I was filled with joy. My time in purgatory was over. It was time to begin to heal, to actually

take a step forward. I felt giddy, the closest I have felt to a childhood Christmas in two decades.

We arrived at the hospital on time, and the team of nurses and doctors brought me back and made quick work of the admissions testing. I was filled with gratitude, shaking everyone's hand—regardless of the extreme pain of doing so—and thanked them.

“You'll be going up any minute,” the nurse told me. I thanked my parents and Amber for all they had done up until this point, anxiously waiting for the trip up to the operating room.

We waited. Waited some more. And then the proverbial rains returned.

After 11 hours, we were sent home. The OR was filled, and they could not help us. We will reschedule soon, the surgeon told me. A reschedule which, due to insurance reasons, never happened.

That car ride home was one of the lowest moments of my life. I walked through the park the next day, my pecs screaming from the preadmissions testing, my heart ached from the disappointment.

But something happened. I felt a deep kinship with each person I passed in the park that day. Each of these strangers

had, at some point in their lives, felt the pain that I was feeling. That sense of quiet desperation and loss, being at the end of one's rope. I cried. My heart broke open. I sent genuine love in the direction of everyone I passed, verbally wishing them well with a sincerity I had never known.

The hero cannot find his gold without facing the dragon. They are inseparable aspects of a homogenous experience. What I became as a result of this experience—the love that I feel that I had only previously read about—was my gold. The battle with this dragon has been worth it.

I was still broken physically, but mentally I was strong. I understood that this was an opportunity to become what my previous environment never called forth. I embraced the role of the hero—I understood that I was experiencing my flood. I understood that the flood was a gift if I used it wisely. I paid attention, I confronted my inner dragons, and I allowed the parts of me that no longer served me to die off.

I was broken, tired, and in constant pain, but I found a peace and understanding that I had never known, that only great suffering could provide. In mythology, the being who becomes enlightened is often first broken in some irreparable way. Horus lost an eye. Jacob dislocated his hip.

I finally understood this sentiment.

As we continued to search for a surgeon, I kept walking and thinking. And I began listening. Walking was about the only form of exercise I could do, so I put in my ear buds and began listening to audiobooks during long walks around the neighborhood.

I listened to *The Obstacle is the Way* and *12 Rules for Life* repeatedly. I'd listen to Ryan Holiday and Jordan Peterson and let their teaching inform my philosophy.

I studied the struggles of other men and learned what the humanities had to teach. I was reading a Carl Jung collection at the time, and my education began to help me detach from what I was experiencing.

I was simply the most recent and near manifestation of the archetypal hero, with my own dragons to slay and boons to win.

My problems were not new. My pain was not uniquely my own. My suffering was shared with all who had come before, with all whom I currently live. I understood that my current struggle was the fertilizer upon which my new and better Self would grow.

I did not only accept my lot, I appreciated it. I was suffering more than I ever had and would cyclically have to defend my

headspace when the futility of my health got the best of me. But I kept working on my philosophy.

I read. I listened. I thought. I journaled. The pain of writing became too much, simply pushing the keys on the keyboard required the smallest pec recruitment that my body could not offer.

I used the talk to text function and kept working through my mind. One piece of lumber at a time, I began to build my arc. As I did so, I continued my search for a surgeon. With no hope of success at each visit, but a deep sense that I would find a way, I made a list of the remaining shoulder surgeons who took my insurance and saw all but one of them. Finally, my persistence was met with reward by way of Sean McMillan at Lourdes Medical Associates.

He tempered my expectations but said that he would give it a shot using my own knee tendons as a graft. I had no choice. I've been without the use of my arms for months now. It was time for a Hail Mary.

The day surgery came, I still had a sneaking suspicion that the flood was not done with me. Even with the IV line in (which I had experienced at UPenn), I did not think the surgery was going to happen. But it did. Hours passed without my knowing, and I found myself waking up in the post-op

room. I was loopy, unsure where I was, but I knew that I had had surgery.

After months of waiting, progress.

As I moved in and out of consciousness, the surgeon stopped by to greet me. And he gave me the most beautiful news. He did not have to use a graft. He had reattached both tendons without the use of anything other than thread and anchors drilled into my arms. My legs remained intact.

A wave of joy came over me. I stumbled over my words of gratitude. I cried. It was too good to be true. I asked Amber multiple times to check the back of my legs to be sure there was no incision there. And each time, she gave me that empathic smile, looked under my gown and gave me the same answer. There wasn't.

Now the healing process could begin. The next week consisted of lying in a lawn chair recliner in front of the television, taking Percocets every few hours as I waned in and out of consciousness. Then, with both my arms wrapped tightly in slings, I returned to the academy. A week after that, I began teaching classes again, albeit with the reliance on the bodies of our amazing instructor team.

After a long four-and-a-half weeks of absolute dependence on Amber, we had our post-op visit with the surgeon. I asked

him how on earth he managed to reattach everything without a graft and his response was simple: by the grace of God.

He did not believe it either. He said my right pec had been torn off the humerus and that the left had been torn at all three connections: the humerus, sternum, and clavicle. He told me that my left pec had retracted past my heart, but that somehow amid the atrophy, the pec was malleable enough to be reattached with a high promise of success.

Things got better from there. I began my rehab with a great physical therapist and my childhood best friend, Jon Papp. Slowly but surely, we began to restore function to my body. There were some scares. I had a few tearings of scar tissue and parts of the muscle which were so far gone, they just needed to be burned off. But each week has gotten better. The small victories of showering by myself and holding a coffee cup added up, and now I am able to do everything in daily life without restriction. It has been a long, difficult, but somehow wonderful road.

I suffered more last summer than I ever have—physically, emotionally, and even metaphysically. I went into the underworld. Chaos consumed me. The flood washed away who I had been.

But the Self remained.

Each of us is presented with the opportunity to embody the archetype of the hero in the present conditions of our own lives. To pay attention to our environment and voluntarily confront the unknown and the dragons which inhabit that place. And having embarked on such a journey, we are granted the gift of death and rebirth: losing what no longer serves us—whether a physical ability or a sense of identity—as we come to a deeper understanding of who we are and what we are here for.

David Goggins is the most recent Navy Seal to come into popular culture and share the mindset of a warrior. He defined his struggles as an opportunity to become uncommon amongst uncommon men.

This is what I believed the Summer of 2018 was for me, an opportunity to learn what traditional life fails to teach. I found a peace and acceptance that I had never found before. The loss of my physical abilities strangely came packaged with an acceptance of my body that I never knew when I was in peak condition.

I found a love for Being that the striving for becoming always eclipsed. I came to understand the Self—to identify with that Self—and saw how all of life was an opportunity to advance toward its fulfillment and that this could be done with an appreciation for what one currently is.

So much of what I was died out of necessity. I lost the pride that comes with being great at physical combat. I lost the identity with past physical accomplishments because I knew that they would remain in the past. I came to understand what happens when you are driven by a sense of not enough, that inferiority can grow so loud that it can lead you down the path of your own destruction.

It's March 2019 now. I've finished physical therapy and have begun strength training. It won't be long until I'm teaching again, and I've continued my study of Jordan Peterson and Carl Jung.

My community and an understanding of the archetypal hero was the arc that got me through the worst flood of my life. I am not disillusioned. Most have experienced far worse floods than two torn pecs. But I am not comparing my flood to theirs or yours.

We all encounter such struggle. We are bonded by it. When we respond as best we can, when we find meaning in the suffering and come away reborn as a result, we play the role of the archetypal hero.

Jiu Jitsu is our training ground, the environment which allows us to practice this process. Paying Attention. Facing the Dragon. Embracing Death and Rebirth. This is the greatest

benefit that Jiu Jitsu provides. This is the process that makes Jiu Jitsu a true vehicle for personal development.

We've all experienced this. The deeper and more sincerely we pursue this art, our lives grow in proportion. The sacrifices we make on the mat yield equivalent benefits in the rest of our lives. It is the kiln which strengthens our souls.

Jiu Jitsu is our vehicle for personal development. When we make this conscious, we come to a far deeper understanding of our craft and the necessity of its practice. Jiu Jitsu takes a lot from us: time, money, attention, and sometimes even health. And life will give us many reasons to stop training. Many of those reasons will be valid. But we mustn't give way to temptation. That which lies at the top of our value hierarchy should be that which pays attention and learns, the process of the creative hero who continually acts as described in this book.

Your highest self, your Jungian Self, is to be found at the end of such action.

And it reveals itself today. I think Jung was right. I think Peterson articulated it better than he did. You can use meaning to orient yourself in your life. You can achieve your potential by allowing that sense of meaning to guide your actions.

We find our training of Jiu Jitsu meaningful. That's why you are still reading these words. It's what allows you to keep showing up to class when you are tired and sore. It's that call that pushes you to do the final round when you are struggling for breath.

This meaning proves that our sacrifice is worth it. Jiu Jitsu is a part of our heroic exploration. Jiu Jitsu is the gift our souls need that we have yet to find anywhere else. Once found, it must be treasured. It is the well spring of life for many of us, the fountain that flows into our lives and touches all with whom we interact.

There is too much at risk to never become what we might have been. Your community and your family need you to keep training. Each of us must adopt maximal responsibility as we aim towards the most noble path we can envision. We must practice the heroic process on the mat so that we may live this way in the world.

Jiu Jitsu is the gift that calls forth our latent potential. It's an environment which requires our constant evolution. Jiu Jitsu is the dragon which gives us the gold. A gold we are meant to share with our community.

Learn More

If you enjoyed this book and would like to read more about using Jiu Jitsu as a vehicle for personal development, check out Chris's other books available on Amazon:

My Mastery: Learning to Live Through Jiu Jitsu

My Mastery: Continued Education Through Jiu Jitsu

The Tao of Jiu Jitsu

On Jiu Jitsu

12 Rules for Jiu Jitsu

5 Rules for White Belts

For More Than Books

Chris and his team enjoy working with individuals and communities to further their development on or off the mat. To connect with us about: interviews, success coaching, seminars, speaking engagements, bulk orders of books, or academy affiliations, please contact: trevor@matakasbjj.com