

Rickson Gracie on Using the Principles of Jiu-Jitsu to Live Your Life

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We were talking last week about Jiu-Jitsu Lifestyle and what it truly meant . One part of living the lifestyle was applying the principles of Jiu-Jitsu in your everyday life. Master Rickson Gracie explained this concept very well in this interview.

Author: Maynard Keenan

A conversation with Gracie Jiu Jitsu Master Rickson Gracie and TOOL singer/songwriter, Maynard James Keenan.

Rickson: Jiu Jitsu is like a philosophy. It helps me learn how to face life.

Maynard: In what way?

Rickson: In every way. To understand our society, to relate myself to people, to compete in an actual self defense tournament, to feel confident to walk on the street and to be able to help people, to be strong enough to forgive...

————Balancing the Scales of Justice————

Maynard: Do you think it is better to avoid a fight rather than to provoke a fight?

Rickson: I believe that you must do what you believe you have to do. If I don't believe I should fight, I'm not gonna fight. My decision is based more on my personal honor than it is on who I'm channeling my anger towards. For example, if I see a guy smacking an old lady I'm going to do something about that. I don't care who it is. It's a moral concern. I cannot live with this on my mind without taking action just because I don't know who it is. In cases like this my honor, my dignity, and my moral code is much more important than my physical body.

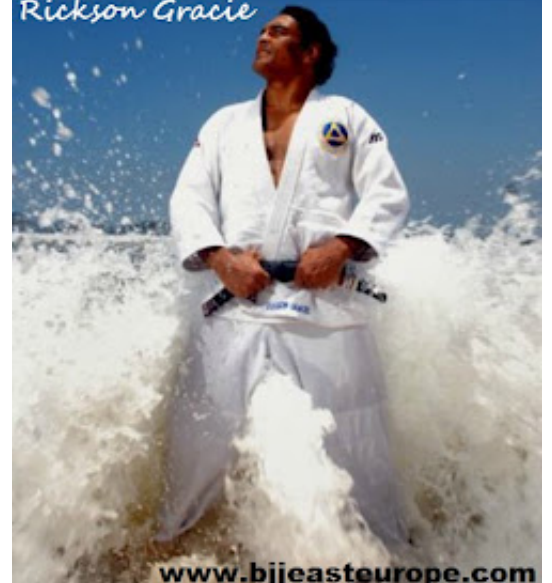
————Balancing Aggressive Nature with Physical Limitations————

Steve: Do you think that Gracie Jiu Jitsu has something for the person who doesn't have a natural talent?

Rickson: Definitely. I can't think of any one with less physical ability than my father, Helio Gracie. When my father was twelve the doctor said that he couldn't do any exercise because of vertigo. If he ran 200 yards in a sprint, he would pass out. But he is a very short tempered, tough guy. So with the impossibility of using power while training with his uncle in Jiu Jitsu, he was forced to develop his own technique thus balancing his inability. We like to say that Einstein was to mathematics what Helio Gracie is to Jiu Jitsu. He totally invented 80 percent of the Jiu Jitsu we have today. Leverage and sensitivity and using the opponent's energy against himself are basic to Jiu Jitsu, but the application of these principles was never done in the way my father developed them. My father broke the mold. He initiated a different perspective. It used to be that when someone told you, "hey, there's a tough guy coming here to kick your ass," you imagine this big guy with and ugly face. He's 280 pounds and has big fists. You don't imagine a guy who weighs 135 pounds.

"There's always a good side to everything. Nothing is totally desperate. Like "Oh...I lost my job." You lost your job? Go to the beach, man. Get some waves."

Rickson Gracie



——Balancing Wants and Needs——

Maynard: I don't know if you realize how significant it is but, seeing your whole family showing up in support of Royce at the UFC is a very moving image for many people. It seems that you don't see that kind of family love and pride much anymore.



Rickson: Especially in the big cities. People don't make the time to give to each other. I think that's just a sign of our times. Smart are the ones who try to preserve those old elements. People today just want to make money. I understand that and respect that but... I find myself in a very fortunate position because I love what I'm doing and I'm good at it. So I make a living.

Maynard: It seems that here in the states, people are more concerned with doing something to make money than they are with doing what it is that they love to do. They decide that money is the goal and then begin to figure out what they've got to do to get it. They forget to listen to themselves to find out what it is they really are not only best suited for but are passionate about as well.

Rickson: Yes. I think exactly the opposite. You need to make money but it should never be the priority. What you like to do is what you should try your best at doing. The money is gonna come. That's the way people really get rich, you know? They just enjoy what they do and the money comes in some way. It's the same with the work out. Some people think that the workout is to increase heartbeats or flexibility or endurance or coordination. So they make up exercises to improve one of more of these areas. When I'm doing exercise, what I'm trying to do is meditate. Get in a state that I feel a balance between body, mind, and spirit. It's just enjoyment. When I train in Jiu Jitsu I don't have a clock in mind. I'm just feeling and flowing. When playing or surfing or hiking there are no timings or special rules. If you love it you just get into it with your whole body. You don't care that it's exercise.

Maynard: ...and the endurance comes.

Rickson: I can't imagine going on a stair master or lifting weights or whatever to get in shape.

——Balancing the Diet——

Maynard: I heard that the Gracies also follow a specific diet.

Rickson: Yes. It doesn't have as much to do with what or how much you eat as it does with how you combine your foods. You can eat vegetables, fruit, rice, beans, meat, or whatever. But the most important thing is the food combinations. The digestive process is the biggest workout your body does on a daily basis. You use energy to digest. You can save energy by choosing foods

that digest better in certain combinations, and you can absorb more nutrients and gain more energy by choosing food that use compatible enzymes to digest.

Maynard: So in the reverse...if you eat something that is difficult to digest and has no nutritional value...

Rickson: Exactly. You waste even more energy. We are not cows. We don't have to eat all day long to maintain. We eat, digest, absorb, then rest. For me, I think three meals a day is enough. I spend at least four hours in between without anything but water.

Maynard: A very traditional Brazilian dish is black beans and rice, but in your diet this is a bad combo.

Rickson: That's right. What you really want to fight in your body is the fermentation process. Fermentation basically is a bad combination between acids you produce to digest your food. For example, when you eat rice, your mouth produces specific acids to break down the rice so your stomach can begin the digestive process. When you eat ice cream, or an apple, or watermelon juice, your mouth produces completely different acids. And that can create a bad chemical reaction in your body. You feel heavy or sluggish which is not good. It's not only uncomfortable, it's counter productive.

——Balancing Perspective/Points of View——

Rickson: I believe that you should have an evolutionary point of view. You must meditate, you must pray, you must be thankful, you must give. I think those things are very important spiritually for you to be at peace with yourself. Once you've tried to improve spiritually, physically, and mentally your are in a good way. Even if I lost my two legs now I don't think that it would make me lose the sense of life. Of course I'm not gonna be a fighter anymore, but I'm able to allow myself to do other things. I'm gonna try to swim. I'm gonna try to surf. I don't know what else, but I'm definitely going to still be in love with life and learning. I've always wanted to learn how to play the piano, but I've never had the time. Or play the guitar. So many things. Some people have legs and they don't use them because they've focused on something else. I think every bad thing has a good way to look at it. Of course I love to do what I'm doing, but if I get sick...understand? The mind is so beautiful and so wild and you can have so many different things. There's always a good side to everything. Nothing is totally desperate. Like "Oh...I lost my job." You lost your job? Go to the beach, man. Get some waves.

Maynard: If you have a clear mind like that, and if you have confidence in life and in yourself you're going to get fed.

Rickson: Definitely. You can't be negative all the time.

Maynard: You can, but don't expect for things to come to you very easily.