

THE BIG IDEAS

Areté

Express your greatness.

Sacrifices vs. Decisions

Big distinction.

Being Courageous

Is a practice.

Crazy Dreams

+ Long journeys.

Dedication

How's yours?



The Way of the Fight

BY GEORGES ST-PIERRE · WILLIAM MORROW PAPERBACKS © 2013 · 320 PAGES

“My goal here is to write the greatest book ever written, including these words about fear. It doesn’t make any difference that this happens to be the first book I’ve ever written. What matters most is the spirit in which it’s being written—and, quite simply, that it’s *being* written. The purpose is to become the best writer in my category (yes, page for page *and* pound for pound). I’m just not sure what the category is yet, and I’m not sure I should care.

The reason behind writing this book is that I’d like to find a way to tell you my story in a different way than it has already been told. In a way, my life can be explained through mathematics and equations. It’s really simple: from the moment I started learning and acquiring knowledge, I realized how much there was left to learn. About fighting, about diet. About love and life. About fear! About dinosaurs, even.

So the equation works like this: The more I learn, the less I know. Yes, more is less. That’s the way it works in my mind. And it applies to all of us, not just me. For me, that’s the secret to a big part of my life and how I became who I am.”

~ Georges St-Pierre from *The Way of the Fight*

Georges St-Pierre.

GSP.

If you’re into mixed martial arts/the UFC, you know GSP as one of the greatest pound for pound fighters ever.

Although I’m not really a big MMA guy, I’ve always admired the sheer, visceral strength + courage of fighters and elite warriors like the UFC champions + Navy SEALs/Army Rangers.

I happened to get connected to GSP’s head coach, [Firas Zahabi](#)—who became an instant virtual friend. (And who shared [these kind words](#) re: our membership program. Thanks, Firas!) Then I was enjoying [The Procrastination Equation](#) by Piers Steel (see Notes) who shared his love of MMA in general and GSP in particular.

Firas let me know GSP had this book and here we are.

It’s awesome.

If you love sports and getting a peek behind the scenes at how greatness is achieved, I think you’ll love the book. It’s incredibly inspiring. (Get a copy [here](#).)

It’s packed with Big Ideas and I’m excited to share a handful of my favorites we can apply to our lives now so let’s jump straight in!

“It’s the repetition of affirmations that leads to belief. And once that belief becomes a deep conviction, things begin to happen.”

~ Muhammad Ali

"In case you don't have time to read or don't feel like reading the whole book, at least remember this: pick a goal, make a realistic plan to reach that goal, work through each step of the plan, and repeat."

~ Georges St-Pierre

ARETÉ

"Another powerful Aristotelean term I heard used by a good friend is *arete*. It's a Greek word with no real equivalent in any other language as far as I can tell, but basically *arete* is about looking into your own soul and not only discovering what it is that can make you great, but also identifying the *source* of that greatness and activating it every single day of your life. It's the well you draw from when there's no other resource. It's the absolute truth that sits in the deepest part of your soul."

Areté.

As you know if you've read many of these Notes/watched much of my stuff/etc., I love this concept. In fact, if I had to summarize [my entire philosophy in ONE word](#), areté would be it.

The word directly translates as virtue or excellence but has a deeper meaning—essentially, expressing the highest version of ourselves moment to moment to moment.

Areté.

THAT's the key to greatness. (And happiness/flourishing/all good things.)

How's yours?

P.S. Here's how [Jonathan Haidt](#) describes it in [The Happiness Hypothesis](#) (see Notes):

"What was his [Benjamin Franklin's] secret? Virtue. Not the sort of uptight, pleasure-hating Puritanism that some people now associate with that word, but a broader kind of virtue that goes back to ancient Greece. The Greek word areté meant excellence, virtue, or goodness, especially of a functional sort... Thus in saying that well being or happiness (eudaimonia) is 'an activity of soul in conformity with excellence or virtue,' Aristotle wasn't saying that happiness comes from giving to the poor and suppressing your sexuality. He was saying that a good life is one where you develop your strengths, realize your potential, and become what it is in your nature to become."

SACRIFICES VS. DECISIONS

"The key has always been simple, though: discovery. Even though other people had started voicing their opinions on my potential, I remained silent. Until I discovered exactly what it is that I wanted to do: become a mixed martial artist. That discovery gave belief to my inner dreams because I started seeing the concrete possibility that I could become a fighter, a true fighter. And so the change was going from having visions about my life to living them concretely.

At this stage in my life I left many, many things behind. I constantly heard Kristof's words whispered in my ear, and it triggered a reaction inside me and I realized: this is what I want to do. I want to become champion of the world in mixed martial arts.

And then, all of my energy, everything I had inside of me, went toward achieving that goal. I wasn't making sacrifices anymore, I was making *decisions*. Train instead of party. Work instead of play. Perfect practice instead of casual repetition.

I started living life with purpose and direction. In the words of Buddha, 'First, intention; then, enlightenment.'"

Sacrifices vs. Decisions.

That's a HUGE distinction.

Reminds me of [The Great Work of Your Life](#) by [Stephen Cope](#) (see Notes) in which Stephen brings the story of the [Bhagavad Gita](#) to life for modern times.

" My life isn't very exciting most of the time... I get up and I go to the gym to work out. Then I eat. Then I work out again, get a therapeutic massage-so I can work out again later-and then I eat more. Then I go back to sleep. That's it for most days, and I love it. In fact, I wouldn't know what to do other than follow this routine."

~ Georges St-Pierre

" The thing I had to learn, and I keep learning this lesson in my life every day, is how to take fear's power and use it to become better."

~ Georges St-Pierre

Stephen tells us that, once we've discovered our dharma/ultimate purpose/sacred calling (!), we need to organize our ENTIRE (!!!) lives around fulfilling our destiny. Period.

But, as GSP tells us here, at that stage, we're so committed to something bigger than ourselves that letting go of the distractions is NOT a "sacrifice." It's just a clear, powerful DECISION that enables us to do what we need to do.

Here's how [Stephen Cope](#) puts it: "Naturally, there is an obstacle to all this wonderment. Alas, it turns out that the process of unification requires saying 'no' to actions that do not support dharma—saying 'no' to detours, and to side channels of all kinds, even to some pretty terrific side channels. It requires snipping off all manner of 'other options.' The root of the word 'decide' means, literally, 'to cut off.' To decide for something means at times to decide against something else."

So, what's your dharma?

Your sacred calling?

The thing you would do if you weren't afraid?

Got it? Awesome.

Now, what things do you need to let go of so you can give yourself most fully to living your destiny?

Fantastic. Nice decisions.

Let's do this.

P.S. As you may know: The [Bhagavad Gita](#) is one of the most beautiful and powerful spiritual texts ever created. It was Gandhi's guidebook. And, Gandhi was perhaps the greatest embodiment of its truths.

Get this: It's the story of the greatest warrior of the era (Arjuna) being counseled by the Divine Krishna on how to conquer his fear and live his purpose. I love the parallels with GSP who is, in many ways, a modern-day Arjuna and this book captures the wisdom gained from his various mentors as he learned to embrace his fear to live his dharma.

P.P.S. We are, of course, *all* warriors fighting the battle between our noble and less-than-noble selves as we optimize and actualize.

P.P.P.S. Here's how Socrates puts it in *The Gorgias*: "I desire only to know the truth, and to live as well as I can... And, to the utmost of my power, I exhort all other men to do the same... I exhort you also to take part in the great combat, which is the combat of life, and greater than every other earthly conflict."

PRACTICE BEING COURAGEOUS

"Don't get me wrong: fear can be a good thing, and there's no way you can eliminate it from your life. In fact, eliminating fear from your life is a lie, or it's a mental illness. That's it, nothing more. Anyone who says they don't feel fear is a liar. Guys who say they don't feel fear are full of shit or they're plain crazy. Major denial issues.

I remember hearing a story about soldiers going into battle and showing no fear, and the guy said it was really simple (I'm paraphrasing here): 'There are two kinds of men: those who want to go out and fight—the crazy ones—and the ones who are afraid to go, but they go anyway. They're the courageous ones.' I realized at this moment that it takes fear to make a person courageous. And I like that, because courage says something about you.

*"This is how I get better.
I pick small things and I
practice them until they're
perfect. I have no choice,
because there are two kinds
of people who do martial
arts: those who practice a
thousand different kicks one
time each, and those who
practice one kick a thousand
times minimum. You can
guess which group I belong
to."*

~ Georges St-Pierre

*"So the question is: What
happens when you accept
and embrace your fear? Fear
becomes your weapon."*

~ Georges St-Pierre

The result is that, after a while, you get practice at being courageous. You understand how to move forward against fear, how to react in certain situations. You just get better. It doesn't mean you stop feeling fear—that would be careless—but it means you have earned the right to feel confidence in the battle against fear."

First, LOVE all of that.

Reminds me of one of my favorite quotes ever. [David Reynolds](#), who integrates Japanese and Western therapies in his great book [Constructive Living](#) (see Notes), tells us: "Anyone who says he isn't afraid of anything is both stupid and lying." <- :)

As I've mentioned before, when I'm reading books I often notice a word or two that the author comes back to again and again. There's often ONE word that keeps on showing up and captures the energy of the entire book.

(For example, I just worked on the Notes for [Mastery](#) by [Robert Greene](#). His word? "INTENSITY." That was the dominant word he used to describe his masters like da Vinci, the Wright brothers, Darwin, Mozart, Henry Ford, etc.

And in [The Hoops Whisperer](#), [Idan Ravin](#)'s #1 word was "GREATNESS." The NBA stars he coaches (like LeBron, Kevin Durant, Chris Paul, etc.) were *all* about achieving GREATNESS.)

So, that leads us to GSP's #1 word.

Somewhat surprisingly, given the fact we think he must be some invincible, fearless warrior, it's FEAR.

The book is essentially an extraordinary look at how GSP has embraced fear again and again and again throughout his life. And, it's his intimacy with *fear* that has shaped his destiny.

Amazingly powerful stuff.

As a guy recovering from being super (!) insecure and afraid of pretty much everything (hah!), I'm always blown away and inspired by the fact that I had it all wrong for decades. Great people are NOT fearless. They just learned to live with their fear and see it as a sign of potential growth rather than a sign that something's inherently wrong with them (which used to be my dominant orientation).

So, if you're still telling yourself that something is wrong with you because you often feel fear, KNOW that feeling fear is not a sign that you're flawed. It's just a condition of the game. It's an opportunity to grow.

If one of the greatest fighters ever embraces fear, so can we.

P.S. GSP is a huge Aristotle fan. It was Aristotle who told us that courage is the virtuous mean between the vices of cowardice (too much fear) and rashness or carelessness (too little fear).

Aristotle also told us that you cultivate any virtue by PRACTICING it. Remember: "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence [aka areté] then, is not an act, but a habit."

So, let's cultivate our courage by recognizing when we feel fear and PRACTICING doing what needs to get done. (Here's [one way](#) to practice!)

CRAZY DREAMS AND LONG JOURNEYS

"The first time I told my dad I wanted to be world champion in mixed martial arts, he thought I was nuts. It was my dream, sure, but everything begins with a dream, and it felt real inside my head. It was hard to talk about, and harder for others to understand or visualize. But I've always had premonitions, feelings and visions that felt like they belonged to me and me alone. Like the future sometimes takes place inside my head.

But this isn't a good thing if the future looks *bleak*. The loss to my hero Matt Hughes, for example. I saw it. From the staredown, where I couldn't even look at him and averted my eyes to the rafters. I'd lived the events inside my head long before the fight. I believed deep inside of me that I'd be champion someday, but I also felt this wasn't the right time.

The importance of the feeling, though, is that it put me on a path. Luckily, I know that each journey begins with one step, and is followed by another."

Two things here.

First, GSP's dad thought he was crazy when he said he wanted to be world champion.

I just finished the Note on [Ronda Rousey's *My Fight Your Fight*](#) where she shared pretty much the exact same story.

Here's her version: "*But you can't let other people affect your belief in yourself. People are going to tell you to be logical and to be reasonable. They're going to say that because no one else has ever done something, that it can't be done. You have to be crazy enough to believe that you are the one person in the history of the world who can create the change or accomplish that dream. Many people are going to doubt you and tell you reasons why you can't and why you shouldn't. You can choose to accept them or reject them.*

I had ignored everyone who said it could never be done. Now I was going to be the first woman ever in the UFC."

Of course, it's not enough to just have big dreams.

GSP and Ronda backed up their dreams with T.E.N.A.C.I.O.U.S. effort.

But, as [John Eliot](#) says in *Overachievement* (I smile every time I read this): "*History, though, shows us that the people who end up changing the world—the great political, social, scientific, technological, artistic, even sports revolutionaries—are always nuts, until they're right, and then they're geniuses.*"

That's Part I.

Part II?

This: "*Luckily, I know that each journey begins with one step, and is followed by another.*"

That's genius.

We all know a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. But then what?

Then we take ANOTHER step. And another. Then another. And another one after that.

And, if your stride length is about 2.5 feet, you better get ready to take 2,112,000 such steps to get to that 1,000-mile-away destination of yours.

Keep that in mind the next time you think you should be able to snap your fingers and achieve your big dreams overnight.

#walkingshoes

P.S. "*Think about climbing a mountain. If you decide you're going up Everest, you don't start with a sprint. You'll never make it out of base camp if you do that. The secret is twofold: make sure your approach is consistent and steady so that you can maintain the progress you're making as your journey continues.*"

"One of the lessons I learned in all those years of practicing karate is that progress only comes in small, incremental portions. Nobody becomes great overnight. Nobody crams information if he wants to be able to use it over the long term."

~ Georges St-Pierre

"When you'd rather die than relive an error, and when you're truly committed to finding a better way to live your life, this is when the world opens its arms, welcomes and rewards you with opportunity. This is why we innovate, or we die."

~ Georges St-Pierre

DEDICATION

"Do you want to know what I like best about myself? The truth is, I've become 'great' at maybe one thing: dedication. I've never been the fastest, or the strongest, or the biggest, or the quickest, or the most powerful. In life, we all discover at some point or other that there's someone else out there who's better at any single thing than we are.

I've found a way to turn what some call hard work into a game and an exercise in efficiency. I turned garbage collection into a race because it's good cardiovascular exercise, because it's good power training, and because it makes the day go by faster. Efficiency for me is an obsession, an addiction. It not only helps me get stronger, but makes things simpler. It helps me transcend my momentary negative inclinations. It gets me to the gym when I don't feel like going. The ancillary benefit is good habits. Food tastes better, too."

Dedication.

There's something to aspire to be great at, eh?

Which brings us back to the first Big Idea: Areté.

Here's to entering the arena that is life and giving it our best shot.

Day in. Day out. Month in. Month out. Year in. Year out. Decade in. Decade out.

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

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About the Author of "The Way of the Fight"

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at brianjohnson.me.