

Introduction

What the Hell is This?

Let's maybe start with with what "Think Like a Bullfighter" (TLABF?) isn't. It isn't a self-help book. But it might be a *self*-self-help book - a self help book that I've written to help myself. I'm writing this because this is something that *I* want to get clear in my head, because it's something that I not only want to get clear in my head, but want to actually practice, in my life, to make my life better.

And please don't think that this is a book about bullfighting, it is certainly NOT a guide to how to fight bulls, in a Spanish arena, or in any other context where you might consider taking on several hundred kilos of beef. This is for entertainment purposes only - as they say in the legal disclaimer to some seduction manuals.

Another thing this book isn't is a collection of references to other reading. I was very taken or perhaps stung when I first heard the notion of a "three inch Buddha," a person who merely reads things and then regurgitates these things as their own wisdom.

What this book *is* is a book about the difference between wrestling and fighting. This comes from a story that I heard a long, long time ago about someone interviewing a bullfighter who asked them if the bullfighter if he had to do lots of exercises to improve his strength in anticipation of his bullfights.

"I think you have perhaps misunderstood," said the bullfighter, "I do not wrestle the bull."

Don't be the Bull

The aim of bullfighting is to encroach on the bull's territory, or get between where the bull is and the area that he has marked out as his territory, and as a result, make him charge. Of course part of charging is that the bull lowers his head so that he can point his horns at you and commits to the attack. By lowering his head he exposes the top of his neck and shoulders to the attack.

Similar way, if you get drawn and commit to a full-blown attack you are vulnerable.

Killing the Bull is Optional

It's not about wrestling the bull, I hope we've established that. And it's not about killing the bull either. Deciding to fight is about changing your opponent, changing in yourself and definitely about changing your relationship between your opponent and yourself. Imagining every fight as a fight to the death makes you much less likely to fight because you become scared that you'll be killed or obliterated, and also, even if you've fantasized about it many times, you not dislike your opponent enough to obliterate them - or maybe you do and you're scared of what that might mean that you do if you get into a fight situation and see that you're winning.

In the Japanese martial art of Aikido there is the notion of looking after your opponent during and after a fight. The purpose of fighting your opponent according to Aikido isn't to destroy them, but to look after them and make them safe.

No doubt, in some situations the only way to make your opponent safe is to obliterate them. The torture victim and political thinker Niccolo Machiavelli discusses very early in his book "The Prince" that when you invade a country you should be absolutely ruthless in destroying prince - and the family - of the losing side.

If we go back to that imaginary, metaphorical bullring (remember that I have no knowledge of any real bullrings) a fight isn't about killing the bull a fight is about invading *some* of the bull's territory and making it either yours or a shared space where you are both allowed to operate.

Never Wrestle The Bull

Never wrestle. Fight yes (when you think you've got at least a chance of winning, and the costs of losing aren't totally prohibitive). Run away yes. Obstruct, yes. Deceive? Yes.

What do I mean by wrestle? I mean throw all your weight and strength full on against the weight and strength of your opponent. Why not? Well, let's look at the potential outcomes of wrestling.

You're Weaker Than Your Opponent

If you're weaker than your opponent and you're wrestling, then result is that you're going to get flattened. The experience of getting flattened like this will be far destructive than the experience of getting beaten in a fight that you've picked. The experience will be much more like getting flattened by a bull.

You're Stronger Than Your Opponent

So you flattened an opponent who was weaker than you. How do you feel now? You flattened someone who was weaker than you, is that a good feeling? What's the value of flattening people who are weaker than you? Is it the best use of your energy and time? Is the payoff big? Might you not be better picking selected fights with people who are stronger than you, where you have a smaller chance of winning, but a bigger chance of winning big?

You're Pretty Much the Same Strength as Your Opponent

This the worst of all, because the battle could go on for a long, long time. If you and your opponent are evenly matched and you wrestle, what ensues will be an exhausting and destructive battle which will ultimately end up in one of the outcomes above. If you wrestle with someone who's pretty much match with you, the outcome will be that in the end you will lose - and lose badly, or in the end you will win - but still be totally exhausted.

Lots of Goes

You probably won't win your first fight. You might not win your tenth fight. The only way that you will get better at this is with practice.

But remember that fighting isn't wrestling. Fighting is deliberately intruding onto someone else's territory (like the bull's) to gain a response. In bullfighting that response is to get the bull to charge. In real life that response may be merely to get the bull to acknowledge you, to understand where your territory is, to understand that you have any claim to territory.

When you start to see a bullfight in every occasion when somebody intrudes on your territory, or when there's a conflict over territory between you and someone else, you start to see opportunities for bullfights dozens of times a day.

I had a realisation when I was thinking one morning about the whole thinking like a bullfighter concept on the way to work on the London underground. The walk to the train station is about a mile and it takes me 20 minutes. And on the way, there must be a dozen territorial spats. For example, at the bottom of my road there is a pedestrian crossing. Actually two, one for the traffic in each direction. When I get to the second lane - the one heading into the city, there are often cars parked across the crossing. So that when the signal turns to green for me, I feel enraged. While the signal is green, this is my space. They should get out of it. I feel especially enraged if it's someone who should know better, like a police car, or a bus. That's a potential bullfight, right at the bottom of my road.

Two hundred yards further on I walk along the bank of the Thames. It's a path shared between cyclists and pedestrians. There are signs all along the route to indicate that the cyclists should keep near the river and the pedestrians should walk down the side of the building that borders the path. But nobody neither cyclists nor pedestrians pays attention to that meaning that cyclists rush up silently behind you and could whizz either side. #When you Get Gored

If you decide that you're going to fight then sometimes you are going to lose. By deciding to fight (rather than just accidentally getting into a fight) you are deliberately raising the stakes, increasing the risk and disturbing the equilibrium. And sometimes when you do that, the result is that you're going to end up worse than when you started.

One thing that you should know about a fight is that the minute you know for definite that you're losing and you know that it's safe to do so you should retreat. Use blocking. Use deception, retire to a safe place.

When You're not Fighting - Don't Fight!

Do you ever spend your days - and your (sleepless?) nights arguing with someone who isn't there? Does this help? Not really, does it?

Well, then, stop doing it. One of the things that happens when you decide when to fight and when not to fight, is that the nature of the time when you're not fighting changes.

When you're not fighting you should be doing one of two things, resting or training.

Resting

Training