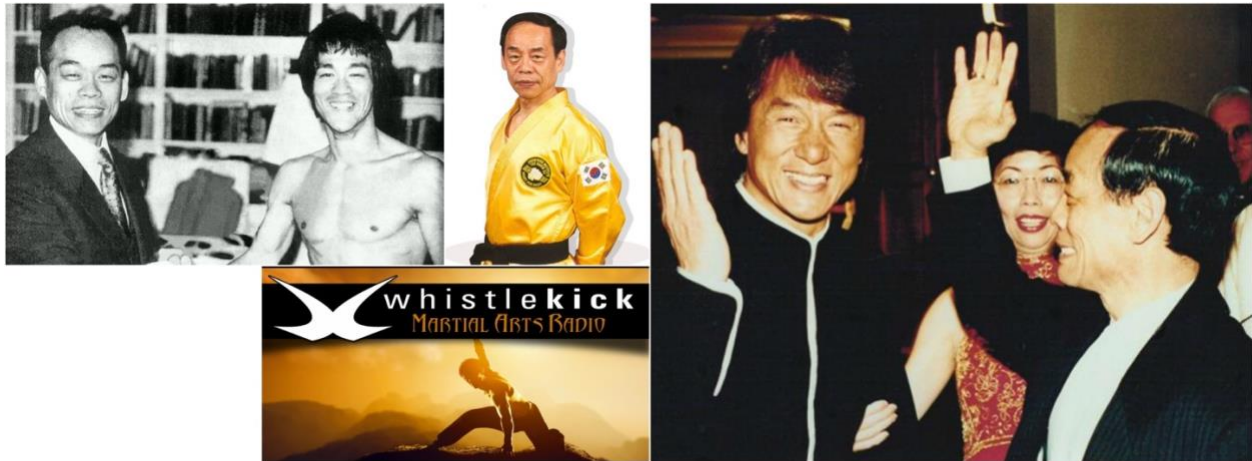




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Episode 180

Grandmaster Jhoon Rhee

Jeremy Lesniak:

Welcome to Whistlekick Martial Arts Radio, episode 180, and thanks for tuning in. Today, we hear from Grandmaster Jhoon Rhee. Yes, THAT Jhoon Rhee.

Here at Whistlekick, we make the world's best sparring gear, and on Martial Arts Radio, we bring you the best podcast on the traditional martial arts twice every week. Welcome. My name is Jeremy Lesniak, and I'm your host as well as the founder of Whistlekick Sparring Gear and Apparel. Thank you to the returning listeners, and welcome to those of you tuning in for the very first time. You can find the show notes at WhistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com, which is also the best place to sign up for the newsletter. As a thank you for joining, we're going to send you our Top 10 Tips for Martial Artists, which is an exclusive podcast episode. We have never, will never, air that in our regular podcast feed, and our newsletter's going to keep you up-to-date on what's going on behind the scenes, tell you about upcoming show guests, and even throw you some discounts on products once in a while.

Back on episode 14, we were lucky enough to speak with Bill "Superfoot" Wallace. Some of you asked for a transcript of the show, and with permission, we've gone ahead and done that. You can find versions for both Kindle and in paperback over at Amazon.

It's hard to be in the martial arts and not know who Grandmaster Jhoon Rhee is, though there are certainly some who don't. When you talk about Taekwondo's start in the USA, you're really



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talking about Grandmaster Rhee. A friend of Bruce Lee, he's a central figure in a book we've spoken of many times on this show, *A Killing Art*. There's something particularly special about speaking to someone who has been training as long as Grandmaster Rhee. While not in the best of health, he was willing to take some time out of his day to speak with me about martial arts, philosophy, and his beliefs on the intersection of the two. Let's welcome him.

Grandmaster Rhee, welcome to Whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

Jhoon Rhee:

Oh, thank you. Thank you for invitation.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thank you, sir. It's an honor and absolute privilege to speak with you.

Jhoon Rhee:

It's mutual.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thank you. We like to talk to our guests about how they got started in the martial arts before we go off on any wanderings and start telling stories because it tends to give us context for their path, and I know that your start in the martial arts has been well-documented, and I'm sure many, many of our listeners know it, but for those that maybe haven't heard that part of your life ...

Jhoon Rhee:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

... could you tell us a little bit about how you got started with your training?

Jhoon Rhee:

Well, when I was 14, I had a little street fight, and I won, but I was scared, so I want to be prepared myself to not to be scared, so I entered a Chung Do Kwan right behind my home. So, another thing that is that when I finished that one week is over, I knew what I'm going to do. I'm going to go US, promote Taekwondo in the US. When I was 14, I had that decision.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

What ... Wow. Okay. I was 14 once. I've known a number of 14-year-olds, and I don't think any of them had that clear of a life plan. Why did you feel so strongly about that?

Jhoon Rhee:

Well, I was always longing for US, and I always wanted the Korean culture to be introduced to the world, and so I thought Taekwondo to be the most ideal item.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.

Jhoon Rhee:

For Korean.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure, and how long did it take you to realize that dream? What age were you when you ...?

Jhoon Rhee:

10 years.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Only 10 ten years?

Jhoon Rhee:

Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, and you spent that time training, preparing, learning Taekwondo?

Jhoon Rhee:

That's right. I came 1950s, so probably it was 1956, to US.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, and what did you ... How did you start teaching Taekwondo when you arrived in the US?

Jhoon Rhee:

Well, first I learned ... I just taught exactly the way I learned. Then I had a lot of new ideas. You know, some of the ideas they are teaching was very ... too primitive, and so we have to be really improved. That's how I really started.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay. Great. Stories. I love stories. I told you before we started the recording that stories are kind of my favorite part of what we do here, and I'm sure that if I asked you to name them all, I mean, it would be books and books, and some of the stories that you've told are in books that I've read, but if I asked you to pick one of your favorite stories for our listeners, what might that be?

Jhoon Rhee:

Well, my new enlightened view of the world. This is my honest opinion. I was a devout Christian, and when I woke up with new ideas, Jesus Christ did not come just to create a little dinky church. He came here to build a Kingdom of Heaven and Earth. So, the philosophical term would be Utopia, so, I named the book called Trutopia. Have you heard of this book?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I have. I haven't had the chance to read it, but now that you're on the show, I'm going to.

Jhoon Rhee:

Do you have one?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I do not.

Jhoon Rhee:

Okay, when you finish, you can email me your address, email address ... your mailing address, then I will send you one.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Oh, thank you, sir. So, tell us about this book then.

Jhoon Rhee:

Well, what this book is about, we made ... You know, all the religions make dogma out of nonsense. It doesn't make sense. It's out of human reason. You know that, right?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes. Yes, I can relate.

Jhoon Rhee:

So, when they believe that, and they create a lot of, fabricate the stories, like Jesus Christ was born without father. I mean, that's very unnatural. That would never happen, and that Jesus' body went to Heaven. This is really fooling the ignorant people, but intelligent, educated people would not believe that, but they are afraid to say, "Oh, I don't believe that."

They said the perfect human being must appear, you know, like Jesus Christ, before we can start building Kingdom of Heaven and Earth. I decided maybe volunteer myself, and that I proclaimed that I am a perfect human being, in other words, divine human being means opposite of animal human being. Opposite ... Animal human being always lie. Divine human being never lie.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Jhoon Rhee:

So, I made sure to practice for last 30, 40 years to be honest.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You talked about dogma within religion, and dogma within martial arts is a subject that comes up fairly frequently, and not just on this show, but in conversations martial artists have in the dojang. Do you see parallels there, and what do you think of that?

Jhoon Rhee:

No. No, Jesus Christ hate religion. He thinks that religions are making this world so crazy. You agree with me on that?



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Jhoon Rhee:

And so, he is not religious person. He is a philosopher. Human being, just like you and I.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right.

Jhoon Rhee:

After he died, the Bible came out, truth came about 300 years later, and they can fabricate any way they want.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes.

Jhoon Rhee:

There was no Jesus talk back to them.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I've heard some people, and I'm curious of how you feel about this with Taekwondo, because you were around in the early days. Do you ...?

Jhoon Rhee:

Yeah, Taekwondo ... See, a lot of people didn't think of Taekwondo as philosophy. I wasn't either. How can punching and kicking people be philosophy? Well, first of all, our first responsibility to God is protecting the safety of our life, so we are responsible to learn how to defend under evil circumstances. We have to ... Never fail ... In other words, the world became crazy. Right?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right.



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Jhoon Rhee:

You agree?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes.

Jhoon Rhee:

Why? Why is it so crazy? Because people lying. You know? Let's say ... Trump. Trump would lie to Soviet Union. Soviet Union lie to US. So these lies keep going, and later on, it's very hard to trust, so they try to build the most dangerous atom weapon they can find. That's atomic and hydrogen bomb. What a dangerous place to live here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right. Right.

Jhoon Rhee:

Especially when we have like people Kim Jong-il. You know?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay. You've talked about truth, honesty ...

Jhoon Rhee:

Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

... a few times, and you've said that it's something that you've spent quite a few years working to hone, to make sure that you are honest.

Jhoon Rhee:

Okay, now let me ask you to repeat after me.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Please. Sure.

Jhoon Rhee:

When I am truthful ...

Jeremy Lesniak:

When I am truthful ...

Jhoon Rhee:

... my heart is beautiful.

Jeremy Lesniak:... my heart is beautiful.

Jhoon Rhee:

When my heart is beautiful ...

Jeremy Lesniak:

When my heart is beautiful ...

Jhoon Rhee:

... everybody loves me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

... everybody loves me.

Jhoon Rhee:

When everybody loves me ...

Jeremy Lesniak:

When everybody loves me ...

Jhoon Rhee:

... I am happy.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

... I am happy.

Jhoon Rhee:

Isn't that simple?

Jeremy Lesniak:

It is simple, and that is good logic.

Jhoon Rhee:

Mhmm. Oh yeah, it's very plain logic. And so, we never knew why we were living. The purpose of life was not clearly taught to the people. What do you think it is?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I've always thought it was to be happy.

Jhoon Rhee:

That's right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.

Jhoon Rhee:

Our purpose of life is to be happy. Yeah, you have to be happy. In order to be happy, you have to be loved. See, Jesus Christ, all the religious leaders say, "You better live and die in my honor." That's the way introduced, you know, to scare people, but God never asked us to honor for him. He always say, "Forget about me. Just love one another." Even physical parents, never asked parents, "You better be honoring for me." You know what I mean?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Mhmm.

Jhoon Rhee:



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How can a God ... He is not egomaniac.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.

Jhoon Rhee:

Am I making sense?

Jeremy Lesniak:

You are, and I'm curious what - because these are good principles, these are good lessons - what do these look like ... Because I'm assuming at some point you took this into your teaching.

Jhoon Rhee:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Into the way you taught Taekwondo.

Jhoon Rhee:

Mhmm.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, how did your Taekwondo teaching change as you brought these principles in?

Jhoon Rhee:

It did not change. Well, I introduced seven physical qualities of a champion.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.

Jhoon Rhee:



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Yeah. In order to be champion in Taekwondo, you have to have power, speed, timing, endurance, balance, flexibility, and good posture. There are seven corresponding, seven qualities of a human champion, identical. That's why, now, I said it's a philosophy. A very in-depth philosophy I found. Can you see?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. You ...

Jhoon Rhee:

So in the power place, knowledge. Speedy place, you have to do the things quickly. You have to read a lot of books to be able to think very fast; and punctuality, timing; and persistent, perseverance; flexibility, you have to be flexible with your heart, just like your body is; and you have to have good balance, your body, mind, and heart. Body, mind, and heart, it must be balanced. In other words, strength in the body, honest in the heart, knowledge in the mind. So when you have your everything balanced, when you have all that, you are literally divine human being. You see?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I do.

Jhoon Rhee:

Mhmm.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I do.

Jhoon Rhee:

You never lie, you love people, then we are divine. We must, you know, think, "We are able to do anything we want to." I think when I first came to US, inventing new musical form and safety gear, I could not believe I did it. As you grow and build your confidence, anything you can do it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If you were to take all of this knowledge that you have now and these understandings, and go back to when you were 24 or 26, and you had come to the US, and you started teaching, what would be different? Would there be less focus on physical things?



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Jhoon Rhee:

Would be, of course. All would be the same, but totally different.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.

Jhoon Rhee:

Yeah. Maybe I may have several thousand divine human beings now. And once it is a formula that works, it will be done within 21st century, because when we start in Washington, doesn't mean we have to finish Washington, and then next go to Moscow. It spread simultaneous time, all over the world. So maybe in a few decades, every country will have divine human beings.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Do you think a martial arts practice is part of that journey?

Jhoon Rhee:

Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.

Jhoon Rhee:

Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Because of what you spoke of before with the need to defend, the protection element, or is it more than that?

Jhoon Rhee:

Well, more than one meaning, "protect my body."

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Okay. Alright. More than just the literal interpretation of protection then?

Jhoon Rhee:

That's right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.

Jhoon Rhee:

We're not supposed to war. Right now, we are having a difficult fight, and that becomes expanded to become national fight, and world fight.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. What do we, as all martial artists today, if we think of martial arts as Taekwondo, and Karate, and Judo, and all martial arts, what do we as martial artists do wrong? What one thing would you want us to change?

Jhoon Rhee:

We aren't doing anything wrong. We're doing what everybody else is doing. We are trying to be good from normal evil. So, never lie, always love people. God will say, "I love you." "I hate Him. God, I hate you." "I still love you." We have to be in that position. Not easy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No. Certainly not.

Jhoon Rhee:

That's why Jesus said, "Love thy enemy." You know, when He was baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, the first thing He said is, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." He thought now He was baptized He was ready, but He didn't know. He is not all-knowing. Let me tell you, let me prove that to you.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.

Jhoon Rhee:



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When Romans tried to arrest Him, He was not trying to hide. Judah kind of sold the information for 30 silver, and that's how He was caught. Right?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Jhoon Rhee:

If he was all-knowing, why didn't he make helicopter and run away?

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's true.

Jhoon Rhee:

Simple question. Simple question. So when they start lied, their lie has to become bigger and bigger and justify that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. Okay. If we could live in some kind of alternate world, where Jesus was doing martial arts, how do you think He would have approached His training?

Jhoon Rhee:

I think He would have do it exactly the way I did.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Really? Okay.

Jhoon Rhee:

Mhmm.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How so? Tell us more.

Jhoon Rhee:



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Well, teach the seven qualities of a champion, so you become, you know, a perfect human being. Then, you can manage your family, your village, your city, your country.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.

Jhoon Rhee:

There should be no disease, pain. All diseases were created from our own stress.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I would agree. I have heard people break down the word disease into dis-ease, to say you are uneasy, and that creates it. Other than Jesus, was there anyone that you would have wanted to train with that you didn't get to?

Jhoon Rhee:

Well, you know I trained with 350 US members of Congress, right? You've heard of that?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I did know that, yes.

Jhoon Rhee:

Oh. Naturally, I like to teach, I like to work out with those who have influence around him. That's why I picked Jesus, and then the US Congress.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.

Jhoon Rhee:

They promote better than you and I can together.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay. Who was your favorite teacher?



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Jhoon Rhee:

Mr. Uhm Woon-kyu in Korea.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, and why him? Why was he your favorite?

Jhoon Rhee:

Because he was very talented in Taekwondo, and very easy to explain, to understand. Some people are gifted.

Jeremy Lesniak:

As teachers, you mean?

Jhoon Rhee:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What do you think makes a good teacher?

Jhoon Rhee:

I think enthusiasm, for first. He really, really have a will to teach, then. Anybody can be a good teacher.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's not every day I get to speak with someone who has done as much to promote martial arts as Grandmaster Rhee. It's been a few days since we recorded, and I'm finding myself reflecting on the time often. It was a personal victory to have him on the show, and for him to be so open with me was certainly an honor. Thank you, Grandmaster Rhee, for coming on the show.

You can find us on social media - Facebook, Twitter Pinterest, YouTube, and Instagram - and our user name is Whistlekick. You should also check out our Facebook group, Whistlekick Martial Arts Radio Behind the Scenes. Hit up our Amazon Book Store for an unabridged version of our Superfoot Bill Wallace interview. We have some other books over there, too, and even more in the works.



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Thanks for listening to this episode, and hopefully you'll check out others. Until next time, train hard, smile, and have a great day.