

THE BIG IDEAS

Let There Be No Evil

In your thoughts.

Recognizing Merit

See it in others!

Practicing

What you preach.

What Needs Doing?

Get on it!

I Can Always Be Certain

Of learning.

Seeing Our Own Faults

Can you?

Hamlets

And love of learning.

50 Years of Study

That should do it.

Making a Mound

Keep making progress!

Purpose:

Your commanding officer.

The Way of the Master

Let's do our best.

"The Master said, Who expects to be able to go out of a house except by the door? How is it then that no one follows this way of ours?"

~ Confucius

The Analects of Confucius

BY CONFUCIUS (TRANSLATED BY ARTHUR WALEY) · VINTAGE © 1989 · 256 PAGES

"For those who approve but do not carry out, who are stirred, but do not change, I can do nothing at all."

~ Confucius from *The Analects of Confucius*

We're going old school on this one.

Believed to be rockin' it in the 5th/6th century BCE (around the same time as [Lao Tzu](#) and [Buddha](#)), Confucius was super passionate about learning and developing himself into the best person he could be according to the dictates of his classic society.

The book can get a little funny as Confucius goes into some detail on how to live properly according to ancient Chinese customs (don't forget to wear the black silk on special occasions! :) but it's packed with a lot of great gems.

I think you'll appreciate the mining I've done for us and trust you'll enjoy this quick tour of the classic book!

LET THERE BE NO EVIL IN YOUR THOUGHTS

"The Master said, If out of the three hundred songs I had to take one phrase to cover all my teachings, I would say 'Let there be no evil in your thoughts.'"

Nice.

As it turns out (and as you know if you've read many of these Notes), this theme is echoed across the literature.

The first words of one of the core texts of Buddhism, *The Dhammapada* ([see Notes](#)), tell us the same thing: *"Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think."*

While Marcus Aurelius ([see Notes](#) on *Meditations*) advises us to watch how we're soaking our mind: *"Your mind will be like its habitual thoughts; for the soul becomes dyed with the color of its thoughts. Soak it then in such trains of thoughts as, for example: Where life is possible at all, a right life is possible."*

And, Shakespeare tells us that nothing is good or bad, but thinking makes it so and [Wayne Dyer](#) tells us that when we change the way we look at things, the things we look at change.

So, how's your mind? A

re you letting "evil thoughts" cruise around in there unchecked?

Time to work on cleaning those gremlins out? :)

RECOGNIZING MERIT

"The Master said, (the good man) does not grieve that other people do not recognize his merits. His only anxiety is lest he should fail to recognize theirs."

"He who by reanimating the Old can gain knowledge of the New is fit to be a teacher."

~ Confucius

Love that.

Where's your focus?

Are you frustrated people aren't seeing your wonderful qualities?

How about we shift that around a bit and only allow anxiety to arise if WE fail to see the merits of others? (Interestingly, my gut is that as we fully make that switch others are a LOT more likely to see our good qualities as well, eh? :)

PRACTICING WHAT YOU PREACH

"Tzu-kung asked about the true gentleman. The Master said, He does not preach what he practices till he has practised what he preaches."

Reminds me of Debbie Ford's great line in her great book *The Dark Side of the Light Chasers* ([see Notes](#)): "This is why I often say, "Attend your own lectures.""

Are you practicing what you preach?

More specifically, what are you preaching that you aren't quite practicing fully yet?

Let's check in on that and see if our preaching should really be pointed at the mirror for a while longer before we direct it at our loved ones/colleagues/etc.

I don't know about you but I tend to most impatiently teach that which I've yet to really master and once I've REALLY gotten it, I soften in my delivery. You?

And, ultimately, this all comes back to Wallace D. Wattles' brilliant point from *The Science of Being Great* ([see Notes](#)) that: "The world needs demonstration more than it needs instruction."

DOING THE THINGS THAT NEED TO BE DONE

"The Master said, He does not mind not being in office; all he minds about is whether he has qualities that entitle him to office. He does not mind failing to get recognition; he is too busy doing the things that entitle him to recognition."

—> "He does not mind failing to get recognition; he is too busy doing the things that entitle him to recognition."

Do you feel like you deserve more recognition in some aspect of your life?

What might happen if you took that energy you're spending being upset/frustrated about not getting recognition and simply DID the things that would unquestionably entitle you to recognition?

(My hunch is it'd be good. :)

So I say we follow the Master's mojo and focus our energy on what needs to be done. :)

I CAN ALWAYS BE CERTAIN OF LEARNING

"The Master said, In the presence of a good man, think all the time how you may learn to equal him. In the presence of a bad man, turn your gaze within!"

Love it.

Confucius says it another way as well: "The Master said, Even when walking in a party of no more than three I can always be certain of learning from those I am with. There will be good qualities that I can select for imitation and bad ones that will teach me what requires correction in myself."

Isn't that a great approach?!?

"The Master said, A gentleman takes as much trouble to discover what is right as lesser men take to discover what will pay."

~ Confucius

"The Master said, To men who have risen at all above the middling sort, one may talk of things higher yet. But to men who are at all below the middling sort it is useless to talk of things that are above them."

~ Confucius

If we let it be, life is our classroom—rich with opportunities to expand our perspective and develop our consciousness.

So, the next time we're in the company of someone who we find a little less than inspiring, rather than criticize or get irritated, let's see if we can see how WE have those same qualities we find offensive in others and do some work on correcting them within ourselves, shall we?!? :)

And, of course, let's see how we can develop those admirable qualities we find in others as well!

SEEING OUR OWN FAULTS

"The Master said, In vain I have looked for a single man capable of seeing his own faults and bringing the charge home against himself."

D'oh!

Seneca tells us something similar in *Letters from a Stoic* ([see Notes](#)) where he says: *"Be harsh with yourself at times."*

Of course, we don't need to go nutty on ourselves like that albino monk from *The Da Vinci Code* (ew), but we DO need to take some time and notice where we might be falling a little short of our potential. Again, not with anger or shame or self-criticism, but with a compassionate view of how we might be able to improve ourselves and remove some bad habits.

Eckhart Tolle describes it beautifully in *The Power of Now* ([see Notes](#)) where he says: *"Once you realize that a certain kind of food makes you sick, would you carry on eating that food and keep asserting that it is okay to be sick?"*

We've gotta take a look at ourselves and see what we're doing that makes us sick SO WE CAN STOP DOING IT!

As everyone says, awareness of our flaws is the first step in correcting them.

Back to Tolle. He also says: *"It is certainly true that, when you accept your resentment, moodiness, anger, and so on, you are no longer forced to act them out blindly, and you are less likely to project them onto others. But I wonder if you are not deceiving yourself. When you have been practicing acceptance for a while, as you have, there comes a point when you need to go on to the next stage, where those negative emotions are not created anymore. If you don't, your "acceptance" just becomes a mental label that allows your ego to continue to indulge in unhappiness and so strengthen your separation from other people, your surroundings, your here and now."*

Quiz time: What's one thing you're doing these days that just isn't serving you?

Can you see how that "fault" just isn't cool and that NOW might be a good time to swap out the less than rockin' behavior/thought/habit/whatever with something constructive?

Sweet. :)

"As to being a Divine Sage or even a Good Man, far be it from me to make any such claim. As for unwavering effort to learn and unflagging patience in teaching others, those are merits that I do not hesitate to claim."

~ Confucius

HAMLETS AND LOVE OF LEARNING

"The Master said, In a hamlet of ten houses you may be sure of finding someone quite as loyal and true to his word as I. But I doubt that you would find anyone with such a love of learning."

For the record, the translator has a little note here to establish the fact that in this case Confucius uses the word "learning" to mean: *"self-improvement in the most general sense. Not book-learning."*

I don't know how many times Confucius refers to the virtue of "learning" throughout this book but it's a LOT.

"I have never yet seen anyone whose desire to build up his moral power was as strong as sexual desire."

~ Confucius

Reminds me of Vernon Howard's wisdom from *The Power of Your Supermind* ([see Notes](#)) where he says: "It is a mistake for anyone to think he has lived too long in his old, unsatisfactory ways to make the great change. If you switch on the light in a dark room, it makes no difference how long it was dark because the light will still shine. Be teachable. That is the whole secret."

(Isn't that passage AWE-some?!)

Special Attention to:—> "Be teachable. That is the whole secret."

So, how passionate are you about your self-development and learning all the things you can about how to improve your life?!?

Know that it was THE virtue that Confucius seems to be most proud to possess.

He says: "Learn as if you were following someone whom you could not catch up, as though it were someone you were frightened of losing."

Love that image!

A story Joseph Campbell used to love to tell comes to mind here ([see Notes](#) on *A Joseph Campbell Companion* for more). Campbell says: "Sri Ramakrishna said, "Do not seek illumination unless you seek it as a man whose hair is on fire seeks a pond.""

Of course, the fact is we might get a little (or a lot) ridiculed for our passion for growth. But don't worry, that's been going on for 2,500 years. Epictetus ([see Notes](#) on *The Enchiridion*) tells us this: "If you desire philosophy, prepare yourself from the beginning to be ridiculed, to expect that many will sneer at you, and say, He has all at once returned to us as a philosopher... And remember that if you abide in the same principles, these men who first ridiculed will afterward admire you: but if you shall have been overpowered by them, you will bring on yourself double ridicule."

And Lao Tzu ([see Notes](#) on *Tao te Ching*) reminds us: "When superior people hear of the Way, they carry it out with diligence. When middling people hear of the Way, it sometimes seems to be there, sometimes not. When lesser people hear of the Way, they ridicule it greatly. If they didn't laugh at it, it wouldn't be the Way."

So, back to you.

What are you most passionate about learning these days? And how committed are you? :)

(btw: here's another perspective from Confucius on the subject: "The Master said, Only one who bursts with eagerness do I instruct; only one who bubbles with excitement, do I enlighten. If I hold up one corner and a man cannot come back to me with the other three, I do not continue the lesson.")

50 YEARS OF STUDY SHOULD DO IT

"The Master said, Give me a few more years, so that I may have spent a whole fifty in study, and I believe that after all I should be fairly free from error."

It's awesome how humble Confucius is about the time it takes to truly master his life.

He says this as well: "The Master said, At fifteen I set my heart upon learning. At thirty, I had planted my feet firm upon the ground. At forty, I no longer suffered from perplexities. At fifty, I knew what were the biddings of Heaven. At sixty, I heard them with a docile ear. At seventy, I could follow the dictates of my own heart; for what I desired no longer overstepped the boundaries of right."

And this: "One who will study for three years without thought of reward would be hard indeed to find."

"Is goodness indeed so far away? If we really wanted Goodness, we should find that it was at our very side."

~ Confucius

Vernon Howard puts it this way: *"Do not be impatient with your seemingly slow progress. Do not try to run faster than you presently can. If you are studying, reflecting and trying, you are making progress whether you are aware of it or not. A traveler walking the road in the darkness of night is still going forward. Someday, some way, everything will break open, like the natural unfolding of a rosebud."*

So, are you feeling a little impatient about growth in a certain area of your life?

Confucius would proly advise us to chillax on the stress and just get back to doing the necessary work.

MAKING A MOUND

"As in the case of making a mound, if, before the very last basketful, I stop, then I shall have stopped. As in the case of leveling the ground, if, though tipping only one basketful, I am going forward, then I shall be making progress."

That's awesome.

As they say, when you're climbing a mountain, it doesn't matter how many times you give up as long as you're feet keep moving. :)

Your feet moving?

You tipping another basketful?

YOUR COMMANDING OFFICER

"The Three Armies can be deprived of their commanding officer, but even a common man cannot be deprived of his purpose."

Purpose, purpose, purpose.

We talk about this one a lot, too, eh?!? :)

It's Deepak's seventh spiritual law in his *Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* ([see Notes](#)). In his words: *"Everyone has a purpose in life... a unique gift or special talent to give to others. And when we blend this unique talent with service to others, we experience the ecstasy and exultation of our own spirit, which is the ultimate goal of goals."*

Abraham Maslow ([see Notes](#) on *Motivation and Personality*) likes to say: *"Musicians must make music, artists must paint, poets must write if they are to be ultimately at peace with themselves. What human beings can be, they must be. They must be true to their own nature. This need we may call self-actualization."*

While Emerson ([see Notes](#)) says: *"Nature arms each man with some faculty which enables him to do easily some feat impossible to any other, and thus makes him necessary to society."*

So... What's your purpose?

I always love Gay Hendricks' answer to that question (see Notes on [The Big Leap](#) and [Conscious Living](#)): *"My purpose was this: to expand in love and creativity every day and to assist those who are interested to expand in their ability to be more loving and creative."*

THE WAY OF THE MASTER

"There is one single thread binding my way together... the way of the Master consists in doing one's best... that is all."

One of the main themes of Confucianism is becoming the ideal person, *chun yu*, who embodies virtue, which is very similar to the Greek concept of *areté*.

As I've mentioned a few times in these Notes, the classic Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle talk about the idea that the meaning of life is happiness and, if we want to consistently live with happiness, we need to live with what they call *areté*—a word that directly translates as “virtue” or “excellence” but has a deeper meaning, something closer to “striving to do your best” moment to moment to moment.

When we're fully showing up in any given moment, there's no difference between what we're capable of being and what we're actually being.

And, when that's the case, we feel bliss.

As Don Miguel Ruiz says while describing the fourth of his *Four Agreements* ([see Notes](#)): “There is just one more agreement, but it's the one that allows the other three to become deeply ingrained habits. The fourth agreement is about the action of the first three: Always do your best.”

He continues: “Under any circumstance, always do your best, no more and no less. But keep in mind that your best is never going to be the same from one moment to the next. Everything is alive and changing all the time, so your best will sometimes be high quality, and other times it will not be as good.”

Our best changes from day to day and even moment to moment, but how're you doing with it?!?

As we embrace these Big Ideas, let's remember Confucius advising us: “There is one single thread binding my way together... the way of the Master consists in doing one's best... that is all.”

B

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.