

## THE BIG IDEAS

### Quick Intro to Buddha

Siddhartha --> Buddha.

### The Dhammapada

Buddhism in a nutshell.

### The Four Noble Truths

1, 2, 3, 4.

### Nirvana & Bodhisattva

Purify and serve.

### The Eightfold Path

Eight steps to nirvana.

### What Are You Thinking?

Well, what are you?!

### Armies In Your Mind

Do a lot of damage.

### How Do You Smell?

Good, I hope!

### Walk Alone (If you must)

Be w/those who inspire.

### How's the Irrigation?

Shape your mind.

### Solid As a Rock

Independence.

### Self-Mastery

It's time.

### Little by Little

That's how.

### Just Do It

Buddha Style.

# The Dhammapada

Translated and Edited by Eknath Easwaran

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“Dhammapada means something like ‘the path of dharma’—of truth, of righteousness, of the central law that all of life is one.”

~ Eknath Easwaran from *The Dhammapada*

## *The Dhammapada.*

Eknath Easwaran, the brilliant translator and editor of this translation of the *The Dhammapada* (along with my favorite translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*) says that if all the sutras had been lost but the *The Dhammapada*, it alone would be sufficient for us to grasp the essence of Buddhism.

In this Note, we'll take a super quick look at Buddhism (in the book, Easwaran covers The Four Noble Truths, dharma, karma, nirvana, etc.) and then jump in to some of my favorite Big Ideas.

If you haven't read or studied Buddhism (and especially, perhaps, if you have), this book is \*incredible.\* Easwaran has a remarkably warm style that reflects the spirit of a man who walked with Gandhi back in the day in his native India before heading to Berkeley where he started one of the early western meditation centers.

So, let's jump in!

## A QUICK INTRO TO THE BUDDHA

Buddha was born Siddhartha Guatama in the 6th century BCE, the son of a royal family in Nepal. He walked away from his riches and life of comfort at the age of 30, seeking spiritual fulfillment through a path of contemplation and asceticism before achieving enlightenment while sitting beneath the Bodhi tree.

The Buddha's teachings of the Four Noble Truths form the core of Buddhism, a religion practiced by hundreds of millions of people around the world while the word *Buddha* is derived from a Sanskrit word that means “to wake up”; thus, the Buddha is one who is awake and truly alive moment to moment.

[Note: Did you know that Buddha taught in India at roughly the same time (6th century BCE) that Confucius and Lao-tzu (Taoism) taught in China? (I always think that's cool. :)]

## THE DHAMMAPADA

“The Buddha did not leave a static structure of his belief that we can affirm and be done with. His teaching is an ongoing path, a ‘way of perfection’ which anyone can follow to the highest good. *The Dhammapada* is a map for this journey.... These verses can be read and appreciated simply as wise philosophy; as such, they are part of the great literature of the world. But for those who would follow it to the end, *The Dhammapada* is a sure guide to nothing less than the highest goal life can offer: self-realization.”

*“Earnest among those  
who are indolent, awake  
among those who slumber,  
the wise advance like a  
race horse, leaving others  
behind... The earnest are  
always respected, the  
indolent never.”*

~ Buddha

*"Go beyond both pleasure  
and pain."*

~ Buddha

*"They are not wise whose  
thoughts are not steady and  
minds not serene, who do  
not know dharma, the law of  
life. They are wise whose  
thoughts are steady and  
minds serene, unaffected by  
good and bad. They are awake  
and free from fear."*

~ Buddha

## THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

Buddha's Four Noble Truths form the core of Buddhism. They are:

1. Life is full of suffering.
2. The cause of suffering is selfish desire.
3. Suffering can be relieved.
4. The relief of suffering can be achieved by following the eightfold path.

"Life is suffering"? What does *that* mean?

Buddha established the fact that life will always involve a certain amount of suffering. We will all get old, get sick and die. Our possessions will break and so will some of our relationships. According to Buddha, that's just how it is.

The fact that these things happen does not account for why we are unhappy, however.

We are unhappy because we fight against it. We cling to our sense of how things *should* be, or how we want them to be. It is this *attachment* to expectations that presents the problem. Only by dealing with the fact that life is unpredictable—and will often bring pain and undesirable events—can we become "non-attached" and avoid the suffering that plagues most people.

(Check out the Notes on [Genpo Roshi's Big Mind Big Heart](#) for more on *dukkha*!)

## NIRVANA & THE BODHISATTVA

The literal Sanskrit root of the word *nirvana* means "a blowing out" or "extinction."

In Buddhism, nirvana represents the highest state of consciousness in which all selfish desires and attachments are no longer present.

The point beyond nirvana that I always thought was cool: the idea of a "Bodhisattva"—one who reaches his or her own enlightenment and chooses to return to the world in service to all sentient beings, committed to resting when all beings are happy and free.

## THE EIGHTFOLD PATH

According to Buddhism, the key to ending suffering and achieving nirvana is to follow the "eightfold path": right views, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

That was quick. For more on Buddhism, Google it. :)

For now, let's jump in to some Big Ideas!

## WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?

"Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think."

Those are LITERALLY the first words of the entire book.

I'll repeat them: "Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think."

Begs the question: What are you thinking? Is it what you want your life shaped by? :)

Pay attention because the Buddha spoke those words quite literally. Your life is shaped by your thoughts. In fact, the book is basically \*all\* about purifying our thoughts and training our mind to live without cravings, attachment, and hatred so we can open ourselves to love, courage and service. Fun!

*"The wise are disciplined in body, speech, and mind. They are well controlled indeed."*

~ Buddha

## ARMIES IN YOUR MIND

"More than those who hate you, more than all your enemies, an undisciplined mind does greater harm."

How true is *that*?!?

How's *your* internal dialogue?

Are you even aware of just how much you can criticize yourself at times? It's pretty crazy when we really start to notice what's going on up there in our minds!!

Of course, as you know if you've spent any time trying, training our minds is an incredible challenge.

Gandhi once remarked that this training requires the patience of someone trying to empty the sea with a teacup.

I say it's time to get to work. And, I raise my teacup in a toast to our training. :)

(My top practice for this, BY FAR: meditation. You meditating? My life took a quantum leap for the better when I started meditating an hour (I started with a half an hour) every morning first thing. Check out the Notes on [Thresholds of the Mind](#) for more.)

"If you forget the joy of life and get caught in the pleasures of the world, you will come to envy those who put meditation first."

## HOW DO YOU SMELL?

"Like a lovely flower full of color but lacking in fragrance, are the words of those who do not practice what they teach."

I LOVE that.

Are you like a beautiful flower that you approach to smell and discover... it's all looks and no scent?

D'oh!

We're all like that at times, eh?

But let's listen to the Big B and LIVE our truths, eh?!?

It's always cool to smell nice. :)

More Buddha mojo on the subject of smelling good: "Dharma is not upheld by talking about it. Dharma is upheld by living in harmony with it."

And: "Do not give your attention to what others do or fail to do; give it to what you do or fail to do."

## WALK ALONE (IF YOU MUST)

"If you find no one to support you on the spiritual path, walk alone. There is no companionship with the immature."

This is another theme echoed (again and again and again) by all the greats.

Some of my favorites:

[Rumi](#) (see Notes): "Stay with friends who support you in these. Talk with them about sacred texts, and how you are doing, and how they are doing, and keep your practices together."

[Seneca](#) (see Notes on [Letters from a Stoic](#)): "Retire into yourself as much as possible. Associate with people who are likely to improve you. Welcome those whom you are capable of

*"All is change in the world, but the disciples of the Buddha are never shaken."*

~ Buddha

*"Avoid the company of the immature if you want joy."*

~ Buddha

*"If you have no wound on your hand you can touch poison without being harmed. No harm comes to him who does not harm. If you harm a pure and innocent person, you harm yourself, as dust thrown against the wind comes back to the thrower."*

~ Buddha

*"Driven by fear, people run for security to mountains and forests, to sacred spots and shrines. But none of these can be a safe refuge, because they cannot free the mind from fear."*

~ Buddha

*"When you are living in darkness, why don't you look for light?"*

~ Buddha

*"Light the lamp within; strive hard to attain wisdom."*

~ Buddha

improving. The process is a mutual one. People learn as they teach."

Perhaps my favorite thought comes from [Jim Rohn](#) (Tony Robbins' mentor back in the day):  
"You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with."

You might want to re-read that and then do the math on who you're hanging out with.

If they're more dialed in, inspiring, etc. than you: sweet. You're averaging up. If they're LESS inspiring/turned on to life/etc. than you: eek. You're averaging down. If it's a mix, you're not going anywhere.

Tip: Average up.

(This is a big practice for me and I like to say that one of my best friends is God. I like having her help my average. :)

## HOW'S THE IRRIGATION?

**"As irrigators lead water where they want, as archers make their arrows straight, as carpenters carve wood, the wise shape their minds."**

And you?

How's the irrigation in your life?

You shaping your mind?!? :)

## SOLID AS A ROCK

**"As a solid rock cannot be moved by the wind, the wise are not shaken by praise or blame."**

I love this one.

Reminds of [Deepak](#) and [Don Miguel Ruiz](#) and Emptiness and Rorschach blobs.

First, Deepak (see Notes on [The Spontaneous Fulfillment of Desire](#)). One of the coolest mantras I've ever learned: "I am totally independent of the good or bad opinion of others." I've said that thousands and thousands of times. Totally transformed my consciousness. Try it if you find yourself too easily swayed by the compliments or criticisms of those in your life.

Next, Don Miguel Ruiz. Check out the Notes on his brilliant [Four Agreements](#) (see Notes). His 2nd Agreement: "Don't Take Anything Personally. Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream. When you are immune to the opinions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering."

And, finally, Emptiness and Blobs.

Just know this: someone's opinion of you says a LOT more about THEM than about you. Another concept in Buddhism (check out the Notes on [The Diamond Cutter](#)) is the idea of "emptiness." The world is empty of meaning except that which we give it.

It's kinda like a Rorschach test—you know, those psychology tests where you look at an ink blob and tell the therapist what you see. With those tests, what you see has NOTHING to do with the blob and EVERYTHING to do with you. :)

Same here.

How someone sees you has to do with THEM. Not you.

(Same goes for how anyone sees ANYTHING. Rain can make some people dance naked with joy and others curse the terrible weather. It. Is. All. Empty. You get to pick your meaning. :)

So, the next time someone gets pissy with you or critical of you or whateva', just remember

*"There is no impurity greater than ignorance."*

~ Buddha

*"Any indiscipline brings evil in its wake."*

~ Buddha

*"Do not do evil, and suffering will not come. Everyone has the choice to be pure or impure. No one can purify another."*

~ Buddha

*"Don't waste a moment, for wasted moments send you on the downward course."*

~ Buddha

they're telling you more about their issues than yours. And, be like a rock—not shaken by EITHER praise OR blame.

And, remember: "It is easy to see the faults of others... it is hard to see our own."

## SELF-MASTERY

"One who conquers himself is greater than another who conquers a thousand times a thousand men on the battlefield."

Jesus: "He who rules his spirit has won a greater victory than the taking of a city."

Rumi: "The lion who breaks the enemy's ranks is a minor hero compared to the lion who overcomes himself."

Leonardo da Vinci: "One can have no smaller or greater mastery than mastery of oneself."

OK. So self-mastery is important.

How do we achieve it?

## LITTLE BY LITTLE

"Little by little a person become evil, as a water pot is filled by drops of water... Little by little a person becomes good, as a water pot is filled by drops of water."

I hate that. Seriously. We all want everything soooo fast. Including self-mastery. Which is kinda funny when you really look at it. :)

Any time I find myself wanting/expecting something to happen on \*my\* time line (which is usually about 10x faster than God's time line :), I re-read this brilliant line from Epictetus (the Stoic Philosopher, see Notes on his Enchiridion): "No great thing is created suddenly, any more than a bunch of grapes or a fig. If you tell me that you desire a fig, I answer you that there must be time. Let it first blossom, then bear fruit, then ripen."

I can also hear the voice of my Vipassana meditation teacher, S.N. Goenka in my head.

During my 10-day silent meditation (10 hours a day for 10 days. Pure silence. No phones, no computer, no journal, no books, no talking, no eye contact, no nothing. You, your meditation cushion(s) and silence—well, other than Goenka's rhythmic Burmese voice. :) Goenka said this dozens and dozens of times:

*"Work diligently. Diligently. Work patiently and persistently. Patiently and persistently. And you're bound to be successful. Bound to be successful."*

About the 78th time I heard that I GOT it. And it's become a defining mantra in my life. I KNOW that if I work diligently, patiently and persistently, I can do \*anything.\* Fun.

And one more little bit here cuz I think this is so important. Have you heard the story of the stonecutter?

Goes like this: A stonecutter hits a rock with his hammer. The stone splits. The casual observer sees this and thinks: "Wow. That guy is really strong. I can't believe he broke that huge rock with a single blow!"

The reality (obviously) is that the stonecutter didn't break it in a single blow—he'd been hammering away at that rock for a long time. Many, many blows went into the rock before it finally split. Most people see someone who has achieved some level of success—whether it's enlightenment or celebrity status or financial wealth—and think, "Wow, they sure must be lucky."

Obviously, the stonecutter isn't strong enough to break a rock in one blow and no one is "lucky" enough to reach any level of excellence without an equally diligent and consistent effort.

*"Now is the time to wake  
up, when you are young  
and strong."*

~ Buddha

So, hit the rock.

Again. And again. And again.

Eventually, it'll break.

(Oh, and btw, quick FYI: once you're done with that rock get ready to start swinging at the next one. :)

**"Make your mind pure as a silversmith blows away the impurities of silver, little by little, instant by instant."**

## **JUST DO IT (BUDDHA STYLE)**

**"If anything is worth doing, do it with all your heart."**

That makes it pretty simple.

If it's worth doing (very important distinction) do it with all your heart (equally important distinction).

Decide what's worth doing. (Seriously. Are you doin' stuff that you shouldn't even be doing? Because that's the stuff you tend to do half-ass. Best solution? Stop doing it—either immediately or make a plan to stop doing it!)

Once you've decided to do it, give all your heart to it.

(Pretty, please.)

B

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## About the Author of This Note

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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](http://heroic.us).