

THE BIG IDEAS

True Enlightenment

Is a moment to moment deal.

Ready to Make a Vow?

Vow > kinda sorta commitment.

Vibrant Dynamism

= Happiness. (Not idle passivity.)

The True Optimist

"What? That was nothing!"

Debts of Gratitude

Repay the soil makers + well diggers.

Books

= Medicine for the soul.

Your True Worth

Full effort = full victory.

Buddhism Day by Day

Wisdom for Modern Life

BY DAISAKU IKEDA · MIDDLEWAY PRESS © 2006 · 393 PAGES

"Every day, we face new challenges, fresh opportunities for growth. It is in the realm of life's ups and downs, the tempestuous struggles, that Buddhism's value is most keenly demonstrated.

Buddhism is sometimes characterized as a religion of mysticism, practiced in remote temples far from the worries of everyday life. This is a misconception. From the very beginning, the sole purpose of Buddhism has been to lead people to a state of indestructible happiness and wisdom, wherever they are.

Buddhism is a philosophy of life—an engaged and courageous way of being—in which compassion and respect for all people's inherent worth lead to tremendous growth and joy."

~ The Editors of *Buddhism Day by Day*

Buddhism Day by Day is a collection of thoughts from Daisaku Ikeda, the leader of Nichiren Buddhism and one of the most respected Buddhist philosophers alive whose work has inspired millions around the world.

I was first introduced to Nichiren Buddhism via Alex Lickerman's great book [The Undefeated Mind](#) (which I was introduced to via Ryan Holiday's [The Obstacle Is the Way](#)).

Whereas a lot of Buddhist approaches can feel a little mystical and detached, Nichiren Buddhism is all about a practical, powerful, ENGAGEMENT in life in which we make each day a victory.

The book is basically 365 Big Ideas—nearly any one of which could have been used as a Big Idea for this Note. (Get the book [here](#).)

I'm excited to share a few of my favorites so let's jump straight in!

TRUE ENLIGHTENMENT IS A MOMENT-TO-MOMENT DEAL

"In Nichiren Buddhism, attaining enlightenment is not about embarking on some inconceivably long journey to become a resplendent, godlike Buddha, it is about accomplishing a transformation in the depths of ones' being. In other words, it is not a matter of practicing in order to scale the highest summit of enlightenment at some point in the distant future. Rather, it is a constant, moment-to-moment, inner struggle between revealing our innate Dharma nature or allowing ourselves to be ruled by our fundamental darkness and delusion."

One of my early favorite authors was Dan Millman. I remember being struck by his statement that there are no enlightened beings—only more or less enlightened moments.

Here's how he puts it in *Everyday Enlightenment* ([see Notes](#)): "No one feels the same way all the time. Even if you are angry, depressed, crazy, afraid, or grieving, you'll have moments when you are distracted. There are no enlightened people, no nice, bad, smart, neurotic, or

"Buddhahood is a state of fearless wisdom and happiness, free of delusion. Buddhahood is also deep compassion; understanding the connection between all life a Buddha faces the suffering of all beings and derives joy from teaching others how to awaken to the wondrous potential within."

~ The Editors

"There simply are no Buddhas who spend all their time sitting in meditation. Buddhas are buddhas precisely because they continually ponder and take action to help others resolve their worries."

~ Daisaku Ikeda

stupid people, either—only people with more (or less) enlightened, nice, bad, smart, neurotic, or stupid moments."

Moment to moment to moment, we're either choosing to express our best self or not.

Winning those little battles is what it's all about.

And, with that attitude, our happiness is UNCONQUERABLE because, no matter what's going on outside of ourselves, we can *always* choose our most empowered response.

THAT is true victory. That is enlightenment.

Let's do that.

READY TO MAKE A VOW?

"In any field of endeavor, making a vow is the foundation for achieving something great. If for whatever reason a person gives up halfway or backslides, his or her commitment hasn't been based on a vow. Halfhearted desire doesn't amount to a vow."

Vow.

It means "a solemn promise."

It's on the far right side of the spectrum of kinda sorta committed to ABSOLUTELY committed.

<----- COMMITMENT LEVEL ----->

(Kinda sorta)

(VOW = ALL IN)

A vow.

A solemn promise to ourselves that we will give everything we have for however long it takes to the altruistic goal we have determined is worthy of us—whether that's actualizing our potential, raising healthy and happy kids, giving our gifts to the world or all of the above.

Let's do a quick inventory. What's most important to you in your life? Your actualization? Your family? Your creative expression? (<— All of the above?)

What's your ideal outcome in those scenarios? And, how committed are you to achieving something great in each of those domains? Kinda sorta? Or have you made a solemn promise to yourself to achieve your desired outcome?

We'll know by how you respond to challenges.

Here's how Alex Lickerman puts it in [The Undefeated Mind](#): "And when our response to failure is to summon an even greater determination to succeed, vowing to get back up after being knocked down not just once but again and again each day and with every obstacle that rises up to challenge us—attacking them, as Nichiren Daishonin wrote, like a 'lion king who unleashes the same power whether he traps a tiny ant or attacks a fierce animal'—then we'll have found a treasure even more valuable than any apparently foolproof plan to reach our goal: the determination necessary to seek a better one when it fails. For in demonstrating to ourselves that we can always summon more of it, our determination becomes to us like a good friend, its steady presence and our faith in its power imbuing us with confidence that no matter how many times we've failed, no matter how much we want to quit, victory can still be ours."

"When your determination changes," Daisaku Ikeda, the third president of the Soka Gakki, writes, "everything will begin to move in the direction you desire. The moment you resolve to be victorious, every nerve and fiber in your being will immediately orient itself toward your success. On the other hand, if you think, 'This is never going to work out,' then at that instant every cell in your being will be deflated and give up the fight. Then everything really will move in the direction of failure."

"A Turkish proverb says, 'Iron shines when used, but rusts when not.' The capacities of people working hard and striving with all their might never get rusty; they are constantly being polished and forged."

~ Daisaku Ikeda

"No one can better bask in summer's balm than those who have endured winter's bite. Similarly, it is those who have suffered through life's darkest hours who are able to truly savor the bright dawn of happiness. The person who has transformed the worst of fate into the best of fortune is life's champion."

~ Daisaku Ikeda

When your determination changes, everything changes.

Let's resolve to be victorious and meet every challenge as fuel to our growth.

#makethevow

P.S. Remember: "Make goals. Whether big or small, work toward realizing them. You must be serious about and dedicated to your goals—you'll get nowhere if you just treat them like jokes. An earnest, dedicated spirit shines like a diamond and moves people's hearts. That is because a brilliant flame burns within."

Plus: "When you devote yourself to achieving your goal, you will not be bothered by shallow criticism. Nothing important can be accomplished if you allow yourself to be swayed by some trifling matter, always looking over your shoulder and wondering what others are saying or thinking. The key to achievement is to move forward along your chosen path with firm determination."

HAPPINESS = VIBRANT DYNAMISM (HOW'S YOURS?)

"Happiness doesn't exist on the far side of distant mountains. It is within you, yourself. Not you, however, sitting in idle passivity. It is to be found in the vibrant dynamism of your own life as you struggle to challenge and overcome one obstacle after another, as you clamber up a perilous ridge in pursuit of that which lies beyond."

Happiness is within you.

BUT (important "but!") *not* within the idle, passive version of you.

Your happiness (echo!) exists in the "vibrant dynamism" of your life as you "struggle to overcome one obstacle after another."

Picture yourself clambering up that perilous ridge in pursuit of that which lies beyond.

THAT is where you happiness lies.

Tal Ben-Shahar echoes this wisdom (and metaphor) in [Happier](#) where he tells us: "Attaining lasting happiness requires that we enjoy the journey on our way toward a destination we deem valuable. Happiness is not about making it to the peak of the mountain nor is it about climbing aimlessly around the mountain; happiness is the experience of climbing toward the peak."

As Osho says, *your being is in your becoming.*

[Viktor Frankl](#) reminds us: "What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for some goal worthy of him. What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost, but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him."

So: What goal is worthy of you?

Make a vow to achieve it.

P.S. The full passage from Osho's [Book of Understanding](#) is worth sharing here: "Man is not born perfect. He is born incomplete, he is born as a process. He is born on the way, as a pilgrim. That is his agony and his ecstasy, too; agony because he cannot rest, he has to go ahead, he has always to go ahead. He has to seek and search and explore. He has to become, because his being arises only through becoming. Becoming is his being. He can only be if he is on the move."

Evolution is intrinsic to man's nature, evolution is his very soul. And those who take themselves for granted remain unfulfilled. Those who think they are born complete remain unevolved. Then the seed remains the seed. It never becomes a tree and never knows the joys of spring and the sunshine and the rain, and the ecstasy of bursting into millions of flowers.

"True individuality never comes to full flower without hard work. Therefore, you're making a big mistake if you think that who you are right now represents all you are capable of being."

~ Daisaku Ikeda

That explosion is the fulfilment, that explosion is what existence is all about—exploding into millions of flowers. When the potential becomes the actual, only then is man fulfilled.”

THE TRUE OPTIMIST: “WHAT? THAT WAS NOTHING!”

“One thing is certain: That is that the power of belief, the power of thought, will move reality in the direction of what we believe and conceive of it. If you really believe you can do something, you can. That is a fact.”

~ Daisaku Ikeda

“Real optimism should not be confused with a carefree outlook in life, one in which we forfeit responsibility for our lives. The person undefeated by misfortune, poverty, insult and vilification, the person who can bounce back from every adversity and say, ‘What? That was nothing!’ The person who marches on toward hope through sheer force of will—that person is a true optimist.”

Real optimism.

It’s not some fluffy happy-go-lucky attitude bolstered by affirmations but blown away the moment something challenging hits.

It’s STRONG.

Rooted in an unconquerable trust in our ability to handle WHATEVER (!!!!!) life throws at us.

Get knocked down?

Awesome.

Get back up.

Bounce back from every adversity saying, “What? That was nothing!”

March on toward your better future through sheer force of will.

THAT’s a true optimist.

P.S. Remember: “It all comes down to you. I hope you won’t rely on others or wait for them to do something. Try to develop such a strong sense of responsibility that you can stand up to the fiercest storms, confidently proclaiming, ‘I’ll do it. Just watch me!’ Please confront reality, look it squarely in the face, and with guts, wisdom and strength, challenge everything that lies ahead of you.”

REPAY OUR DEBTS OF GRATITUDE

“Great people never forget what others have done for them. In fact, having a sense of appreciation makes a person worthy of respect.”

~ Daisaku Ikeda

“Grass and trees cannot grow without soil. The ‘soil’ that fosters our growth includes our parents, teachers, seniors; or homeland, alma mater, community or company. In any case, everyone has some place where they grew up or someone who nurtured them. Human beings grow as a result of nurturing ‘soil’ in which they express their ability and make the flowers of their lives blossom, just as the spirit of the rice plant returns to the soil and the stalk sprouts to flower and bear grain once again. We should repay our debts of gratitude to this soil in which we developed. This cycle of repaying gratitude will envelop one’s whole existence. Your true humanity will never blossom if you seek only to develop yourself.”

Grass and trees cannot grow without soil. And, of course, neither could we.

In *The 15 Invaluable Laws of Success*, John Maxwell echoes this wisdom: “A Chinese proverb says that those who drink the water must remember those who dug the well. Everything we do, every accomplishment we have, every milestone we pass has come in part because of the efforts of others. There are no self-made men or women. If we can remember that, we can be grateful. And if we are grateful, we are more likely to develop good character than if we aren’t.

Confucius asserted, ‘Humility is the solid foundation of all the virtues.’ In other words, it paves the way for character growth. And that sets us up for personal growth. These things are definitely connected.”

"The true spirit of meditation lies in manifesting our innate wisdom in society and resolutely struggling for the happiness of ourselves and others, and to construct a better society."

~ Daisaku Ikeda

Let's take a moment to thank those who dug the well—all the people and places that have nurtured us in our evolution.

(Seriously. Take a moment to reflect on all the amazing people and institutions that helped make you you.)

And, let's repay that debt by most fully giving ourselves to those around us. Let's be the nurturing soil for our friends and community and world.

P.S. Einstein's wisdom is worth recalling here as we go through our day today: *"Many times a day I realize how much my own outer and inner life is built upon the labors of my fellow men, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received."*

BOOKS = MEDICINE FOR THE SOUL

"Reading is dialog with oneself; it is self-reflection, which cultivates profound humanity. Reading is therefore essential to our development. It expands and enriches the personality like a seed that germinates after a long time and sends forth many blossom-laden branches."

People who can say of a book 'this changed my life' truly understand the meaning of happiness. Reading that sparks inner revolution is desperately needed to escape drowning in the rapidly advancing information society. Reading is more than intellectual ornamentation; it is a battle for the establishment of the self, a ceaseless challenge that keeps us young and vigorous."

The other day I asked Ryan Holiday to share his favorite books. (The guy reads more than I do.)

He pointed me to [this blog post](#)—which kicks off with this gem: *"I've always devoured books. Why, exactly, I'm not sure. Obviously a big reason to read is because it's fun. As Petrarch, a famous book lover observed some 700 years ago, 'books give delight to the very marrow of one's bones.' But if I was honest, I would say the real reason that I've spent so much time with my nose inside this book or that book is because I have been searching for something: a way to life. There is a Latin expression: liber medicina animi (a book is the soul's medicine). That's what I've been after."*

Liber medicina anima.

A book is the SOUL'S MEDICINE.

Wow.

And Amen.

I need to do a class on Reading 101. One of the key Ideas will be that. Another will be this:

Whenever I read a book, I like to imagine sitting down with a wonderful human being who dedicated a significant part of their life to mastering a certain subject and then taking the time to capture the essence of that wisdom in their book. It's like we're having a great conversation about these Big Ideas.

And, as Ikeda points out, in addition to having a great chat with the author, we're having a great chat with OURSELVES—reflecting on what resonates, inspires and challenges us.

Books.

They're medicine for the soul.

P.S. Reminds me of this passage from Campbell ([see Notes](#) on *Pathways to Bliss*) as well:

"For myself, well, Alan Watts once asked me what spiritual practice I followed. I told him, 'I underline books.' It's all in how you approach it."

"Nichiren writes, 'None of you who declare yourselves to be my disciples should ever give way to cowardice.' When the crucial moment comes, it is important to battle through it with the ferocity of a charging lion."

~ Daisaku Ikeda

"The true victors in life are those who, enduring repeated challenges and setbacks, have sent the roots of their being to such a depth that nothing can shake them."

~ Daisaku Ikeda

YOUR TRUE WORTH

"It is important to remember that your worth as a person is not based on your profession. It is not based on wealth, fame or academic credentials. What counts is how hard you have striven in your chosen path, how much good you have accomplished, how earnestly you have devoted your energies to it. It is your spirit of devotion, your sincerity, that determines your true worth."

As we know, contrary to what everything and everyone tells us, our true worth is **not** based on our wealth, fame, hotness, or letters after our name.

It is based on how earnestly we have devoted ourselves to our chosen path.

As Gandhi said: *"Satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment. Full effort is full victory."*

Which, of course, begs the question: How's *your* effort?

You may notice that you feel your best on those days when you went ALL IN and gave your best. Let's create a lot of those days and go to bed fully victorious tonight.

We are *unconquerable*.

May we cultivate and use that strength wisely in service to our families, communities and world,

B

Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

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you'll probably like...**

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About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



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.