

THE BIG IDEAS

Your Life

Is your message

Changing Gears

Is a good thing.

Keep Chewing!

Move from icky to sweet.

One-Pointed Attention

Build your samadhi muscles.

Mass Media

Time for a detox + superfood feast.

A Work of Art

Make your life one.

Practical Idealism

Every moment.

Your Life Is Your Message

Finding Harmony With Yourself, Others, and the Earth

BY EKNATH EASWARAN · HYPERION © 1997 · 128 PAGES

“While I have the deepest respect for all those working selflessly to serve the world, many of the so-called “reformers” I have seen both in India and this country have an unpromising approach. They look down from the soapbox or pulpit and say, “Let me reform you, Diane, and you, Steve, and of course you, Bob.”

If Bob says, “What about you?” they reply, “Oh, that can wait. Let me start with Diane and Steve and you.”

That is a familiar refrain in international politics, international economics, international aid, even international education. But the great spiritual teachers of all religions — men and women who have devoted their lives to the art of living in complete harmony, like Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, the Compassionate Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi — say, “Oh, no! You start with yourself.” There is not much purpose served by preaching to others or talking at them. The only way to influence people for the better — your family, your friends, your club, your class, your clinic, your society, even your enemies — is through your personal example. Harmony with the environment — the alleviation of our environmental crisis — and harmony with others — the easing of our social, political, and economic difficulties — both begin with a third harmony: harmony with ourselves.”

~ Eknath Easwaran from *Your Life Is Your Message*

Eknath Easwaran is one of my favorite teachers.

One of the most respected spiritual teachers of the twentieth century, he reminds me of [Joseph Campbell](#)—vibrantly alive, passionate and uber-wise.

We used his translations for our Notes on the [Bhagavad Gita](#) and [The Dhammapada](#) and also featured his great book on meditation called [Conquest of Mind](#). I think you'll enjoy those Notes + books.

This little book has been called his seminal work. It's a quick read that captures the essence of his teaching. The focus: Helping us create harmony in three domains: with ourselves, with others and with our environment such that our LIFE becomes our message.

If we want to change the world, we need to be the change. Let's do that and let's take the next baby step by exploring some of my favorite Big Ideas from this great little book. Hope you enjoy!

YOUR LIFE IS YOUR MESSAGE

“Once, while Mahatma Gandhi's train was pulling slowly out of the station, a European reporter ran up to his compartment window. “Do you have a message I can take back to my people?” he asked. It was Gandhi's day of silence, a vital respite from his demanding speaking schedule, so he didn't reply. Instead, he scrawled a few words on a scrap of paper and passed it to the reporter: “My life is my message.””

“When you are able to live with joy, giving your time and energy to improving the quality of life for all, you are not only fulfilling your highest destiny, you are also helping all those around you to grow to their full height.”

~ Eknath Easwaran

"I believe if one man gains spiritually the whole world gains with him and, if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent."

~ Mahatma Gandhi

I love everything about that.

First, Gandhi had silent days. Silent days? Yah. He just didn't talk.

You might just skip over that and chalk it up to a somewhat eccentric guru-genius but pause for a moment. He DIDN'T TALK for that day. You could talk to him and he'd just write something back. Laughing.

Choosing to go silent for a day may not be your thing, but what if we were willing to do something a little out there that we knew benefited us? Genius.

My current thing is not checking email beyond, essentially, one person on my team. Period. That's a little weird. And, I have nothing in my calendar. No meetings at all. A little more weird. But I've decided that if I want to be in integrity with what I'm committed to doing then that's what I'm going to do. (Those things plus a bunch of other micro-weird stuff. hah.)

Any practices you wish you had but felt a little uncomfie rockin'? Let's use Gandhi's clarity and self-mastery as an inspiring example as we optimize.

... Alright. That was a lengthy aside.

The heart of this passage, of course, is what Gandhi communicated via his brief note—which, I think, is staggeringly awesome.

"My life is my message."

<— Wow. My life is my message...

Begs the question: Is *your* life *your* message?

If so, what does it say?

...

Is that what you would *like* it to say? If not, what would you like your life to say?

Here's to making **THAT** the message of your life.

P.S. Reminds me of Rumi: *"He is a letter to everyone. You open it. It says, 'Live!'"*

P.P.S. Let's do this. #weirdosunite

CHANGING GEARS

"God is in, we are out; God is at home, we abroad."

~ Meister Eckhart

"The goal of all spiritual disciplines is gradually to bring the mind to a perfect stillness. In automotive terms, you are downshifting from overdrive to top gear then to second then finally to neutral. When you develop the capacity to put your mind in neutral, you will have acquired inexhaustible patience..."

Whenever you sit down for meditation, you might remind yourself that you are slowly changing gears, from the fastest to the slowest, until after many years you park your mind, just as you park your car.

At that point, all your energy is saved. Normally, even when we are not consciously acting or speaking, the mind goes on thinking, consuming precious energy. When you have learned to park your mind, a great deal of energy and vitality is saved, strengthening your immune system and vital organs, and lengthening your life."

Love it.

Imagine you have your brand-new dream car. You drive it off the lot with glee. It's amazing. But it has one little problem...

You can't shift gears!!!

*"To be in hell is to drift: to
be in heaven is to steer."*

~ George Bernard Shaw

It may be stuck in overdrive. Or maybe it's stuck in reverse. Or maybe it's stuck in first gear and you can't quite get it going. Whatever you do, you can't shift gears!!! Now, that car would go from being ridiculously awesome to not-so-awesome, eh?

As you might have noticed, that's pretty much how *we* are at times.

We need to cultivate the ability to shift our gears at will. We want to be able to notice when we're caught in overdrive—redlining ourselves with worry thinking the same anxious thought about the future over and over and over again—and when we're stuck in reverse—ruminating over the past again and again and again.

Notice and then shift. Notice and shift. Notice and shift.

And, eventually, after years (!) of practice, Eknath tells us we can just park our minds. And, experience that joy of perfect stillness.

The benefits we get at that stage? Eknath tells us: "You will be able to listen to another's point of view with such concentration and detachment — even when your opinions are being torn to shreds — that sometimes you will say to yourself, "Hey, he is right. I am wrong. I can learn from him." That attitude of open-mindedness, of having a slow-going mind which listens very carefully to opposing points of view and is prepared to learn from them, is the beginning of kindness, and kindness is the foundation of a harmonious world. Hurry is unkindness."

Plus: "A great bonus that comes when the mind slows down over a longer period is that you become a stranger to insecurity and depression. When the mind is going fast, depression is always with you, riding along in the back seat. Where the mind is going slow, enabling you to choose freely which thoughts you think, depression is outside, hitchhiking. You just say, "Sorry, no room," and drive right by."

*"What wisdom can you
find that is greater than
kindness?"*

~ Jean Jacques Rousseau

KEEP CHEWING!

"When you are taking to meditation and beginning to change your habits, it sometimes looks as if you're having a very thin time. I'm not trying to mislead anyone. This is hard work. In fact, my younger students sometimes tell me plaintively, "Life used to be so pleasant for us. Why is it now so . . . so icky?"

I sympathize. When I went through the same thing, I complained about it to my spiritual teacher, my grandmother. She was a very plainspoken teacher, with none of the euphemisms of the intellectual, so she simply led me to a nearby amla tree. The amla is a beautiful tree, a little like the mimosa, with a small fruit. She picked a fruit and said, "Here, take a bite." I started chewing. It was pretty awful.

I said, "I've got to spit it out, Granny. It's sour, bitter, unpleasant." She just said, "Bear with me. Keep chewing for a while." So I went on chewing, and to my surprise the amla fruit began to get sweeter and sweeter.

Similarly, meditation and the allied disciplines require sustained enthusiasm every day — even when it seems icky. Especially when it seems icky! If you keep at it, you will find those same disciplines becoming sweeter and sweeter. When meditation time comes around you will find yourself hungering for the inner peace and calm it brings. The time will even come when you want a double helping."

Want to go from icky to sweet?

KEEP CHEWING!!!

Eknath puts it this way in [Conquest of Mind](#): "In every fitness program, of course, it is stick-to-itiveness that counts. You get nowhere if you exercise by fits and starts. Don't go out one day and do a lot of exercises, then get depressed the next day, go to bed, and skip the program

completely. Keep on exercising, whether it feels good or not. That is how you develop a fit will and a svelte, attractive personality.”

He also says this (one of my favorite passages ever): “In Sanskrit we have a word which means “heroes at the beginning”: people who take up a job with a fanfare of trumpets but soon find that their enthusiasm has tiptoed down the back stair. Those who go far in meditation are the ones who keep on plugging. They may not be very spectacular; they may never hear a trumpet. But they keep on trying day in and day out, giving their best in every situation and relationship, never giving up. Such people are bound to reach their goal.”

And all that reminds me of this gem from [Seneca](#): “You have to persevere and fortify your pertinacity until the will to good becomes a disposition to good.”

Plus (another favorite!): “How much better to pursue a straight course and eventually reach that destination where the things that are pleasant and the things that are honorable finally become, for you, the same.”

Keep chewing. Keep chewing. Keep chewing.

ESPECIALLY when it seems icky! :)

ONE-POINTED ATTENTION

*“Trying to do many things
at once means doing nothing
well. As the Buddha says,
‘When you are walking, walk.
When you are sitting, sit.
Don’t wobble.’”*
~ Eknath Easwaran

“Doing more than one thing at a time divides attention and fragments consciousness. When we read and eat at the same time, for example, part of our mind is on what we are reading and part on what we are eating; we are not getting the most from either activity. Similarly, when talking with someone give him or her your full attention. These are little things, but all together they help to unify consciousness and deepen concentration.

Everything we do should be worthy of our full attention. When the mind is one-pointed it will be secure, free from tension, and capable of the concentration that is the mark of genius in any field.”

Want the concentration that is the mark of genius in any field?

Focus your attention. On one thing.

We need to build our concentration muscles. Our ability to put our attention on ONE thing and hold it there. And we can practice moment to moment to moment. At work. While eating. With your family. Be present. Focused on one thing.

George Leonard asks this question in his great book *Mastery* ([see Notes](#)): “Could all of us reclaim lost hours of our lives by making everything—the commonplace along with the extraordinary—a part of our practice?”

Here’s how Jon Kabat-Zinn puts it in his classic *Wherever You Go There You Are* ([see Notes](#)): “You can think of concentration as the capacity of the mind to sustain an unwavering attention on one object of observation. It is cultivated by attending to one thing, such as the breath, and just limiting one’s focus to that. In Sanskrit, concentration is called samadhi, or “onepointedness.” Samadhi is developed and deepened by continually bringing the attention back to the breath every time it wanders. When practicing strictly concentrative forms of meditation, we purposefully refrain from any efforts to inquire into areas such as where the mind went when it wandered off, or that the quality of the breath fluctuates. Our energy is directed solely toward experiencing this breath coming in, this breath going out, or some other single object of attention. With extended practice, the mind tends to become better and better at staying on the breath, or noticing even the earliest impulse to become distracted by something else, and either resisting its pull in the first place and staying on the breath, or quickly returning to it.”

Here's to building our samadhi muscles!!

DETOXING FROM MASS MEDIA

"Rich relationships and a great capacity for the benefit of the world, that is the jackpot which everyone is looking for."

~ Eknath Easwaran

"We are so immersed these days in what the mass media offer that it is helpful to give half an hour or so each day to reading the scriptures and the writings of the great mystics of all religions.

Their experiences and encouraging words can give us the support and companionship we need to keep our efforts to transform our lives. Just before bedtime, after evening meditation, is a particularly good time for spiritual reading, because the thoughts you fall asleep in will be with you throughout the night."

We need to detox ourselves from the junk food that is mass media and eat more of the good stuff.

That starts with reducing the inflow. If your mind is constantly being filled up with every single thing! that is going on out in the world you're going to have a really (!) tough time connecting to that quiet voice within.

How about turning off the talk radio on the way to work (and the pop music)? Going on a news fast for a week (you'll survive!)? Giving up following sports for a bit (why give so much attention to other people following *their* dreams while you ignore yours)? Limiting the social media time. Etc. Etc. Etc.

And use some of that extra time to soak in the goodness of the greatest teachers?! (= a really good trade!)

Makes me think of Michael Beckwith and Joseph Campbell.

Beckwith captures this powerfully in what he calls the "tyranny of the trends."

Check out the Notes on [Spiritual Liberation](#) where he tells us: "One of the ways we hijack our capacity to experience a state of beholding is that we become swept up in what I call the 'tyranny of trends.' The tyranny of trends allows for the lowest common denominator to set the standard of success, and of course, 'coolness.' Very often, trends convince individuals what their life's purpose should be. The tyranny of trends is blasted out at us from television, radio, newspapers, tabloids, computers, and even our dentist's waiting room, attempting to convince us that we must smell a certain way, wear a certain label, weigh a specific weight, have whiter teeth, drive a certain car, make a certain income, and so on, before we can consider that we've made it."

He continues: "Begin to consciously break your agreement with the mediocrity present in the tyranny of trends. No longer consider trendsetters as people who are to be admired or imitated. Break free from the hold of what society tells us we should be like. Be drawn into the presence of those who exemplify the next level of human evolution—a spiritual teacher or spiritual community. Each of us has arrived on planet Earth to behold, to participate in the adventure of exploring the truth that we are enlightened beings having a human incarnation."

Here's how Joseph Campbell puts it ([see Notes](#) on *The Power of Myth*):

Moyers: "How do we know these things [how to experience bliss]?"

Campbell: "I'll tell you a way, a very nice way. Sit in a room and read—and read and read. And read the right books by the right people. Your mind is brought onto that level, and you have a nice, mild, slow-burning rapture all the time. This realization of life can be a constant realization in your living."

BE A WORK OF ART

"Great scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita can be looked upon as artist's manuals. Just as painters

"I have known from early youth that nonviolence is not a cloistered virtue to be practiced by the individual for his peace and final salvation, but it is a rule of conduct for the whole of society."

~ Mahatma Gandhi

study their color and drawing manuals, you can read the Gita or the Sermon on the Mount as a living manual to help you make your life a flawless work of art.

This is truly the supreme art. When your life becomes a work of art, your family will benefit from it every day."

Your life as a work of art + The great scriptures as artist's manuals = Beautiful.

What would *your* life look like if you viewed it as a work of art?

What would change?

What little baby step (/brush stroke) can you take *today*?!

PRACTICAL IDEALISM

"In this book I have spoken quite a bit about ideals. To me, ideals are not vague, abstract concepts but living forces as real as gravity or electromagnetism. People who have the daring and determination to live out their ideals release a tremendous beneficial power into their lives, and that power will begin to transform the world they live in. Mahatma Gandhi called this "practical idealism," which means that it can be practiced in every aspect of life. It doesn't call so much for great acts of heroism as for a continuing, persistent effort to transform ill will into good will, self-interest into compassion."

Practical Idealism. That is so good.

Again, EVERY MOMENT (!!!) gives us an opportunity to live our ideals. [Brené Brown](#) calls that "ordinary courage"—showing up in the day-to-day realities of our lives.

Let's do that as we make our lives our messages to the world!

B

Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

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.

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