

## THE BIG IDEAS



### Swan Legs

Calm + unceasingly paddling.

### Awakening

To our limitless potential.

### Oneness with Life

Is reality.

### We Are All Connected

No one exists in isolation.

### A Solid Self

Time to establish it.

### Clean Your Face

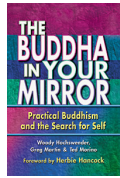
Not the mirror.

### Absolute Happiness

Tap into it.

### Be Who You Are

And be it well.



# The Buddha in Your Mirror

## Practical Buddhism and the Search for Self

BY WOODY HOCHSWENDER, GREG MARTIN, TED MORINO ·  
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“This book has the power to change your life. Although it is not, strictly speaking, a self-help book, it includes the most time-honored and effective self-help secrets ever formulated—the all-embracing system of thought that is Buddhism. It is titled *The Buddha in Your Mirror* because of its most fundamental insight: the Buddha is *you*. That is, each and every human being contains the inherent capacity to be a *Buddha*, an ancient Indian word meaning “enlightened one,” or one who is awakened to the eternal and unchanging truth of life.

By tapping our vast inner potential, our Buddha nature, we find unlimited resources of wisdom, courage and compassion. Instead of avoiding or fearing our problems, we learn to confront them with joyful vigor, confident in our ability to surmount whatever life throws in our path.”

~ Woody Hochswender, Greg Martin, Ted Morino from *The Buddha in Your Mirror*

This is a book about Nichiren Buddhism.

Nichiren was a thirteenth century Japanese Buddhist monk who inspired this super practical form of Buddhism. The core of the Nichiren practice is chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*. 12 million people from around the world practice it today.

I was first introduced to Nichiren Buddhism in [Alex Lickerman](#)'s great book, *The Undefeated Mind* (see those Notes). I loved its emphasis on our ability to create an indestructible self capable of rising to all challenges in our lives.

In this Note, we're going to focus on a handful of my favorite Big Ideas.

Let's jump straight in!

## SWAN LEGS

“A swan seems to swim calmly, but under the water, invisible to us, it paddles unceasingly. Similarly, the Buddhist has a vigorous daily practice that, while not effortless, smoothes the way for things to go right in life. It enables one to approach the travails of existence with equanimity and poise. Enlightenment, or awareness of the universal truth underlying all phenomena, brings out the noblest and most rewarding aspects of a person's life.”

Swan legs.

I just love that image.

We see a graceful swan cruising on the surface of a lake. All appears calm and serene.

And...

Below the surface?

That little swan's legs are paddling *unceasingly*.

*“Buddhism is a beautiful philosophy, but above all, it is about action”*

~ Woody Hochswender, Greg Martin,  
Ted Morino

And so it is with us.

If we want to calmly cruise around the lake of life, we need to polish our consciousness *unceasingly*—committed to our daily fundamentals (exercise! nutrition! rest! meditation!) and to approaching each moment as a part of our practice.

#swanlegs

## AWAKENING TO OUR LIMITLESS POTENTIAL

*“When deluded, one is called an ordinary being, but when enlightened, one is called a Buddha. This is similar to a tarnished mirror that will shine like a jewel when polished.”*

~ Nichiren

“The Buddhist teacher Nichiren, who lived and wrote in the thirteenth century, defined this rhythm, this underlying impulse of life, as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. It enables everyone to tap into this limitless potential, this higher life-condition, at will. We call this higher state of life Buddhahood. In the writings of Nichiren, enlightenment is not a finite destination, a near-impossible goal to be pursued lifetime after lifetime in an endless drama borrowed from Sisyphus. Rather, it is an immanent quality, present at all times in all life, waiting to be awakened at any given moment.”

Buddhahood.

The word *buddha* essentially means “awakened one.”

Although we tend to think of THE Buddha, there were many buddhas back in the day—many awakened sages. Same with today.

And, the fact is, we can ALL wake up to our limitless potential.

That’s why the Buddha IS IN YOUR (!) MIRROR.

(Might want to go cruise over to a mirror and take a glance. The Buddha is RIGHT THERE! :)

Giving us access to this way of being is what Nichiren Buddhism is all about—moving the process of awakening from a Sisyphus-like struggle of multiple lifetimes to an immanent quality, always present and awaiting our recognition of its possibilities.

I like it!

This wisdom also makes me think of [Dan Millman](#) + [David Reynold](#)’s brilliant insight that it’s less about enlightened individuals per se and more or less enlightened MOMENTS.

In [Everyday Enlightenment](#) (see Notes), Dan says this: “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 stupid people, either—only people with more (or less) enlightened, nice, bad, smart, neurotic, or stupid moments.”

In [Constructive Living](#) (see Notes), [David Reynolds](#), who combines Zen with Western therapy, says this: “There are no neurotics or geniuses or failures or fools. There are only neurotic moments, flashes of brilliance, failed opportunities, and stupid mistakes. But these moments, pleasant or unpleasant, can never fix us into rigid, immutable characters. We cannot help but change.”

Every moment gives us the opportunity to express the most enlightened version of ourselves.

Let’s have fun bringing the light and living from our Higher selves!

## ONENESS WITH LIFE

“If we were to apply these notions to the realm of human relations, certain insights would emerge. We would begin to realize that the lives of those in our immediate environment tend to mirror our own inner lives. Generally, if an individual finds other people unfriendly, it is

*"There's no way out of this mess except to become enlightened and then enjoy it."*

~ Robert Thurman

often because he or she is provoking that reaction, one way or another. Similarly, if that person becomes friendlier, the people around that person will begin to react differently. An unusually kind and good-hearted person will tend to believe that others are the same. To a person possessed by lust for power, even the most selfless, benevolent actions of others will appear as cunning moves to gain power. When we cherish people with the same profound reverence as we would the Buddha, their Buddha nature functions to protect us. On the other hand, if we belittle or regard people with contempt, we will be disparaged in return, as though gazing into our own image reflected in a mirror. As much as we sometimes resist the idea, a smile and a few kind words can achieve near miracles by reducing hostility in many situations. There are people who can walk into a room and immediately lighten things up and lift everyone's spirits. These are all illustrations of what Buddhism terms the principle of oneness of life and its environment."

This is from a section on the connection between the self and environment.

As Nichiren tells us, our environment and circumstances mirror our inner life. Everything is both empty of meaning and intricately connected to our state of mind.

If you're a kind, generous, warm-hearted person, you tend to see those qualities in those around you. If you're a selfish, petty, mean-spirited person, guess what? That's what you tend to see in those around you.

So, what are *you* seeing in those around you? Know that's actually saying more about YOU than them. (That's either good news or bad news. Hah.)

Actually, it's all good news.

Because when we accept responsibility for this reality, we can change it.

Test it out.

Smile more often. Act with more warmth and kindness to your family and colleagues and random people you meet during the day.

Notice how they respond.

Remember that we are intimately connected to our environment. Our environment and circumstances mirror our inner life. If we want to change the outer, we MUST change the inner!

P.S. This works the other way as well and is at the heart of [Don Miguel Ruiz's](#) Second Agreement: Don't Take Anything Personally. Check out the Notes on his [Four Agreements](#). Here's how he puts it: *"Whatever happens around you, don't take it personally... if I see you on the street and say, 'Hey, you are so stupid,' without knowing you, it's not about you; it's about me. If you take it personally, then perhaps you believe you are stupid. Maybe you think to yourself, 'How does he know? Is he clairvoyant, or can everybody see how stupid I am?'"*

Plus: *"Nothing other people do is because of you. It is because of themselves."*

## **NO ONE EXISTS IN ISOLATION**

"No one exists in isolation. We are connected to parents who conceived and raised us, to teachers who have educated us, and to friends who have encouraged us. We are also linked to people we have never met who harvest and distribute our food, manufacture our clothing, write the books that shape our thinking—in fact, we are connected to everyone whose efforts help hold together the fabric of society. There is no one in the world who has no connection to us."

There is NO ONE in the world who has no connection to us.

That's a profoundly powerful thing to realize.

Here's to reflecting often (and with profound gratitude!) on the countless anonymous souls who make our lives possible.

*"To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school... It is to solve some of the problems of life, not theoretically, but practically."*

~ Henry David Thoreau

## ESTABLISHING A SOLID SELF

"The best predictor of general life satisfaction, according to a nationwide study conducted by the University of Michigan, is not satisfaction with family life, friendships or income but satisfaction with self. As Daisaku Ikeda has written:

True happiness is not the absence of suffering: You cannot have day after day of clear skies. True happiness lies in building a self that stands dignified and indomitable. Happiness doesn't mean having a life free from all difficulties but that whatever difficulties arise, without being shaken in the least, you can summon up the unflinching courage and conviction to fight and overcome them.

Ultimately, happiness is determined by the degree to which we establish a solid self. This self is actually the true self of one's life, the eternally existing life of Buddha that exists in harmony with the law of the universe. As we discover the great treasures or virtues of life through Buddhist practice, we can foster a dramatic revision of self-image, an awakening to our inherent greatness."

I love this line: "*Awakening to our inherent greatness.*"

And I especially love this word: "*Inherent.*"

What a beautiful word. Apple dictionary definition = "existing in something as a permanent, essential, or characteristic attribute."

*Inherent.*

Our greatness is INHERENT.

It is existing within us as a PERMANENT, ESSENTIAL characteristic or attribute.

In short: We *\*are\** great.

The Divine is within us. How could we be anything *but* great?

Our task is to wake up to this fact and to live from this reality.

Seriously.

That's our only *\*real\** work. To do the things that help us connect to the Highest within more and more consistently.

THAT is why we come back to the fundamentals (exercise! nutrition! rest! meditation!) again and again (and again and again). It's why we constantly talk about the power of approaching every.single.moment as another opportunity to express the highest version of ourselves.

Do that diligently, patiently, and persistently and we "*foster a dramatic revision of self-image, an awakening to our inherent greatness.*"

Let's do that.

And, in the process, we will build a self that stands dignified and *indomitable* in the face of life's challenges.

## CLEAN YOUR FACE

"Nichiren taught that suffering arises from "looking outside oneself" for the cause or the solution to problems. The fact that it is you who is suffering means it is your problem to solve, not someone else's. If you're looking for others to change, you may wait a very long time. Still, people make extraordinary efforts to modify the behavior of others in an effort to make relationships work. But ultimately this is as futile as cleaning the mirror in an attempt to clean your face. The mirror will just keep reflecting back the same image."

*"If you wish to change  
society, change yourself  
first."*

~ Thomas Carlyle

Love that.

Your face a little dirty?

No big deal. Just clean the mirror, right?

Uh....

Yah.

Or...

We could clean our face. Hah.

If we think someone ELSE has to change to solve \*our\* problems, we're looking in the wrong direction. If we're suffering, that's the sure sign WE need to change.

Period.

Reminds me of [Anthony de Mello](#).

He tells this great story in [Awareness](#) (see Notes): *"Imagine a patient who goes to a doctor and tells him what he is suffering from. The doctor says, 'Very well, I've understood your symptoms. Do you know what I will do? I will prescribe a medicine for your neighbor!' The patient replies, 'Thank you very much, Doctor, that makes me feel much better.' Isn't that absurd? But that's what we all do. The person who is asleep always thinks he'll feel better if somebody else changes. You're suffering because you are asleep, but you're thinking, 'How wonderful life would be if somebody else would change. How wonderful life would be if my neighbor changed, my wife changed, my boss changed.'"*

Let's quit looking outside ourselves for the cause or solutions to our problems.

No more rubbing the mirror in an attempt to clean our face.

No more prescribing medicine for our neighbor (or spouse or children or colleague) to deal with OUR issues. :)

## TAPPING OUR ABSOLUTE HAPPINESS

"Tapping our absolute happiness also means living optimistically. Optimists are healthier and more successful. "No empowerment is so effective as self-empowerment," wrote Harvard University historian and economist David S. Landes in his 1999 book, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor*. "In this world, the optimists have it, not because they are always right, but because they are always positive. Even when wrong, they are positive, and that is the way to achievement."

Buddhism teaches us to regard everything in a positive light, as an opportunity for growth, as the raw material for developing absolute happiness. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the wellspring of this optimism and growth, what Buddhism calls "value creation." This well-spring enables practitioners to turn everything in their lives, joys and sufferings alike, into causes for absolute happiness. As a result, individuals develop confidence in their power to transform even intense suffering into the raw material of happiness. With this power, everything is a benefit, an opportunity."

Imagine having the intense trust in ourselves and our ability to turn EVERYTHING into a benefit. The ability to *"transform even intense suffering into the raw material of happiness."* The power to turn poison into medicine.

THAT is what we want to create.

And what we WILL create as we diligently, patiently, and persistently practice living our highest truths more and more consistently.

*"It is never too late to be what you might have been."*

~ George Eliot

## BE WHO YOU ARE AND BE IT WELL

"Ultimately, we create true happiness by developing our lives to the fullest. Trying to be somebody else or what you think somebody else wants you to be is a sure way to suffer. Be who you are and be it well. Be where you are and be there well. If you are continually growing and advancing, you have the greatest life in the world because you know tomorrow will always be better than today."

There's a lot of wisdom in that little paragraph.

First: I love (both parts of!) this: "*Be who you are and be it well.*"

Two parts:

1. Be who you are. Don't try to be someone you *think* you should be. Be YOU.
2. Be it well. Go all in. Live WHOLEheartedly. Play your role well. Moment to moment to moment.

And, finally, "*If you are continually growing and advancing, you have the greatest life in the world because you know tomorrow will always be better than today.*"

I get a big smile reading that.

Here's to continually growing and advancing, KNOWING tomorrow will always be better than today as we celebrate having the greatest life in the world! :)

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Chief Philosopher*

P.S. Please say "Hi!" to that Buddha in your mirror for me!

If you liked this Note,  
you'll probably like...

[The Undefeated Mind](#)

[The Dhammapada](#)

[The Way of the Bodhisattva](#)

[The Diamond Cutter](#)

## About the Authors of "The Buddha in Your Mirror"

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at [brianjohnson.me](http://brianjohnson.me).