

Gems of Wisdom

Quotes from Western and Eastern Thinkers
on Relationships, Work, Self-Growth
and Truth

PLUS: Question to Ponder on each topic



by Debra Cohen LCSW

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Gems of Wisdom

Quotes with Questions to Ponder

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Introduction

Debra Cohen, LCSW

“A quotation at the right moment is like bread to the famished.”

- The Talmud

“One who asks a question is a fool for five minutes; one who does not ask a question remains a fool forever.”

- Chinese proverb

Great ideas creep up on us and can make us squirm, transcend our daily perspective through humor, stop us dead in our tracks and show us a door to another vision. Yogi Bhanan says that a real thought will, “Poke, Provoke to a Reaction, Confront and Elevate.”

The quotes in this book are organized under the categories of “Work”, “Relationships”, “Self-Growth”, “Truth” and “Zen and Eastern Themes” with the intent of illuminating everyday life. I’ve also added questions after each chapter to help stimulate further inquiry.

I find that when I read a book, a phrase or idea will often look hard at me and reverse my ordinary sense of being the “looker”. When we speak of insights, it’s interesting that violent phrases are often used such as “it struck me”, “it hit me”, “I was bowled over” or “it blew me away”. Religiously, some people use the phrase “Chased by Light”.

It’s hard to avoid feeling haunted by Nietzsche’s line: “The most common lie is the lie one tells to oneself; lying to others is relatively the exception.” And when Woody Allen says, “I’m not afraid of death. I just don’t want to be there when it happens”, we can’t help having a sense of relief from the cosmic questions.

I hope this collection of quotes and questions will help to add some wonder, spark new thoughts, create a pause and aid one’s walk on the journey. Seeing the courage and efforts of others helps one undergo the trials involved in self-transformation. Please subscribe to my free quotes newsletter and receive by e-mail thoughts from the great minds of the East and West accompanied by

questions to reflect upon. Just send an e-mail to: <mailto:philosophyquotes-subscribe@listbot.com>. You can read the archives at: <http://philosophyquotes.listbot.com> and find a number of quotes and topics not in this e-book. If you want to send me any feedback, comments or questions please feel free to write me at <mailto:debrc@ix.netcom.com>

If you are interested in an audiotape that has tips, techniques and quotes from the East and West to elevate awareness, transcend mental tape loops and gain motivation please visit <http://www.quotes-quotations.com/tapes.html>.

I created this tape to help increase self-awareness, calmness and energy in daily life.

The topics are presented in alphabetical order. Great ideas often touch on many categories and are not an exact science to classify. On the next page, I group the different subjects under the larger headings of “Work, Relationships, Self-Growth, Truth and Zen and Eastern Themes. There is also a resource page at the end of the book for further study and related content. In addition to information on quotes, you can learn how to create your own ebook.

I hope this ebook will connect us to the timeless truths that Eastern and Western thinkers have captured and illuminate our relationships to work, friendship, love and self-transformation.

Categories

Self-Growth

[Courage](#)

[Fear](#)

[Gratitude](#)

[Habits](#)

[Hope](#)

Patience

RELATIONSHIPS:

[Love](#)

Men and Women

Solitude

Zen and Cosmic Anecdotes

WORK:

[Action](#)

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Money

Motivation

Perseverance

Recognition

Zen and Eastern Themes

[Attachment](#)

[Emptiness](#)

Wisdom

Zen Humor

Truth:

[Character](#)

Meaning

Wisdom

Action

Do you know that disease and death must needs overtake us, no matter what we are doing? What do you wish to be doing when it overtakes you? If you have anything better to be doing when you are so overtaken, get to work on that.

~ Epicetus ~

How can anyone see straight when he does not see himself and the darkness he unconsciously carries with him into all his dealings?

~ Carl Jung ~

The great end of life is not knowledge but action.

~ Thomas Henry Huxley ~

Action should culminate in wisdom.

~ Bhagavad Gita ~

We cannot put off living until we are ready. The most salient characteristic of life is its coerciveness: it is always urgent, "here and now" without any possible postponement. Life is fired at us point-blank.

~ Jose Ortega Y Gasset ~

Questions:

- 1) What is the nature of distraction? Why don't we do what we wish to be doing?
- 2) What's the relation between action and knowledge? Do we sometimes use one to dodge the other? What is action for the man of wisdom?

Attachment:

If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself but to your own estimate of it; and this you have the power to revoke at any moment.

~ Marcus Aurelius ~

The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water and breeds reptiles of the mind.

~ William Blake ~

Better shun the bait than struggle in the snare.

~ John Milton ~

Buddha's doctrine: man suffers because of his craving to possess and keep forever things which are essentially impermanent. Chief among these things is his own person, for this is his means of isolating himself from the rest of life, his castle into which he can retreat and from which he can assert himself against external forces. He believes that his fortified and isolated position is the best means of obtaining happiness; it enables him to fight against change, to strive to keep pleasing things for himself, to shut out suffering and shape circumstances as he wills. In short, it is his means of resisting life. The Buddha

taught that all things, including his castle, are essentially impermanent and as soon as man tries to possess them they slip away; this frustration of the desire to possess is the immediate cause of suffering.

~ Alan Watts ~

Zen masters hold that an individual's full understanding of Zen is often precipitated by the hearing of a single phrase exactly calculated to destroy his particular demon of ignorance; so they have always favored the brief paradoxical dialogue as a means of instruction; finding it of great value in giving a sudden jolt to a pupil's mind which may propel him towards or over the brink of Enlightenment.

~ John Blofeld ~

Disappointment, always a shock to the feelings, it not only the mother of bitterness but the strongest possible incentive to a differentiation of feeling. The failure of a pet plan, the disappointing behaviour of someone one loves, can supply the impulse either for a more or less brutal outburst of affect or for a modification and adjustment of feeling , and hence for it's higher development. This culminates in wisdom if feeling is supplemented by reflection and rational insight.

~ Carl Jung ~

Every man takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world

~ Arthur Schopenhauer ~

Questions:

- 1) Watts speaks about attachment as “resistance to life”.
What is the relation between desire and resistance?
- 2) If our pain at loss is a function of our perception (Marcus Aurelius),
why do we tend to attribute the pain to something external of our minds?

Character:

Blessed is he who has learned to admire but not envy, to follow but not imitate, to praise but not flatter, and to lead but not manipulate.

~ William Arthur Ward ~

Take care of your thoughts,
Then, actions will take care of themselves.
You sow an action and reap a tendency.
You sow a tendency and reap a habit.
You sow your habit and reap your character.
You sow your character and reap your destiny.
Therefore, destiny is in your hands.

~ Sathya Sai Baba ~

Talent is nurtured in solitude; Character is formed in the stormy billows of the world.

~ Goethe ~

It is with trifles and when he is off guard, that a man best reveals his character.

~ Schopenhauer ~

If I try to be like him, who will be like me?

~ Yiddish Proverb ~

You cannot dream yourself into a character, you must hammer and forge yourself one.

~ James Froude ~

Questions:

- 1) If Schopenhauer is right that one's character is revealed when one is off-guard, then what is it that most people are displaying aware of the other's glance?
- 2) What do we mean when we see "character" in someone's face?

Courage:

It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare; it is because we do not dare that things are difficult.

~ Seneca ~

Whatever you do, you need courage. Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising that tempt you to believe your critics are right. To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires some of the same courage that a soldier needs. Peace has its victories, but it takes brave men and women to win them.

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson ~

Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore.

~ Andre Gide ~

A hero is no braver than an ordinary man, but he is braver five minutes longer.

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson ~

We gain strength, and courage, and confidence by each experience in which we really stop to look fear in the face... we must do that which we think we cannot.

~ Eleanor Roosevelt ~

Courage is the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees the others.

~ Aristotle ~

We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.

~ Martin Luther King, Jr. ~

Questions:

- 1) Emerson points out that we are easily discouraged by others' criticisms. How can we not be influenced by their doubts?
- 2) When we "look fear in the face" how does that transform it? Is fear an illusion? Is it something that looms because we won't tackle it? Is it like looking at the boogey man?
- 3) Sometimes we lose heart and our will collapses. How can we remember to transcend the immediate response of defeat?

Emptiness:

The uniqueness of zazen (zen meditation) lies in this: that the mind is freed from bondage to all thought forms, visions, objects, and imaginings, however sacred or elevating, and brought to a state of absolute emptiness, from which alone it may one day perceive its own true nature, or the nature of the universe.

~ Philip Kapleau ~

The quieter you become, the more you can hear.

~ Ram Dass ~

I took a walk. Suddenly, I stood still, filled with the realization that I had no body or mind. All I could see was one great illuminating Whole- omnipresent, perfect, lucid and serene.

~ Han Shan ~

If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything. In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few.

~ Shunryu Suzuki ~

Two monks were arguing about the temple flag. One said the flag moved, the other said the wind moved. Master Eno overheard them and said, "It is neither the wind nor the flag, but your mind that moves." The monks were speechless.

~ Told by Jon Winokur in "Zen to Go" ~

Questions:

- 1) Can discrimination lead to emptying the mind ?
- 2) Why do concepts, forms and mental representations rarely appear to us as “bondage” as Kapleau calls it?

Fear:

I count him braver who overcomes his desires than him who conquers his enemies; for the hardest victory is over self.

~ Aristotle ~

It is not death that a man should fear, but he should fear never beginning to live.

~ Marcus Aurelius ~

To one who is afraid, everything rustles.

~ Sophocles ~

There is great beauty in going through life without anxiety or fear. Half our fears are baseless and the other half discreditable.

~ Upanishads ~

He who sees all beings in his own Self and his own Self in all beings loses all fear.

~ Upanishads ~

Questions:

- 1) How can we see that many of our fears are baseless?
- 2) Why would our inability to see the Self in the other person be related to fear? Is our sense of individuality tied up with feeling over against another, competitive or jealous?

Goals:

Be not afraid of growing slowly, be afraid only of standing still.

~ Chinese Proverb ~

Too many business men never stop to ponder what they are doing. They reject the need for self-discipline. They are satisfied to be clever, when they need to be wise.

~ Louis Finkelstein ~

Nothing is so fatiguing as the eternal hanging of an uncompleted task

~ William James ~

Never look down to test the ground before taking the next step; only he who keeps his eyes fixed on the far horizon will find his right road.

~ Dag Hammarskjöld ~

The shortest way to live with honor in the world, is to be in reality what we would appear to be; all human virtues increase and strengthen themselves by the practice and experience of them.

~ Socrates ~

If you want the present to be different from the past, study the past.

~ Spinoza ~

Questions:

- 1) If there is a tiredness when an uncompleted project is on the back burner, why is it so difficult for us to stop procrastinating?
- 2) Are we afraid to study the past because change is more difficult than repeating a habit?

Gratitude:

To speak gratitude is courteous and pleasant, to enact gratitude is generous and noble, but to live gratitude is to touch Heaven.

~ Johannes A. Gaertner ~

Reflect upon your present blessings, of which every man has plenty; not on your past misfortunes of which all men have some.

~ Charles Dickens ~

In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit.

~ Albert Schweitzer ~

Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; but remember that what you now have was once among the things only hoped for.

~ Epicurus ~

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.

~ Melody Beattie ~

There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.

~ Albert Einstein ~

If the only prayer you say in your whole life is ‘thank you,’ that would suffice.

~ Meister Eckhart ~

Questions:

- 1) Why is it that we forget the insight of Epicurus that what we have now is one of the things which we once hoped for?
- 2) What makes a realized hope fade as an object of desire?

Growth:

The key to growth is the introduction of higher dimensions of consciousness into our awareness.

~ Pir Vilayat Khan ~

The minute a man ceases to grow, no matter what his years, that minute he begins to be old.

~ William James ~

Life can only be understood backwards, but must be lived forwards.

~ Soren Kierkegaard ~

Experience is not what happens to a man. It is what a man does with what happens to him.

~ Aldous Huxley ~

I count him braver who overcomes his desires than him who conquers his enemies; for the hardest victory is the victory over self.

~ Aristotle ~

It is the task of the conscious mind to understand these hints. If this does not happen, the process of individuation will nevertheless continue. The only difference is that we become its victims and are dragged along by fate towards that inescapable goal which we might have reached walking upright, if only we had taken the trouble and been patient enough to understand the meaning of what crosses our path.

~ Carl Jung ~

Questions:

- 1) What is the connection between self-growth and self-overcoming? How are we related to the self that we are over-coming?
- 2) How can we use the thorns and disappointments of life for growth without becoming bitter or disillusioned?

Habit:

Habit is a cable; we weave a thread of it each day, and at last we cannot break it.

~Horace Mann ~

Such as are your habitual thoughts, such also will be the character of your mind; for the soul is dyed by the thoughts.

~ Marcus Aurelius ~

**Take care of your thoughts,
Then, actions will take care of themselves.
You sow an action and reap a tendency.
You sow a tendency and reap a habit.
You sow your habit and reap your character.
You sow your character and reap your destiny.
Therefore, destiny is in your hands.**

~ Sathya Sai Baba ~

One will seldom go wrong if one attributes extreme actions to vanity, average ones to habit and petty ones to fear.

~ Friedrich Nietzsche ~

Buddha's doctrine: man suffers because of his craving to possess and keep forever things which are essentially impermanent. Chief among these things is his own person, for this is his means of isolating himself from the rest of life, his castle into which he can retreat and from which he can assert himself against external forces. He believes that his fortified and isolated position is the best means of obtaining happiness; it enables him to fight against change, to strive to keep pleasing things for himself, to shut out suffering and shape

circumstances as he wills. In short, it is his means of resisting life. The Buddha taught that all things, including his castle, are essentially impermanent and as soon as man tries to possess them they slip away; this frustration of the desire to possess is the immediate cause of suffering.

~ Alan Watts ~

Questions:

- 1) Watts makes an interesting point that our habits actually are a means of keeping life out. What are we trying to keep out?
- 2) Is habit hard to break primarily because of the history of repetition or is it tied up with a hope that the repetition appears to solve?

Hope:

Isn't it the moment of most profound doubt that gives birth to new certainties? Perhaps hopelessness is the very soil that nourishes human hope; perhaps one could never find sense in life without first experiencing its absurdity.

~Vaclav Havel ~

Hope is the most treacherous of human fancies.

~ James Fenimore Cooper ~

Hope is merely disappointment deferred

~ W.Burton Baldry ~

We love to expect, and when expectation is either disappointed or gratified, we want to be again expecting.

~ Samuel Johnson ~

Prayer is not an old woman's idle amusement. Properly understood and applied, it is the most potent instrument of action.

~ Mahatma Gandhi ~

We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope.

~ Martin Luther King, Jr. ~

Questions:

1) Kierkegaard and Baldry see hope as taking away a chance for us to let go of a solution that isn't working (i.e. a certain habit of mind or pattern that always gets us up against the wall). Many speak of a calamity or a crisis in the soul as the greatest motivator. Is this despair the basis for self-transformation?

2) The opposite philosophies speak of NOT losing hope, but persevering. Do these two philosophies conflict or is the conflict one of appearance? For example, many in the motivational and affirmation tradition speak of examining one's motives , goals and plans to see if they are worth pursuing.

Love:

When we treat man as he is, we make him worse than he is when we treat him as if he already were what he potentially could be, we make him what he should be.

~ Goethe ~

Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?

~ Henry David Thoreau ~

For neither birth, nor wealth, nor honours, can awaken in the minds of men the principles which should guide those who from their youth aspire to an honourable and excellent life, as Love awakens them.

~ Plato ~

Women have a tendency to assess their sense of self worth in relation to the condition of their intimate relationships.

~ Maggie Scarf ~

Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength while loving someone deeply gives you courage.

~ Lao Tzu ~

The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches but to reveal to him/her his/her own.

~ Benjamin Disraeli ~

In love the paradox occurs that two beings become one and yet remain two

~ Eric Fromm ~

In any relationship in which two people become one, the end result is two half people.

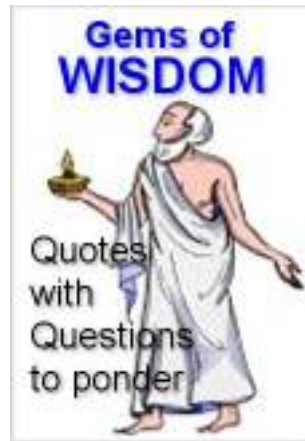
~ Wayne Dwyer ~

Questions:

- 1) What is the difference between immature love and mature love?
- 2) Is it true as is commonly thought that women use relationships for self-worth while men use personal achievement?

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