

Carlo De Paoli

**365 genuine philosophical
and spiritual quotes**



Your little companion
on the path to liberation

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Welcome



These writings that you are either holding in your hands or reading on a computer are a labour of love and dedication because instead of being copied from the internet they have been collected from the original books. Let me explain a bit more about this endeavour.

Over a year ago I began researching quotations on the internet and I saw many websites with hundreds of them and it became clear that most of them had copied those quotes from each other. Nothing wrong with that but what baffled me the most was the realisation that many of those quotes were not only abbreviations from the originals but the phrases were truncated in such a way that their meaning was changed almost beyond recognition. Let me give you an example of this and let us examine one of the most popular quotes on the internet attributed to the Buddha:

'We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts, we make our world'.

Actually the Buddha never said this, besides the above quotation gives us the impression that the Buddha thought along the lines of 'positive thinking' new age philosophies which maintain that by changing our thoughts we can attract almost anything we desire unto our lives. On the contrary the Buddha taught that we can change our reactions to events but he never said that by the law of attraction we can manifest all our wishes because there are many factors that can determine the course of our lives including Karma. The original words of the Buddha which are marginally similar to the quote in question are:

'Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox.

Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with a pure mind a person speaks or acts happiness follows him like his never-departing shadow'

As you can see the verses of the Dhammapada point out that if we act in a destructive or impure manner we will create a state of unhappiness in ourselves whilst if we act with compassion and purity we will create a state of happiness in ourselves. This is rather different from believing that with our thoughts we can get the perfect job, the perfect partner and so on. Of course if we are compassionate and happy within we are more likely to attract beneficial outcomes but there is no guarantee that we will. What is important is to maintain a pure mind.

After this realisation I decided to read again some of the philosophical and spiritual books which I had studied in the past and to explore many others that were new to me in order to

extract from them the quintessence of their teachings. Therefore I started a transforming and rewarding journey that has given me an insight into some of the most elevated and inspiring works of the philosophical and spiritual world.

Along with the chosen quotations I have also added to many of them a short commentary to clarify their meaning and to invite you to a deeper reflection. In some of the quotations I have also added a meditation or visualisation.

In the next couple of pages I will attempt the difficult task of condensing in a nutshell some of the core teachings of these teachers so that you can better appreciate the essence of their sayings and philosophy.

Ethics of Socrates (469 – 399 BC) and Aristotle (384 – 322 BC)

I started this journey by reading the ‘Memorable thoughts of Socrates by Xenophon’ and ‘The Ethics’ by Aristotle’ and you will encounter the word ‘ethics’ often in the quotes I choose. So what do they mean by ethics? They are not talking about some moral rule given to us by a supernatural force that we must obey unquestionably. Instead they are pointing to that which creates in us and also in others the greatest happiness and that is reached by a desire to pursue the common good, by taming our unruly passions, by the use of reason and moderation and by constantly cultivating moral thoughts and performing moral actions. In the ‘Memorable thoughts of Socrates’ we read how Socrates goes through numerous human relationships like father and son, son and mother, a general and his troops, a ruler and the citizens of the state, brothers and sisters and in each instance he describes how we can create love and harmony and above all fairness and justice. Aristotle emphasises how we can cultivate virtue by following the middle path between contrasting emotions like cowardice and recklessness, aggression and fear and so forth. He then proceeds how we can cultivate an ethical life by performing actions which reflect this temperate state of mind.

Plato (428 – 348 BC) and Plotinus (204 – 270 AD)

Staying with ancient Greek philosophy we encounter Plato and his disciple Plotinus. I find Plato’s spiritual philosophy very poetic and inspiring. He expounds that there is a supreme presence or being whose nature is love and beauty and the heavens around him (or her) are filled by love and beauty. This being creates the world to share these qualities and not out of a need to be worshipped and obeyed. The world in which we live is only but a reflection, a shadow of this pure abode and we live like people imprisoned in a cave on whose walls we see only a reflection of that final reality. However this limited world has many echoes of the divinity and therefore there is a way out of this prison. And the way is by cultivating love, beauty, wisdom and justice in our lives and these acts of aesthetic and moral appreciation will be like stepping stones which will lead us back to the divine. I have brought quotations from some of the main writings of Plato like the Symposium and Phaedo and from the Enneads of Plotinus.

The Upanishads and monism,

The Upanishads form the core of Indian philosophy. They are a collection of writings from oral transmissions of many spiritual teachers and the meaning of the word is something akin to 'sitting at the feet of the teacher'. Some scholars have concluded that they were written between 800 to 400 BC although some of them were probably written at a later stage. At the center of their message lies the concept of monism as opposed to monotheism. This philosophical view was also shared by many traditions and philosophers like the Gnostic Christians, some schools of Sufism and at a later stage by philosophers like Spinoza. Whilst monotheism believes in a personal deity that creates the world but is separated from it and can administer punishments and rewards, monism sees the whole of life as a manifestation of an absolute substance. The philosophy is also called Advaita (non-duality) and Vedanta (the essence of the Vedas). Its main vision is that the ultimate essence of this universe is pure energy, eternal and infinite, unchangeable and uncreated. Within it a 'bindu', a small dot appears from which the universe with its multitude of life forms expands into existence. This universe keeps on expanding till eventually it collapses upon itself returning to its original state of pure energy. This energy is also called the Absolute and the Sanskrit word for it is Brahman. A birth and dissolution of the universe is defined as a blink in the eye of Brahman. It is very important to remember that the universe born out of the Brahman is not separate from it, only a variation so our 'true Self' is this Absolute. By realising this we become free from changes and death because we realise that we are eternity itself. In the Vedic philosophy Brahman is self-aware and pure consciousness and bliss.

In this book you will find a few quotations from the Gnostic Gospels written by an early Christian sect which followed a similar teachings to the Upanishads.

The Buddha (Around 600 BC)

The Buddha born in a royal family in present day Nepal was originally known as prince Gautama Siddhartha. Since his colourful life is well known by most of you and also because of space constraints I will not dwell on it but I will write a few words about his path of liberation also called the Dharma or the Dhamma. The Buddha was not concerned about concepts of a true Self or any other speculative religious doctrine. His main concern was actually the small self or the ego and he felt that at the root of all suffering is our selfishness and attachment to what in reality is impermanent and unsatisfactory. Our mind is forever striving to gain and cling to possessions which are ephemeral and we hold passions which make us fluctuate from greed to hatred. So the Dharma of the Buddha is a path that leads us to peace and ultimate liberation from suffering by purifying our mind from greed, hatred and delusion.

Jesus

He definitely needs no introduction! I have added some of the most poignant sayings of the four gospels free from any of the doctrines which, centuries later after his birth, were made unto dogma. I have also added passages from the Gospel of Thomas, an early Gnostic writing. Amongst scholars there is a lot of controversy about the time of its writing but many believe that it is actually the earliest gospel having being composed around 20 AD.

Lao Tzu author of the Tao Te Qing

Lao Tzu lived around the same time as the Buddha and he is the author of the renowned and much liked Tao Te Ching a book about The Tao the unseen essence of the world which can be followed and realised by living a simple and unpretentious life in harmony with nature.

Epicurus (341 – 270 BC)

Epicurus is the most misunderstood philosopher of all times. Most people believe that he preached unbridled passion and pleasure as the foundations of happiness. Nothing is further from the truth. Instead he taught that a simple life, free of superstition and fear and dedicated to learning was the foundation for peace and happiness and in this book you will read some of his sayings that will illustrate this point.

Confucius (551 – 479 BC)

Confucius who lived around the time of the Buddha and Lao Tzu is along with the later one of the most appreciated philosophers of ancient China. His approach like ancient Greek philosophers is all about ethics.

Marcus Aurelius (121 – 180 AD)

Marcus Aurelius was a Roman emperor from 161 till 180 AD and is still revered as a literary monument to a philosophy of service and duty, describing how to find and preserve equanimity in the midst of conflict by following the intelligence inherent in nature as a source of guidance and inspiration. We might think that because he was an emperor he led an opulent, easy and luxurious life but that is not the case. During his lifetime the Roman empire was beset by turmoil and conflict and its borders were besieged by constant attacks by hostile tribes and Marcus Aurelius spent a lot of his time in frontier outposts fighting against this threat often also facing plots and deceit from within his ranks. In the midst of this turmoil he wrote his philosophical masterpiece 'Meditations'.

Rumi (1207 – 1273 AD)

Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī was a Persian poet, jurist and Sufi mystic author of the Masnavi one of my favourite collections of spiritual teachings and poems. Rumi stresses divine love and acceptance of the changes of nature as an opportunity to release the old and to be born again. Many of his stories are also full of wit and wisdom and I have presented a few of them.

I have given a brief presentation of some of the major authors of memorable sayings and quotations but this book contains also the wisdom of a few others like Confucius, Spinoza, Einstein and Krishnamurti.

I have also had the temerity to write two or three quotations of my own and they are signed as CDP.

How to use this book

You can read this book like any other book at your own pace and leisure or you can also just examine one quotation at a time and make it your meditation for the day. It could also be used as a source of inspiration when you need guidance by first recollecting yourself and then opening one page at random. If you are using an ebook you could also open a page at random in the table of contents. I like to remind you that if you own it as an ebook you can bookmark your favourite quotes.

An apology to women

Most writers use the pronouns he, him for descriptive purposes but of course they also mean she and her. I have maintained the original words both in the quotations and in my commentaries and meditations to maintain the descriptive flow and also because English is not my maternal tongue and I do not have the necessary skills to rephrase such a large collection of writings. But I mean no offense!



*Download all the 365 quotations in kindle format
click on the Buddha he will take you there*

1- Buddha – We can influence our life

Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox.

Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with a pure mind a person speaks or acts happiness follows him like his never-departing shadow.

Dhammapada



What we place in the core of our being conditions and colours the quality of our lives and can influence many of the outcomes and events that we experience. The Buddha is not saying that we can create exactly the life we want as we are also subject to many other influences that can determine events. What he is stressing is that the feelings and thoughts that we nurture can have an effect. For example if our heart and mind are filled with feelings and thoughts of anger and resentment we will also experience many situations provoked by what we harbour in ourselves. If we hurt and attack we will be hurt and attacked Often we are not aware of this reality and we blame the world for being unfair and hostile. And the more we blame the world the more resented we become and the more resented we become the more unfair and hostile the world appears to us unaware that many of these circumstances have been created by what we project outwards.

I invite you to start this series of meditations by becoming more aware of your thoughts and feelings and how you react to challenges. What is the nature of your thoughts and feelings? What is more predominant in your being throughout the day? Look at your relationships in most aspects of your life. Are they mostly based on harmony or discord? Do not judge yourself but be honest, remember that you can make a valuable difference to your life.



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2- Cultivate your garden

The heart is like a garden. It can grow compassion or fear, resentment or love. What seeds will you plant there?

Jack Cornfield



Once you have become more aware of your thoughts and feeling as described in the previous quotation and meditation gently allow seeds of reconciliation towards yourself and others to flower in your heart and life. Seeds might seem very small and insignificant but we all know that they can flower into large trees. Trust that every small act and thought of peace and empathy in your life will one day flower into a garden. So become more aware of your thoughts, feelings and actions and ask yourself, from time to time, what will they flower into?



3- Buddha - Only good will conquers hatred

Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By good will alone is hatred appeased. This is an eternal law.

There are those who do not realize that one day we all must die. But those who realize this settle their quarrels

Dhammapada



We might not be able in every situation to act in an ideal way but too often we think that we become more powerful and fulfilled by reacting with aggression. See if you can cultivate as far as possible an attitude of good will and understanding, you might be surprised by the results. Next time that you feel like verbally or physically attacking someone see if you can instead extend your good will to those you consider as enemies and watch the outcome. You might be surprised how so many tense situations can be diffused by a conciliatory act or action of good will. Life is short so try to make it as pleasant and happy as possible for you and others.



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24- Isa Upanishad – Fullness

Om! All this is full. All that is full.
From fullness, fullness comes.
When fullness is taken from fullness
fullness still remains. Peace! Peace! Peace!



This is one of the most important and deepest verses in the Vedic tradition. In Vedanta the whole of life is seen as a manifestation of one essence which can take infinite forms yet remains the same, like clay modelling countless forms yet always remaining clay. Someone interested in quantum physics might say that all of life manifests from a unique substance like energy strings (string theory), vacuum fluctuations or quantum information. Many universes can come and go from this ultimate substance but this primordial matrix remains unchanged. The aim of meditation and enquiry for the Indian mystics was to realise that we are not just a passing ego but our true nature is that eternal substance.



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26- Rumi – The Parrot

There was a certain merchant who kept a parrot in a cage. Being about to travel to Hindustan on business he asked the parrot if he had any message to send to his kinsmen in that country and the parrot desired him to tell them that he kept confined in a cage. The merchant promised to deliver this message, and on reaching Hindustan duly delivered it to the first flock of parrots he saw. On hearing it one of them at once fell down dead. The merchant was annoyed with his own parrot for having sent such a final message, and on his return home sharply rebuked his parrot for doing so. But the parrot no sooner heard the merchant's tale than he too fell down dead in his cage. The merchant, after lamenting his death, took his corpse out of the cage and threw it away; but, to his surprise the corpse immediately recovered life, and flew away, explaining that the Hindustani parrot had only feigned death to suggest this way of escaping from confinement in a cage.



Ingenuity and a cool head can get you out of your cage!



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28- Marcus Aurelius – Opinions

It is not men's acts which disturb us, for those acts have their foundation in men's ruling principles, but it is our own opinions which disturb us. Take away these opinions then, and resolve to dismiss your judgment about an act as if it were something grievous, and your anger is gone. How then shall I take away these opinions? By reflecting that no wrongful act of another brings shame on you.



This simple reflection can bring a fundamental change in your life. People act prompted by a myriad of different emotions and conditioning. Let us always reflect whether what they say has some relevance in the way we conduct ourselves. This can help us to know ourselves better but if you feel that they were unfair and aggressive towards you when you understand that they acted so because of their own limitations then you will not upset yourself. If their conduct in general does not match your expectations then remember that it is their problem not yours.



32- Jesus – Do not be judgemental

Do not be judgmental, and you will not be judged. Do not be condemning, and you will not be condemned. Be forgiving, and you will be forgiven.

Be giving, and it will be given to you. A generous container: compacted, shaken and running over they will hand into your arms. For with the standard you measure out, it will be measured back to you

Gospel of Luke



This is one of my favourite passages of the Gospels and a saying well worth remembering and meditated upon. If you are understanding and forgiving, people will also be understanding and forgiving to you. Give what you want to receive. You will also become more understanding and supportive of yourself



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34- Plotinus on beauty

The soul could never see beauty, unless she herself first became beautiful. To obtain the view of the beautiful, and of the divinity, every man must begin by rendering himself beautiful and divine.



Our small actions to bring beauty and peace in our life are the ladder that will take us to that universal energy that is peace and beauty itself.



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38- Epicurus – The Eternal Being

A happy and eternal being has no trouble himself and brings no trouble upon any other being; hence he is exempt from movements of anger and partiality, for every such movement implies weakness.



What we place in the center of our being colours the whole of our life. If you feel connected to a higher being what is the concept you hold about it? Is it loving, forgiving and impartial? Or is it petty, vengeful and partial?



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43- Upanishads – Rivers

As the rivers flowing in all directions merge unto the sea and become one with it forgetting they were separate rivers so do all creatures forget their separateness when they merge at last into pure being.



When we realise through direct perception that our essence is the same essence of all of life and that we are not separate from the whole we merge like a river unto the sea.



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50- Buddha - Before admonishing others

One who wants to admonish another should first investigate: “Am I or am I not one who practises utter purity in body and speech? Am I or am I not possessed of utter purity in body and speech, flawless and untainted? Are these qualities manifest in me or not? “If they are not, there are undoubtedly people who will say: “Come now, practise correct bodily and verbally”.

Again, one who wants to admonish another should first investigate: “Have I developed a mind of goodwill, free from malice towards my fellows in the holy life? Is this quality established in me or not?” If he has not, there are undoubtedly people who will say: “Come now, develop a mind of goodwill yourself.”



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53- Spinoza – Joyfully

He who wishes to revenge injuries by reciprocal hatred will live in misery. But he who endeavours to drive away hatred by means of love, fights with pleasure and confidence; he resists equally one or many men, and scarcely needs at all the help of fortune. Those whom he conquers yield joyfully.



The universe is held together by beautiful symmetries some call this as equivalent to love, who endeavours to walk the path of love has the universe behind and ahead of him/her.



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126- Buddha – Stay Calm

“Not by belief, oral transmission or knowledge. Said the Buddha, “and not by rites and rituals nor by the absence of any one of these. By none of them at all. The thing to do is give them up, stay calm and independent. You’ll stop longing for any state of mind.”



When you are calm and peaceful you do not need rituals and ceremonies although you might still attend them for social functions. When you are calm and peaceful you do not look for transcendental experiences either, just being who you are is enough.



170- Epicurus - What is pleasure

It is not an unbroken succession of drinking-bouts and of merrymaking, not sexual love, not the enjoyment of the fish and other delicacies of a luxurious table, which produce a pleasant life; it is sober reasoning, searching out the grounds of every choice and avoidance, and banishing those beliefs through which the greatest disturbances take possession of the soul.



As I have mentioned in the preface Epicurus is the most misunderstood philosopher of all times always depicted as someone who promoted unbridled lust and gluttony as the means to happiness and pleasure. On the contrary Epicurus said that we achieve pleasure and satisfaction by appreciating and enjoying what little we have, by being moderate and considerate and by pursuing knowledge and reason which should be free from superstitions and delusions.



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194- Krishnamurti - True Virtue

If you want to know what you are, you cannot imagine or have belief in something which you are not. If I am greedy, envious, violent, merely having an ideal of non-violence, of non-greed, is of little value. The understanding of what you are, whatever it be—ugly or beautiful, wicked or mischievous—the understanding of what you are, without distortion, is the beginning of virtue.



It is by being aware of our faults and limitations that we cultivate wisdom and virtue.



204- Spinoza – Superstitious men

The superstitious know how to reproach people for their vices better than they know how to teach them virtues, and they strive, not to guide men by reason, but to restrain them by fear, so that they flee the evil rather than love virtues. Such people aim only to make others as wretched as they themselves are, so it is no wonder that they are generally burdensome and hateful to men



This words remind me so much of how Jesus used to rebuke the priests and teachers of the law in his time, full of commandments and injunctions but with no love and compassion in their hearts.



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211- Marcus Aurelius – Good deed

As a horse when he has run, a dog when he has tracked the game, a bee when it has made the honey, so a man when he has done a good act, does not call out for others to come and see, but he goes on to another act, as a vine goes on to produce again the grapes in season.



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216- Buddha – Views

It is because of attachment to views, adherence to views, fixation on views, addiction to views, obsession with views, holding firmly to views that religious people fight against each other.



Religious people sadly often forget that true religion is about being kind and loving, instead they proceed to quarrel and kill each other over dogma.



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