

About the Book

If the days seem to go by much too quickly and you search for some quiet time to reflect on the purpose of it all, you'll welcome a personal retreat with *The Buddha In Your Mirror*, a book that shares the wisdom of centuries and makes perfect sense for our lives today.

Many of us wonder about why we are here on earth, what it is we can learn along the way, and how we can face our final days feeling content with how we chose to live our lives. In *The Buddha In Your Mirror*, authors Woody Hochswender, Greg Martin and Ted Morino offer real-life stories and wisdom that grant each of us the ability—and responsibility—to choose our path and actually shape our karma or “life tendency.” What can be more fulfilling than to achieve happiness in a world filled with problems, spend our time as our “higher selves” rather than struggling in our “lesser selves,” and view life in a broader perspective than that which we experience here on earth?

The Buddha In Your Mirror reveals life-affirming teachings of Nichiren, a 13th-century Japanese Buddhist reformer and educator. Nichiren, who based his life on the Lotus Sutra (the highest teaching of Shakyamuni), revealed a method for achieving enlightenment without renouncing or retreating from real life.

Buddhism, as a belief more than a religion, views humankind as a part of nature and sees that every individual is connected to everything on earth. While the destiny of our planet may be in danger and world peace may be a worthy goal, it is achieved one individual at a time. The authors encourage us to begin with ourselves and offer us wisdom for the journey to enlightenment, happiness and the joy of becoming our better selves.

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About the Authors

Woody Hochswender is a former reporter for the *New York Times* and a former senior editor at *Esquire* magazine. He has been practicing Nichiren Buddhism for more than 25 years and has written two previous books and numerous articles on various topics. He lives in Sharon, Conn., with his wife and daughter.

Greg Martin is a vice general director of the SGI-USA, the lay organization of Nichiren Buddhists in the United States. He has written and lectured on Nichiren Buddhism for much of his 30 years of practice and holds a professorship within the SGI-USA's Study Department. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife.

Ted Morino is a vice general director of SGI-USA and is currently editor-in-chief of the organization's weekly newspaper and monthly magazine. He has led the translation efforts for numerous books and articles on Nichiren Buddhism and has written and lectured extensively on the topic for much of the past 30 years. He is the former head of the SGI-USA's Study Department. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife.

TOPICS TO CONSIDER

- 1 In the foreword, Herbie Hancock shares the advice that his mentor, Miles Davis, once gave him: “Don’t play the butter notes” (p. xi). Thinking of your own mentors or significant others, can you recall a critical message you may have received at some time in your life that allowed you to look at things differently and to grow in your awareness of the world around you?
- 2 The authors suggest, “Buddhism has no conflict with the world of science” (p. 4). Are the perspectives of faith and science merging in Western society? In what ways?
- 3 Buddhism and Western religion have differing perspectives. “In Western religion, you can bring yourself closer to God through your faith, but you can never become God. In Buddhism, one could never be separate from the wisdom of God, because the ultimate wisdom already exists in the heart of every person” (p. 24). What were the beliefs you grew up with that influenced your self-perception of wisdom and holiness? If you’ve unlearned or relearned any of those beliefs, discuss the catalyst for that transition.
- 4 If “every individual is connected to everything on earth” (p. 27), how would individuals behave differently in a world where this belief is shared—and lived—by all? What gets in our way of living this belief?
- 5 Boundaries—by state and country—geographically divide the earth and government officials are typically looked upon to solve the world’s conflicts. Are government leaders making progress? Would the results be different if the dialogue and negotiations were left to ordinary people? To children? To elders?
- 6 The authors say that the underlying aim of this book is world peace (p. 29), a result of the process of individual enlightenment and dialogue. Think of people you’ve known or know of who were living examples of personal enlightenment. How did they influence and/or encourage your personal development?
- 7 How is chanting similar to and different from conventional Western concepts of prayer? If you did not grow up with Buddhist beliefs, discuss your perception of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to be in harmony or rhythm with the universe. The authors claim you need not even believe in chanting for it to work. Can you accept this without questioning its validity or demanding proof? If you’ve tried to chant, discuss your experience.
- 8 Do you agree that “one’s environment and circumstances actually mirror one’s inner life”? (p. 67) In your own experience, have you seen changes in your outer environment when your inner life has changed?
- 9 The authors claim, “All of us are ultimately responsible for everything about our lives” (p. 79) When you look back at some painful or hurtful events in your life, can you accept 100 percent responsibility as Buddhism asks? What does responsibility mean in this context, and how does it differ from self-blame?
- 10 According to Buddhism, there are no accidents in life and there are no coincidences (p. 83). How does knowing this change how you view situations that surface in your life? Is there something that has recently happened that puzzles you?
- 11 Many religions prescribe a way to know God or to be faithful. How is chanting, the Buddhist path, similar to and different from paths of other religions?
- 12 Do you agree that “circumstances have little to do with happiness?” (p. 96) How can you help someone with every advantage who is miserable?
- 13 The authors suggest, “Nearly everyone has a tendency to dwell in one world more than in the others.” From the list of 10 worlds noted on p. 101, which would you pick as the one you dwell in most? What would your daily life be like if Buddhahood was your dominant life tendency?
- 14 On p. 156, the authors suggest that there is “no reason to be controlled by illness, no reason for it to fill us with suffering, fear or distress.” Has this book changed your thoughts of growing older? Of death?
- 15 In the Buddhist view, our lives are like pages in a book. Our eternal lives extend beyond our physical lives. Is this view very different from other faith perspectives on life after life on earth?
- 16 As the U.S. population grows older, do you believe that a new understanding of the relationship between life and death is emerging? Discuss the generational differences in views about life expectancy, quality of life, dying, and rituals that mark the end of life on earth.

5 Easy Steps for Leading Book Discussions

Excerpted from Reading Group Choices
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1 Acknowledge your role as “facilitator”—not expert.

If it's your turn to lead the discussion, know that you are not expected to be an authority or expert on the chosen book. Your primary tasks are to open the discussion, keep it going, maintain a lively dialogue, and end the discussion on time. A great book discussion is the result of the thoughts and perceptions of a variety of different people.

2 Note your own response as you read.

Make notes as you read the book, highlighting or marking passages. What are your reactions, questions or insights? Add the personal touch to your discussion. Share your thoughts during your discussion and invite others to comment.

3 Lay some ground rules.

After you've introduced yourself to the group, remind members of the ways they can contribute to the discussion:

- Avoid “crosstalk” or talking over others.
- Be respectful. Keep an open mind.
- Try not to repeat what others have said. Speak up with something new or add to the previous comment.
- Acknowledge that there is no right or wrong, just differences of opinion.
- Be open to learn from others.
- If you are outgoing, be careful to allow space for others to share their thoughts.

4 Call the question.

If you feel the group has begun to repeat itself, acknowledge your observation, ask for agreement if necessary, and pose a new topic.

5 Balance the discussion.

Invite quiet members to share their thoughts. Watch for introverts who have something to say but are having a hard time getting in a word.

Praise for *The Buddha In Your Mirror*

“This is an excellent introduction to the not-so-new, pragmatic practice that is cropping up all over the Western world: aware of it or not, this is how we are beginning to live. Highly applicable to everyday situations, Nichiren Buddhism has the added goal of a peaceful and secure society — Buddha by Buddha by Buddha.”

—NAPRA ReView

“Like the Buddha, this book offers practical guidelines to overcome difficulties in everyday life and to be helpful to others. Readers will find these pages are like a helpful and supportive friend.”

—Dr. David Chappell, editor of *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace*

Host a Reading Group

Reading group discussions—in your home, at a bookstore or in a library—are great opportunities to learn something new, see things in a new way, examine deeply held beliefs or simply to enjoy the company of other book lovers. Middleway Press is happy to provide this discussion guide, which gives you everything you need to host a successful meeting: a descriptive summary, topics to consider, endorsements and hosting tips.

For more copies of this guide, or guides for other great Middleway Press books, contact us at:

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE BUDDHA IN YOUR MIRROR

Practical Buddhism and the Search for Self

Woody Hochswender,
Greg Martin, & Ted Morino

Foreword by Herbie Hancock

The Buddha In Your Mirror: Practical Buddhism and the Search for Self

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