

# Living Your *Real* Best Life

**A practice for true contentment, abiding happiness, and deep appreciation for what you have and who you are.**

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*Living your best life* is a popular expression these days, a pervasive belief that everyone can—and should—be happier by getting what they want. It usually means having more material things, looking beautiful, and having a lifestyle with a lot of leisure time and a rewarding and high-paying job. If you search the hashtag *#liveyourbestlife* on Instagram, the results include before-and-after photos of weight loss and diet plans; glossy pictures of digital nomads in Bali, Rome, and Belize; yoga moms with their kids in coordinating outfits outside of renovated farmhouses; and advice quotes from tech-startup founders and new age spiritual teachers. Thousands of programs, classes, and books are available to teach us all how to *live our best lives*, and nearly all purport to tell us how to increase our wealth; land our dream job; find the perfect relationship; be beautiful, fit, and healthy; and feel good all the time.

Clearly, this idea of *living your best life* is deeply ignorant, because it's demonstrably untrue—it's neither possible nor the best life. It's impossible because very few of us have the resources or privilege—the time, money, education, social connections, ability—necessary to get an interview for a high-paying prestige profession; go hiking in the rainforest; hire a life coach; or quit a job, find investment capital, and become an entrepreneur. The vast majority of us simply need and want to make a decent living to support ourselves and our families, and to do so in a position that pays fairly and treats us with dignity and respect. In fact, right now, just over [eleven percent of Americans live in poverty](#), and [over four percent are currently unemployed](#). Suggesting that it's possible for everyone to live this version of a *best life* is a dangerous and cruel delusion.

Furthermore, *living your best life* in this way is actually *not* the best life because it necessarily means that the life you have is not enough and never will be until you get everything you want. It requires comparing yourself to others who have more than you, and ignoring the blessings that you

currently enjoy. This cycle of wanting and getting—the Sanskrit word for it is *samsara*—is never satisfying because desire and comparison create more desire and comparison, not less. They generate greed, aversion, and delusion—the poisonous root causes of unhappiness and suffering. A *real best life* is a happy one, which is not the same as getting what you want. Real happiness is freedom from these poisonous roots of suffering, also called neediness, hatred, and ignorance.

The Buddha explained that it's easy to live a *real best life*. All we have to do is create the conditions that will end our suffering and create happiness. When we live this *real best life*, our mind is steady and clear and present-focused, and we're not swept away by envy or shame, so we don't have reasons to regret or feel guilty about our actions. We feel content about ourselves and at peace with our life. The way to do this is pretty simple—we just need to appreciate our blessings, cultivate our wholesome qualities, and act compassionately with wisdom for ourselves and each other.

Appreciation arises just from noticing what we already have. Using mindfulness, we can turn our attention away from what we think we lack or are missing from our life, and instead choose to focus on the healthy, supportive, and positive aspects that we all enjoy. This can include: friends and family who love us; material things that we often overlook, like unlimited potable water from our tap, or warm shoes; shelter from the rain; and inner qualities like kindness, patience, and a warm heart, which we may dismiss or overlook as unimportant. Even if we struggle with illness, experience painful loss, or have other hardships, all of us can balance our difficulties by recognising our advantages, however small they might seem. Even something as seemingly insignificant as an easeful breath can be a cause for appreciation.

A *real best life* is one in which we develop our limitless capacity for love, wisdom, compassion, and joy—what the Buddha called the [Four Immeasurables](#). Cultivating these qualities dispels distressing feelings like jealousy, self-loathing, and boredom. It gladdens our mind and reminds us that we are worthy, loveable, and wise—and so is everyone else. Developing our beautiful qualities deeply connects us with the truth—that all living beings want to be happy and free, just like we do, and all deserve to live their *real best life*, too. We realise we're not in competition with anyone else—in fact, we have a true intention that everyone, everywhere,

including us, deserve to live their *real best life*, and it's a pleasure and an honour to use our wisdom and compassion to help make this happen.

As we practice the Four Immeasurables, we begin to recognise the deep connection we share with everyone, and we gain confidence in our actions. We learn to use our thoughts, words, and behaviours skilfully, to benefit and not harm ourselves and each other. We notice that our clear communication and ethical behaviour has an effect on everyone we encounter, and we begin to accept that we are significant and all that we do matters. This enables us to accept an important truth—that there are tremendous possibilities for positive change and growth for ourselves, society, and the world, now and in the future, and that we can contribute to creating them.

Because living our *real best life* is tethered to our intention to be happy and free and to help everyone else be happy and free, we don't have to feel ashamed, regretful, or guilty, even when we make mistakes or forget our blessings. We can learn from our actions and start again and again. And, as we lead our *real best life* we naturally feel good because our wholesome qualities expand. We begin to trust ourselves to weather difficulty, sadness, and upset, and to keep a steady mind when we have success, good fortune, or achievement.

If you think you should be *living your best life*, consider *living your real best life*. Everyone, including you, can do this with true contentment, abiding happiness, and deep appreciation for what you have and who you are.

[Kimberly Brown](#) is a meditation teacher and author based in New York City. Her teaching methods integrate depth psychology, compassion training, and traditional Buddhist techniques as a means to help everyone reconnect to their inherent clarity and openness. Her second book, *Navigating Grief and Loss: 25 Practices to Keep Your Heart Open to Yourself and Others*, will be published by Prometheus Books in 2022.