

Following is the full text of Bruce Lee's daughter Shannon Lee's talk titled "What Bruce Lee Can Teach Us About Living Fully" at TED conference. In this inspiring talk, she takes us inside the mind of her father, exploring how to use his philosophy in your daily life to achieve profound personal growth and make a lasting impact.

Shannon Lee - TED Talk TRANSCRIPT

Bruce Lee is my father. And he is best well-known as a martial artist and an action film star, as I'm sure most of you know.

He died when I was four years old, but I have a really deep memory of him. I don't have those long-form, storied memories that you do when you're older, but the memory that I do have is of the feeling of him.

I remember his energy, his presence, his love — the safety of it, the power of it, the radiance of it.

And to me that memory is very deep and personal. And it is the memory of the quality of his essential nature.

What a lot of people don't know about my father is that he was also a philosopher. He had a very ever-evolving philosophy that he lived. And it is that distinction — that he lived his philosophy and didn't just espouse his philosophy — that made him the force of nature that he was, and still engages us today.

His wisdom has salvaged me many times in my life: when my brother died, when my heart's been broken, whenever I have faced a challenge to my mind, my body or my spirit, the way that he expressed himself has lifted me up.

And so I come to you today not as a researcher or an educator or a guru or even a life coach, but as a student of Bruce Lee — as his daughter, and

also as a student of my own life.

So my big burning question that I want you all to consider today is: **How are you?**

Let me elaborate. Whenever anyone would ask my mom what my father was like, she would say, “How he was in front of the camera, how you saw him in his films, how you saw him in his interviews was, in fact, exactly how he was.”

There were not multiple Bruce Lees. There was not public Bruce Lee and private Bruce Lee, or teacher Bruce Lee and actor Bruce Lee and family man Bruce Lee. There was just one unified, total Bruce Lee.

And that Bruce Lee had a very deep, philosophical life practice called **self-actualization**. You’ve probably heard that term before. It’s also known as how to be yourself in the best way possible.

And that Bruce Lee said this:

“When I look around, I always learn something and that is to be always yourself, and to express yourself and have faith in yourself. Don’t go out and find a successful personality and duplicate it, but rather start from the very root of your being, which is ‘How can I be me?’”

Many of us have done some soul-searching or at least some incessant thinking and worrying about things like our [purpose](#), our [passion](#), our impact, our values and our “reason for being.”

And that is sometimes considered *our why*. Why am I here? Why this life? What am I meant to be doing?

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If we can grab a little piece of that information, it can help to ground us and root us, and it can also point us in a direction, and typically what it points us to is *our what*. What we manifest in the world, what we have. So our job, our home, our hobbies and the like.

But there's this little space in between the why and the what that often doesn't get our full attention, and that is *our how*. How we get there and the quality of that doing.

And I want to offer that this is actually the most important part of the equation when it comes to our personal growth, our sense of wholeness and even the long-term impact that we make. How is the action that bridges the gap from the internal to the external.

And bridging the gap is a very important concept for martial artists like my father. It's how you get from point A to point B. It's how you get from here to your target under the most vital of circumstances.

And so it makes all the difference. Do you get there as an amateur? Are you sloppy? Are you wild, chaotic, sometimes you get lucky, sometimes you're not lucky?

Or are you a warrior? Are you confident? Are you focused? Are you skilled? Are you intuitive? Are you expressive, creative, aware?

So I want to talk to you today about your how in your life. So we do a little bit of — we spend a little time in existential crisis over “Why am I here? What am I meant to be doing?” and we put a ton of effort into *our what* — our job, our career, our partner that we have and the hobbies we pursue.

But I want us to consider that *our how* is the expression of our why in

every what, whether we're aware of it or not. And so let's take an example.

Let's say that I have a value of kindness. I'm all about kindness, I feel really natural being kind, I want to see more kindness in the world. Is that kindness — is that value in the result or is it in the doing? Are you trying to be kind when it's hard to be kind? Can you do something you don't want to do kindly, like fire someone? Can you leave a relationship with kindness?

If kindness is the value, then are you trying to express it in the whole spectrum of your doing — and trying to do that? Or are you just doing it when it's easy?

So I want us to think about that for a moment and consider, you know, if we come home and we're kind and generous and loving with our kids, but then we go to work and we are dismissive and rude to our assistant and we treat them like a subhuman, then there is a fragmentation in the beingness of our value.

And so I want us to consider that how we are in our lives is in fact how we are. Meaning, if I am the kind of person that walks down the street and smiles at people and says "hi" as I walk past them on the sidewalk, then that is how I am.

ALSO READ: [Lesley Hazleton: On Reading The Koran at TEDxRainier \(Full Transcript\)](#)

But if I'm also the kind of person who makes fun of my brother every chance that I get behind his back, that is also the kind of person that I am.

And ultimately how we are makes up the totality of the picture of who we are. And so I want to talk about how do we unite these pieces if we have any fragmentation.

I want to understand how we embody ourselves as our one and only self.

HOW DO WE ACTUALIZE THE WHOLE SELF?

My father said, “All goals apart from the means are an illusion. There will never be means to ends — only means. And I am means. I am what I started with and when it is all over, I will be all that is left.”

So you can employ a systematic approach to training and practicing, but you can't employ a systematic approach to actually living because life is a process not a goal. It is a means and not an end.

So “to obtain enlightenment” — and I'm going to say self-actualize, to be self-actualized or to obtain wholeness — “emphasis should fall NOT on the cultivation of the particular department” — all of our whats — “which then merges into the totality of who we are as a total human being, but rather, on the total human being that then enters into and unites those particular departments.”

You are your how.

You — if you have some consciousness and you want to bring some practice, if you want to step into that warrior space around your how — how you express in every aspect of your life — then you get to be the artist of that expression. You get to step into that and claim it and exercise it and bring that beingness through your doingness into your havingness.

And there you will find the most profound of your growth, you will find a sense of wholeness and ultimately, you will leave a lasting impact on your environment.

My father was his how. He applied the execution of who he was to every aspect of his life. He was way more than that kung fu guy from the '70s. He was someone who worked very hard at actualizing his inner self and

expressing it out into the world.

And that laid the foundation for what continues to inspire us, engage us, excite us and attract us to him. He was the embodied example of living fully.

He said, "I am means." And there are only means.

So I'm going to ask you one more time. Thank you for listening, and please consider, for you, across the spectrum of your doing: **how are you?**

Thank you.

Resources for Further Reading:

[Stoicism as a Philosophy for an Ordinary Life: Massimo Pigliucci \(Transcript\)](#)

[My Philosophy for a Happy Life by Sam Berns \(Transcript\)](#)

[Patrick Gentempo: Unleashing The Power of Philosophy at TEDxMinot \(Transcript\)](#)

[Alain de Botton on A Kinder, Gentler Philosophy of Success \(Full Transcript\)](#)

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