
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

A selection of best suggestions, exhortations and counsels.

... to spiritual seekers

PART 1

Be careful with commitments...

... the help you need is already within you

... "external aid" is only transitory

The true teacher is the experience in our own Soul...

... and that is how we know the Truth, the Reality, the "Real Life".

PART 2

An immortal Soul

Get rid of attachment

The true Renunciation

Karma: we are responsible for our destiny

Don't blame anyone, don't criticize, don't condemn...

... calmness and courage are our spiritual strength

The help of our "enemies"

States of mind

The essence

The ideal of a higher life...

Face the Truth, the Reality as it is.

Reaching out to God

A continuous fight... until the final victory.

PART 1

Be careful with commitments...

Out of a hundred persons who undertake the spiritual life, eighty turn out to be charlatans, fifteen insane, and only five, perhaps, catch a glimpse of real Truth. Therefore, beware.

Above all, beware of compromises. I do not mean that one should antagonize anyone, but one should hold to one's own principles through thick and thin and never adjust them to the "fashions" of others out of greed to gain followers. Your *Atman* (Divine Soul) is the support of the Universe, whose support do you need?

... the help you need is already within you

All the strength and help you need is within yourself. There is no help for us outside ourselves; all the powers of the Universe are already ours. It is we who have put our hands in front of our eyes and shout that it is dark.

We are our own help. If we cannot help ourselves, there is no one who can help us. You yourself are your only friend and your only enemy. There is no other enemy but this self of mine, no other friend but myself.

Vedanta does not recognize "sin", it only recognizes error. And the greatest error, says Vedanta, is to say that you are weak (or that others are weak), that you have no power and that you cannot do this and that. All power is within you; you can do anything and everything, without even anyone's guidance. Rise up and express the divinity within you!

Never fear what will become of you, never depend on anyone. Only the moment you reject all help are you free.

Don't ask for healing, longevity or prosperity; just ask to be free!

... "external aid" is only transitory

Every human being is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, devotion, psychic control or philosophy, by one, or more, or all of these, and be free. This is all religion. Doctrines, dogmas, rites, books, temples, churches, idols or forms are but secondary details; they are only aids in spiritual childhood.

First read or listen, then analyze and understand, and later, leaving all distractions, close your minds to outside influences and devote yourself to developing the Truth within yourself.

Do not believe anything simply because you have read it in some book or just because other people have said it is true. Don't believe in words because they have been sanctified by tradition. Don't believe because it is your national belief or because you have been led to believe it since childhood. Instead, reason it all out, and after you have analyzed it, if you find that it will do good to one and all, then believe it, live by it, and help others also to live by it. Discover the Truth for yourself! That is Realization.

Learn also all that is good from others, but introduce and absorb it in your own way; do not become others. Start with disbelief. Analyze, test, prove everything by experience and only then take what you think is right. Whoever asks you to believe blindly, or simply drags people behind him or her by the controlling power of his or her will, does a disservice to humanity, even if it is not his or her intention. Therefore, beware of anything that takes away your freedom. Know how dangerous it is and avoid it by all means in your power.

You must exercise your own discernment; you must see from your own experience whether these things happen or not. Just as you would take any other science, in exactly the same way you should take this science to study. There is no mystery or danger in it. And insofar as it is true, you can offer it to other people, but any attempt to falsify it will be a danger to you and to them...

The true teacher is the experience in our own Soul...

Experience is the only teacher we have. You can read and reason every day, but you cannot truly understand anything until you have experienced it for yourself.

You have to grow from the inside out. No one can teach you; no one can make you spiritual. There is no other teacher but your own Soul.

We have to analyze our own Soul and find what is there; we have to realize what is comprehended there.

... and that is how we know the Truth, the Reality, the "Real Life".

Like the silkworm, you have built a cocoon around yourself. Who will save you? Break your own cocoon and come forth as a beautiful butterfly, as the free Soul. Only then will you know the Truth.

The mind is in its own nature when it is calm. The moment you can calm it, at that [very] moment you will know Reality.

When you take a step beyond thought, intellect and all reasoning, then you have taken the first step towards Soul-realization, towards God; that is the beginning of spiritual life, of "Real Life".

PART 2

An immortal Soul

Although this body has its beginning and its end, the inhabitant of the body is infinite, imperishable...

You are an immortal Soul, a free and eternal Spirit; you are not matter, you are not the body; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter...

Every human being has a perfect divinity within him, and everyone must show his divinity sooner or later. If I am in a dark room, no protest will make me shine brighter: I must light a match.

He who sows must reap, they say; and, surely, the cause must produce the effect. Good brings good; evil returns in evil; and none escapes the law. Thus it is certain that he who transits in a form must bear the consequent chain of forms and names...
But, far beyond name and form is *Âtman* (the Divine Soul), ever free. Know that thou art That!

Get rid of attachment

Who can work without any attachment? That is the real question. Work incessantly, but renounce all attachment to work. Do it!

Work, but as if you were a stranger on this earth, a pilgrim. Running away from work is never the way to find peace. To be freer (from all materialistic attachment) is the goal of all our efforts, because only in perfect freedom can there be perfection.

Don't be attached to anything. Bondage is terrible. Let things work out. This world is not our room, it is just one of the many stages we are going through.

Stay without attachments, do not expect any return from the material world, attachment comes only where we expect a return, Love shines only in freedom.

The true Renunciation

Fulfill your desire for power and all the rest. But the time will come when you will know that all these (the material world) are but limited things and activities, only transitory means; however, until you have fulfilled this desire, until you have gone through this activity, it is impossible for you to reach the state of calm, serenity and surrender of yourself.

We must realize that our supposed possessions are just toys that have been lent to us to play with for a while...

The moment comes when we want to interpret our weakness and cowardice as forgiveness and renunciation. But, true Renunciation [to materialism, selfishness...] is fearless, courageous. Be bold. You are the one and only cause.

Stand up once more, because nothing can be done without Renunciation.

Karma: we are responsible for our destiny

Where is destiny and who is destiny? We reap what we sow. We are the makers of our own destiny. The wind blows; those ships that have their sails unfurled catch it and go their way, but those that have their sails folded do not catch the wind. Is it the wind's fault?... We make our own destiny.

We have to bear the result of our own actions because we are attached to them.

If you project hatred and jealousy, they will reverberate on you with compound interest. No power can prevent them; once you have set them in motion, you will have to endure them. Remembering this will keep you from settling into defects.

Knowing the causes will lead to the knowledge of the effects...

By hurting someone, you hurt yourself, by loving someone, you love yourself.

Do not hurt anyone, because the harm that comes out of you, sooner or later must return to you. If you love, that love will return to you, completing the circle.

When you give something to a person and expect nothing in return, do not even expect him to thank you, his ingratitude will not affect you, because you never expected anything, you never thought you were entitled to any compensation. You gave her what she deserved; her own Karma got it for her; your Karma made you, her bearer.

Don't blame anyone, don't criticize, don't condemn...

Blame neither people nor God, nothing in the world. When you find yourself suffering, blame yourself and try to do better.

Do not criticize others, for all doctrines and all dogmas are good; but show them with your lives that religion (philosophy) is not about books and beliefs, but about spiritual realization.

All condemnation of others really condemns ourselves. Adjust the microcosm that is in your "can do" and the macrocosm will adjust to you.

Don't condemn anyone. If you can extend a helping hand, do so. If you cannot, fold your hands, bless your brothers and let them go their own way.

No one should be judged by the mere nature of their duties and tasks, but everyone should be judged by the true spirit in which they perform them...

... calmness and courage are our spiritual strength

Being calm is the greatest manifestation of power. It is easy to be anxious, restless. Let go of the reins and the horses will run away with you. Anyone can do that, but whoever can stop the rushing horses, that's the strong human being.

When we have managed to avoid being thrown off balance by all the forces of the world, only then have we reached the strength that gives us freedom, and not before...

Nothing is definitive (in worldly life), change is always possible if you have the courage to make it happen. Better is the one who fights than the one who never tries.

The world is a great moral gymnasium in which we all have to exercise to become stronger and stronger spiritually. If you are pure in heart and strong in your decisions, you will be an army of one for the whole world.

The help of our "enemies"

Bless people when they insult you. Think how much good they are doing by helping to do away with the false ego.

Be grateful to the one who curses you, for he gives you a mirror to show what it is to curse, as well as an opportunity to practice self-control; so bless him and be glad. Without practicing, our power cannot emerge; without the mirror, we cannot see ourselves.

Never say that a human being is hopeless, because he only represents a character, a set of habits, which can be controlled by new and better ones. Character is repeated habits, and only repeated habits can reform character.

States of mind

The yogi teaches that the mind itself has a higher state of existence, beyond reason, a supraconscious state, and when the mind reaches that higher state, then this metaphysical and transcendental knowledge, beyond reasoning, comes to that human being.

When you have trained your mind and nerves to realize this idea that the world does not depend on you or anyone else, then there will be no reaction in the form of pain as a result of the work.

There is no doubt about it. We know perfectly well how often in our lives, due to laziness and cowardice, we abandon the battle and try to hypnotize our minds with the belief that we are brave.

Only the cheerful and strong mind perseveres and makes its way through a thousand difficulties.

Even when intellectually recognizing the difficulties, in reality, we do not truly know them until we feel them in depth...

You must avoid excessive joy. A mind in that state never calms down, it becomes fickle...

Do not waste your energy in talking for the sake of talking, it is better to meditate in silence and not let the rush of the outside world disturb us. Keep your mind always laughing; if melancholy thoughts come, cast them out. Then your mind will be in the highest state.

The essence

Although devotion is given to many institutions, teachers and masters everywhere, only the essence should be taken from all these sources, as the bee takes the essence of many flowers.

True religion does not consist of doctrines or dogmas. What is important is not what you read or the dogmas you believe in, but the essence of what you realize. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," yes, in this life. And that is salvation.

The ideal of a higher life...

The ideal of all education, of all knowledge, should be this inner formation of the human being, but instead of that, we are always trying to polish the outside. But, instead of that, we are always trying to polish the exterior. What is the use of polishing the exterior when there is no (we are not aware of) an interior, of a Divine Soul?

Fill your mind with higher thoughts and higher ideals, place them day and night before you and from that will come a great work...

If you want to do a good work, do not bother to think about what the result will be. Have faith in yourself, you will do a wonderful job, great convictions are the mothers of works done with Love.

So never mind these failures, these little relapses. Keep the ideal a thousand times, and if you fail a thousand times, try once more. There is infinite life before you. Take your time and the end will be reached...

Face the Truth, the Reality as it is.

And here is the test of Truth: Whatever makes you weak physically, intellectually or spiritually, reject it as poison; there is no life in it, it cannot be Truth.

Face the Truth as it is! If death comes, let it come! We are determined to die in the game of beginnings and endings. That is all the religion I know. I have not attained it, but I am striving to do so. I may not, but you can. Keep going! Where one sees or hears another, that is, as long as there are two, there must be fear, and fear is the mother of all "misery." Where no one sees another, where all is One, there is no one to be miserable, no one to be unhappy. There is only the "One Without a Second".

Love the Truth and you will succeed, it may be slow but it is sure.

The greatest truths are the simplest things in the world, as simple as your own existence.

You don't need to worry or go without sleep for the world; the world will go on without you. Do good for good's sake. Ask no more questions. Don't seek or avoid, take what comes. Our Karma determines what we deserve and what we can assimilate.

Mental laziness (i.e., our ego) makes us lose all lively interest in the subject (the "science" of the knowledge of Reality), and without that interest there will be no will or energy to analyze and understand it. Doubts will arise in the mind about the truth of this science, however strong one's intellectual conviction may be. But, if we get some glimpses (of our inner reality), they act as a help that strengthens the mind and makes the student persevere. Some days or weeks when you are practicing, the mind will be quiet and easily concentrated, and you will find yourself progressing rapidly. Suddenly, progress will stop one day and you will find yourself, so to speak, stranded. You have to persevere...all progress comes from such an up and down.

Reaching out to God

Where can we go to find God if we cannot see Him in our own hearts and in every living being? You cannot believe in God until you believe in yourself.

Think of a space in your heart, and in the middle of that space think of a flame burning. Think of that flame as your own Soul and within the flame is another glowing light, and that is the Soul of your Soul, God. Meditate on that in your heart.

Feel like Christ and you will be a Christ; feel like Buddha and you will be a Buddha. It is the deep feeling that is the life, the strength, the vitality, without which no amount of intellectual activity can reach God. It is through the heart that the Lord is seen, and not through the intellect...

Talk to yourself at least once a day, otherwise you may miss a meeting with an EXCELLENT person in this world. Never forget the glory of human nature. We are the greatest god... Christs and Buddhas are but waves in the boundless ocean that I AM.

We can pray to God, but for Knowledge and Light; any other prayer is selfish. God reveals Himself to the pure heart.

We must revere the Self in Krishna, not Krishna as Krishna. Go out into the Universe of Light and you will see that everything in the Universe is yours. Reach out and embrace it with Love. If you ever felt you wanted to do that, then you have felt God.

You reach a plane where pedantic and impotent reason is left far behind, and mere intellectual groping in the dark gives way to the daylight of direct perception. You no longer reason and believe, you perceive. And is this not seeing God, feeling God and enjoying God above all else?

... and you discover that the world, the gods and the sky are... within your own Self.

A continuous fight... until the final victory.

A perfect human life is a contradiction in terms. Life itself is a state of continuous struggle between us and everything external. In reality we are struggling at all times with the external nature, and if we are defeated, our life must disappear... Knowing this, stand up and fight!

Things (internal) do not change, they do not improve; they always stay as they are. We are the ones who grow better, because of the changes we make in ourselves.

Sometimes success may come immediately, but we must be prepared to wait patiently even during what may seem like an endless period of time. The student who sets out in such a spirit of perseverance will, at last, find success and Realization.

There must be a continuous struggle, a constant effort, a ceaseless wrestling with our lower nature, until the higher need is really felt and victory is achieved.

Only those who persevere to the end succeed. "I will drink the ocean" says the persevering soul, "at my will the mountains will crumble." Have that kind of energy, that tremendous will, work hard and you will reach the goal.

Patiently and gradually we must train ourselves. It is not a matter of one day, months or years, or even births. It doesn't matter!

The momentum must continue. Knowingly, willingly, inch by inch we will gain ground. We will begin to feel and gain real possessions, which no one can take from us: the wealth that no human being can take from us, that no one can destroy, the joy that no human misery can hurt any more.