

Paul Brunton's reflections on accomplishing “one of his life-tasks”

Source: THE DIGITAL NOTEBOOKS OF PAUL BRUNTON

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The Notebooks of
PAUL BRUNTON

There are many 'notes' in 'The Notebooks of Paul Brunton' in which PB talks about his feeling of having accomplished “one of his life-tasks”. We have chosen two of them, #14271 and #14382, first because they both combine perfectly with each other, and then because they are a good opportunity to display them in their entirety on our UR website, since as they contain relatively long texts (both well over a thousand characters) they cannot be included as 'short notes' in the pop-up “Paul Brunton's quote”, which can only contain those not exceeding 1,000 characters. In any case, three short passages have been extracted (two from the first note and one from the second), which are displayed in the pop-up.

The candor with which PB expresses his feelings in these paragraphs is priceless. He tells us, among other things, of the reasons that led him to write: to help other seekers, but also to help himself; of the “presence” that impelled him to carry out his work, besides being in some way a participant in it; of his own inner maturation that influenced the evolution of his writings over time; and also of some critics who misinterpreted his purposes and who, without full knowledge of the facts, judged him maliciously.

And he tells us all this with admirable depth and sincerity, worthy of someone who has dedicated his life to the true service to humanity. A service that, as he himself emphasizes, never demands any reward from that same humanity.

So, whether for its moral authority, or for the warmth of its message, this is an absolutely essential reading for many. Let us therefore pay close attention to its content:

I have several excuses for continuing to inflict my screeds upon the public. One of them has been well put by Arthur Machen: "When you are condemned by the gods to write," he said, "you can't leave off." Another is that I wrote down these creative ideas not only because of the wish to assist other seekers but also because of the struggle to work out my own intellectual salvation. Much of my writing has not only been an attempt at communication but also an effort to work out my personal salvation. I wrote for myself as well as for others. For, as explained in so many prefaces, I am only a student of these matters and not a master. In the words of Saint Paul, "I count not myself to have attained." This is partly why I seem to have fallen into inconsistency. But every growing thing is inconsistent with its former self. Consistency belongs to the cemetery alone. Between the time when I wrote the first book and the time when I wrote the tenth book, there was an advance in capacity and an evolution in outlook. The shift of emphasis and the transference of interest which my writings show are the natural result of fuller inner maturation and further outer experience. >

>The third excuse may appear less credible in a cynical and self-centered world. Yet it happens to be true. And it is true only because I feel the presence and command of the Overself continually beside me, not because of any virtue in my own self. But for this I would certainly be as cynical and self-centered as so many others. Grinding overwork has tyrannized my head and hands for years. I have long promised myself freedom, but know that I shall probably never take it. Yet freedom is already there, I have only to stretch forth my hand and it will lie within my grasp. Why then do I submit to unending slavery? The answer can be given in a single word—compassion! Those whose personal malice prevented them from believing this during my lifetime will have to believe it as soon as I have gone. And I shall not be sorry to go. But that is another story. If I can persuade or at least encourage some people to tread a higher path rather than a lower one, to look for guidance to spiritual rather than materialist sources, to think rightly about God as well as their fellows, it will make me feel that one of my life-tasks has been accomplished. So it is something real for me to want others to have it, too. Also, this realization seems to me to be just what we have been put on this earth to find—all the other activities such as earning a livelihood and feeding the body being merely the accessories which enable us to exist here in order to do so. I have written about it not to obtrude my own personality but in obedience to an overwhelming inner urge. The task itself is an inspiring

one. It is not an exaggeration to say that sometimes I felt as if I were bringing humanity messages from another world. Starved souls have found nourishment in these pages that speak of the Overself. These writings have instructed some in the noble truths of philosophy and consoled others in the sad hours of affliction. They have propagated themselves over all the continents. However lightly and however imperfectly, their truths have entered the thoughts and their ideals have suffused the hearts of hundreds of thousands. I have tried to transmit aureoled concepts to my own generation, to lodge new-old spiritualizing tenets in its mind.

(#14271)

It did not occur to an unimaginative mind that I could always conquer a competence with my pen, whether I wrote highly paid publicity material for large commercial companies or lowly paid instructional and inspirational material for struggling spiritual seekers. A narrow mentality could not arrive at the understanding that my fortune lay within my head and underneath my pen-nib, not within the ashram of any individual yogi nor underneath the Indian sky. How could anyone with whom my personal intercourse was necessarily shrunken by my nomadic life to the fewest possible words adjudge either my character or my motives? And what reply but contemptuous silence could I make when such a one started a chorus of calumny about my having sat at the feet of Ramana Maharshi meanly and merely to earn a livelihood? For how could an ignorant man know at the time that I carried a standing invitation to become the editor of a journal in the West at a remuneration many times more than my modest earnings from books?

The truth is that I am not and never have been a journalist; I am not and never have been a professional author. Most of my time and much of my energy are pledged, as sacredly and as sincerely as any human being has ever pledged them, to the quest of the Overself and to the communication of the results of this quest for the helping of other seekers. I always felt that the term of life was too short merely to be devoted to earning a livelihood or collecting luxuries. No!—I wrote about these higher things because something higher than my petty self bade me do so, and when it tells me to desist I shall certainly do so and never write about them again. Meanwhile I regard my work to be no less holy than a priest's. Journalists and authors usually think—and quite rightly—of the fees they receive or the royalties they earn as being so much payment for so many words written or for so many copies sold. I however am constitutionally incapable of thinking like them and therefore I know well that I am neither a journalist nor an author. For I am never really alone when writing but every now and then there rises before my mind's eye the vision of some man or woman whose whole life may take a new and nobler course because of a few paragraphs which flow lightly from this old pen of mine, or of some broken creature whose self-destroying hand may be stayed and stayed forever from a suicidal act because of a fresh understanding got from some sentences which trip out of my typewriter. There can be no reasonable recompense for such services. They cannot be properly priced in any of this planet's currencies, so it would be better not to price them at all. Certainly it seems to me that I have nothing to sell and that so long as I listen for and obey the Voice deep within the heart, so long will the world's rewards or the world's sneers be but of secondary importance. And so long as my critics think that I have come into embodiment for the same petty little purposes as they, so long will they utterly fail to understand me. The abyss between us is too wide and too deep for that. It is indeed the abyss between two short words: the impassable chasm between 'get' and 'give'.

(#14382)