

Translation of Excerpts from R. W. Emerson's "Self-Reliance"

***There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better for worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on the plot of ground which is given him to till.***

***The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried. Not for nothing one face, one character, one fact, makes much impression on him, and another none. It is not without pre-established harmony, this sculpture in the memory.***

***The eye was placed where one ray should fall, that it might testify of that particular ray. Bravely let him speak the utmost syllable of his confession. We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents. It may be safely trusted as proportionate and of good issues, so it be faithfully imparted, but God will not have his work made manifest by cowards.***

***It needs a divine man to exhibit anything divine. A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best; but what he has said or done otherwise shall give him no peace. It is a deliverance which does not deliver. In the attempt his genius deserts him; no muse befriends; no invention, no hope.***

***Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the Eternal was stirring at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. And we are now men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny; ...***

As Emerson wrote, "envy is ignorance; imitation is suicide." You have something unique, original, and great to express. Try to imitate someone else and you kill off that originality which is you. Envy is a lack of appreciation of your own special gifts.

Nobody knows what your special gifts are, and you won't know until you try to express them. Follow your own interest. It will lead you where you need to go.

You are an expression of this vast and wondrous universe. You are one of the things the universe is doing right now. This immense, mysterious existence is expressing itself everywhere at every moment. For the miracle to be expressed through you, it will take courage and a firm dedication to truth and authenticity. The greatness of the universe cannot be expressed by cowards. God doesn't want his "work" wasted.

Be brave and true to yourself. Put your heart into your work. Do these things with sincerity and you come nearer to being what you truly are: A singular expression of all existence — a genius, a creator, a redeemer, a healer, a teacher, a force for good in the world.

Trust yourself — not your petty self, but that Self you touch in blissful solitude on quiet walks in the mountains, that Self you feel when you are at your highest best.

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**Whoso would be a man, must be a non-conformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world.**

**A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall!**

**.... Ah, then, exclaim the aged ladies, you shall be sure to be misunderstood! Misunderstood! It is a right fool's word. Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood.**

The world is in a conspiracy to make you conform. Others will think they know what you should be and how you should act and what you should think. And they will apply pressure to you to make you conform to it. But if you conform, you lose your soul. You lose your originality. You lose your connection to the Mystery. You lose your creativity and your aliveness.

The people who know you will sometimes resist your creativity. They feel more comfortable with what is familiar. If you want to be the full greatness you can be, you must give up the game and be your honest self. As Emerson put it, "Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind." Rely on yourself and you become one of those who determine the future of the world.

Not you? Why not you? Many of the people who have changed the course of history also would not have believed that they could or would. But when you rely on yourself and be exactly what you are, a new force moves through you, and a new source of power.

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#### 4. PRAYERS

##### Par. 1

When you pray for anything but the good of all, you are out of touch. Praying for some special favor is a demonstration of the lack of self-trust. That kind of prayer arises out of a lack of knowledge about the

unity of all things. Prayer, if engaged in at all, should be a "contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view." It is the monologue of a grateful soul. It is the universe acknowledging itself.

##### Par 5

The secret of success is simply this: Take pleasure in self-derived work. "Welcome evermore to gods and men is the self-helping man." People love and admire him because he does not need their love and admiration. We celebrate his triumphs because he persevered when everyone was against him.

##### Par. 6

Not only are our prayers an expression of a "disease of the will" but those principles we live by are an expression of an equally pathetic "disease of the intellect." For the most part, when I speak to someone, I am alone because I am not likely to be speaking to a deeply honest person. I'm not likely to meet the universe expressing itself through him. No. He will be following some creed or other, not of his own creation. He will be relying on the external rules created by others rather than trusting himself. He will recite "truths" he has borrowed from others. But each soul is an entirely new classification. Not a new member of an already-existing class. A new class. Each person is original — or at least *should* be! But people are, for the most part, followers. They do not create or initiate genuine actions, but copy and follow.

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**When an un-self-reliant person finds some new philosophy, she will think it is the end-all, be-all, the all-encompassing truth. It is natural to feel an enthusiasm for new ideas, new systems — at least for awhile because you can feel the new philosophy has expanded your understanding and the reach of your mind. A self-reliant soul, however, will outgrow the system and go beyond it. The weak mind will stop seeking and consider the new philosophy the only truth and will refuse to understand how anyone else could see the light without the particular teachings of this one master. But the light will shine on any open mind. It makes no narrow discriminations. It only requires honesty to open the door, and it will happily beam bright and warm into the humblest shack.**

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***If you are noble, I will love you; if you are not, I will not hurt you and myself by hypocritical attentions.***

***Society never advances. It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other. Its progress is only apparent like the workers of a treadmill. It undergoes continual changes; it is barbarous, it is civilized, it is Christianized, it is rich, it is scientific; but this change is not [amelioration](#). For every thing that is given something is taken. Society acquires new arts and loses old instincts.***

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Emerson suggests you say to your friends and family, "If you are noble, I will love you; if you are not, I will not hurt you and myself by hypocritical attentions. If you are true, but not in the same truth with me, cleave to your companions; I will seek my own. I do this not selfishly but humbly and truly. It is alike your interest, and mine, and all men's, however long we have dwelt in lies, to live in truth."

This new way of being, this discipline to speak the truth, will sometimes seem excessively harsh. But if you follow the path of honesty, you will ultimately enter the flow of the river — you will ultimately live in reality instead of the tangle of lying, misleading, and pretending that passes for reality.

Yes, your honesty will cause pain. But will you sell your freedom and power to save someone from an unpleasant feeling? Especially when the feeling is an appropriate response to reality?

In time, if the person will consent to look, they will perceive the truth too, and thus may begin a life of honesty.

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The self-reliance revolution needs to revamp our ideas about improvement. You cannot improve "society." It changes, but the change is not improvement — for everything that becomes better, something becomes worse. We get new forms of entertainment and they waste hours of our time, distancing us from our loved ones, making us feel isolated and alone in a world full of people. We get electricity and the lightbulb, and it throws our carefully-evolved biological system, attuned for eons to the earth's cycles of light and dark, out of balance. We get new modes of transportation and lose some health from our drop in exercise. We get labor-saving devices and then both parents have to work to pay for them all

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