

## An essay by Bertrand Russell. A Free Man's Worship"

I received a beautiful Sepia Photo of my father and a small notebook from my niece Louis who is my older brother Lewis's daughter. She is always caring and thoughtful; she very kindly donated them to me, as I'm the last man standing.

In the tiny notebook he inscribed and extracted from the BR essay his own philosophy in small but very legible words all about the way he felt himself and those words reflected the way he lived his life. Having read them; they made me now realise why I found him to be that Man who was my father. Why I respected, admired and adored him as I had written in my memoirs before I had even set eyes upon this little notebook. The following are his words chosen from the essay.



The life of Man, viewed outwardly, is but a small thing in comparison with the forces of Nature. The slave is doomed to worship Time and Fate and Death, because they are greater than anything he finds in himself, and because all his thoughts are of things which they devour. But, great as they are, to think of them greatly, to feel their passionless splendour, is greater still. And such thought makes us free men; we no longer bow before the inevitable in Oriental subjection, but we absorb it, and make it a part of ourselves. To abandon the struggle for private happiness, to expel all eagerness of temporary desire, to burn with passion for eternal things—this is emancipation, and this is the free man's worship.

United with his fellow-men by the strongest of all ties, the tie of a common doom, the free man finds that a new vision is with him always, shedding over every daily task, the light of love. The life of Man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach, and where none may tarry long. One by one, as they march, our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent Death. Very brief is the time when we can help them, in which their happiness or misery is decided. Be it ours to shed sunshine on their path.

Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark.

Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for Man, condemned to-day to lose his dearest, to-morrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts, that ennoble his little day; distaining the coward terrors of the slave of Fate, to worship at the shrine that his own hands had built; undismayed by the empire of chance, to preserve a mind free from the wanton tyranny that rules his outward life; proudly defiant of the irresistible forces that tolerate, for a moment, his knowledge and his condemnation, to sustain alone, a weary but unyielding Atlas, the world that his own ideals have fashioned despite the trampling march of unconscious power.

In this lies Man's true freedom: in determination to worship only the God created by our love of the good, to respect only the heaven, which inspires the insight of our best moments. In action, in desire, we must submit perpetually to the tyranny of outside forces; but in thought, in aspiration, we are free, free from our fellow men, free from the petty planet on which our bodies impotently crawl, free even, while we live, free from the tyranny of death. Let us learn then, that energy of faith, which enables us to live constantly in the vision of the good; and let us descend in action, into the world of fact, with that vision always before us.

The vision of beauty is possible only to unfettered contemplation, to thoughts not weighted by the load of eager wishes; and thus Freedom comes only to those who no longer ask of life that it should yield them any of those personal goods that are subject to the mutations of Time.

These are then, the exact words penned in his little notebook. And they are words he constantly lived his life by because I experienced it in so many ways that I vowed to live my life as he did. The following words are those that I selected in addition to my father's to reflect my vision and philosophy.

In the narrow raft illumined by the flickering light of human comradeship, the dark ocean on whose waves we toss for a brief hour, all the loneliness of humanity amid hostile forces is concentrated on the human soul. Let us lighten their sorrows by the balm of sympathy, to give them the pure joy of never-tiring affection, to strengthen failing courage, to instil faith in hours of despair.

There is in resignation a further good element; even real goods, when they are unattainable, ought not to be fretfully desired. To every man comes, sooner or later, the great renunciation. For the young there is nothing unattainable; a good thing desired with the

whole force of a passionate will, and yet impossible is to them not credible. Yet by death, by illness, by poverty, or by the voice of duty we must learn, each one of us, that the world was not made for us, and that however beautiful may be the things we crave, Fate may nevertheless forbid them. It is the part of courage, when misfortune comes, to bear without repining the ruin of our hopes, to turn away our thoughts from vain regrets. This degree of submission to Power is not only just and right; it is the very gate of wisdom.

Let us preserve our respect for truth, for beauty, for the ideal of perfection which life does not permit us to attain.

Man is yet free, during his brief years, to examine, to criticise, to know and in imagination to create. To him alone, in the world with which he is acquainted, this freedom belongs; and in this lies his superiority to the restless forces that control his outward life.

When, without the bitterness of impotent rebellion, we have learnt both to resign ourselves to the outward rules of Fate and to recognise that the non-human world is unworthy of our worship, it becomes possible at last so to transform and refashion the unconscious universe, so to transmute it in the crucible of imagination, that a new image of shining gold replaces the old idol of clay. In all the multiform facts of the world—in the visual shape of trees and mountains and clouds, in the event of the life of man, even in the omnipotence of Death—the insight of the creative idealism can find the reflection of a beauty which its own thoughts have made. In this way mind asserts its subtle mastery over the thoughtless forces of Nature.

This is the reason why the Past has such magical powers. The beauty of its motionless and silent pictures is like the enchanted purity of late autumn. When the leaves, though one breath would make them fall, still glow against the sky in golden glory. The Past does not change or strive; like Duncan, after life's fitful fever it sleeps well; what was eager and grasping, what was petty and transitory, has faded away, the things that were beautiful and eternal shine out of it like stars in the night. Its beauty, to a soul not worthy of it, is unendurable; but to a soul, which has conquered Fate it is the key to religion.

There you have it. My Father's vision and mine all in one, thanks to Bertrand Russell's essay "A Free Man's Worship"

Frank Waller. 1<sup>st</sup>. January 2023