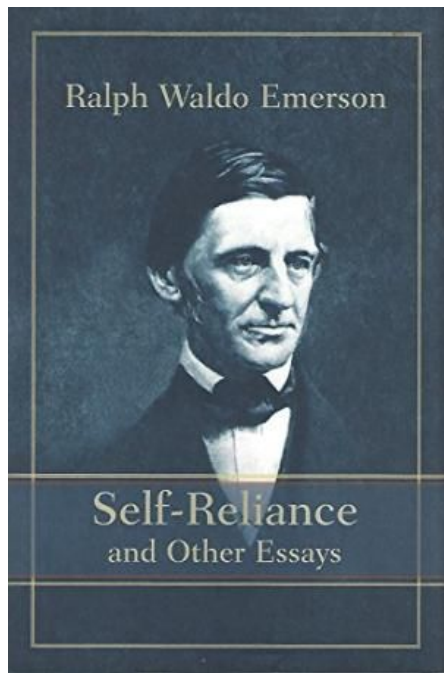


Favorite Quote

"To be great is to be misunderstood."



Summary: written in 1841, Emerson's famous essay [Self-Reliance](#) is a mere 19 pages, yet it contains volumes of wisdom.

Self-Reliance is about individualism, personal responsibility, and nonconformity.

One of Emerson's most famous quotations is contained within: *"A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines."*

In this manner Emerson eloquently—and staunchly— encourages each person to avoid conformity and false consistency.

Instead, follow your own instincts, your own ideas, and your own inner truth. Do not look for things outside yourself. Look within.

Do what you think is right, no matter what other people might think. Pursue your own self-growth and try to avoid the distractions of community. Seek solitude and reflect on your own inner nature.

→ *Maybe it's time to book that [Vipassana Retreat](#) you've talked about. . .*

"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, or worse, as his portion. . ."

Ralph Waldo Emerson (May 25, 1803 – April 27, 1882) was an American essayist, lecturer, philosopher, and poet who led the transcendentalist movement of the mid-19th century. He was seen as a champion of individualism and a prescient critic of the countervailing pressures of society, and he disseminated his thoughts through dozens of published essays and more than 1,500 public lectures across the United States after Harvard.

He remains among the linchpins of the American romantic movement, and his work has greatly influenced the thinkers, writers and poets that followed him. "In all my lectures," he wrote, "I have taught one doctrine, namely, the [infinite](#) of the private man." Emerson is also well known as a mentor and friend of Henry David Thoreau, a fellow transcendentalist.

Emerson's father died from stomach cancer on May 12, 1811, less than two weeks before Emerson's eighth birthday. Emerson was raised by his mother, with the help of the other women in the family; his aunt Mary Moody Emerson in particular had a profound effect on him.



This famous essay is but a mere 19 pages. Therefore, instead of a full summary I have selected the quotations and sections that seemed particularly poignant to the premise of the essay.

Opening Quote

Emerson opens his essay with some Latin—“Ne te quaesiveris extra” which means “Do not seek for things outside yourself.” Emerson does not cite the quote, but it is from the Roman poet and satirist [Persius](#) (circa 60 AD).

On character:

- “Your genuine action will explain itself, and will explain your other genuine actions. Your conformity explains nothing.”
- “Man is timid and apologetic; he is no longer upright; he dares not say ‘I think,’ ‘I am,’ but quotes some saint or sage.”
- “The force of character is cumulative.”

On intuition: “We denote this primary wisdom as Intuition, whilst all later teachings are tuitions. In that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go, all things find their common origin.”

“Time and space are but physiological colors which the eye makes, but the soul is light; where it is, is day; where it was, is night; and history is an impertinence and an injury, if it be anything more than a cheerful apologue or parable of my being and becoming.”



“He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time.”

On persistence: “If our young men miscarry in their first enterprise, they lose all heart. If the young merchant fails, men say he is ruined. If the finest genius studies at one of our colleges, and is not installed in an office within one year afterwards in the cities or suburbs of Boston or New York, it seems to his friends and to himself that he is right in being disheartened, and in complaining the rest of his life. A sturdy lad from New Hampshire or Vermont, who in turn tries all the professions, who teams it, farms it, peddles, keeps a school, preaches, edits a newspaper, goes to Congress, buys a township, and so forth, in successive years, and always, like a cat, falls on his feet, is worth a hundred of these city dolls.”



On prayer: “Prayer that craves a particular commodity—anything less than good—is vicious. Prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view. It is the soliloquy of a beholding and jubilant soul. It is the spirit of God pronouncing his works good. But prayer as a means to effect a private end is meanness and theft. It supposes dualism and not unity in nature and consciousness.”

“His hidden meaning lies in our endeavors;
Our valors are our best gods.”

On modernization: “The civilized man has built a coach, but has lost the use of his feet. He is supported on crutches, but lacks so much support of muscle. He has a fine Geneva watch, but he fails of the skill to tell the hour by the sun. A Greenwich nautical almanac he has, and so being sure of the information when he wants it, the man in the street does not know a star in the sky.”

On society: “Society is a wave. The wave moves onward, but the water of which it is composed does not. The same particle does not rise from the valley to the ridge. Its unity is only phenomenal.”

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“Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.”